

SGHS comments on Applicant's responses to Deadline 1 Submissions GH8.1.15

Responses to Notes on Ecology Aspects REP1-218, found on page 112 onwards.

They pick on 3 points:

- 1) **Wintering birds** – (Ref SGHS-054) with particular reference to FLL (functionally linked land) related to the Special Protection Area for the RAMSAR site.

Their response culminates in 'the mitigation package has been discussed with Natural England and will be agreed through the Statement of Common Ground to be submitted at Deadline 2'.

On page 38, reference NE-001, in response to Examiners' Question 8.0.5, it is obvious that Natural England are still unhappy about the mitigation for FLL and are pursuing this with them.

Stop Green Hill Solar acknowledge that Natural England are the experts on this issue and have no further comments to make about this, at this time.

- 2) **Effects on flora** – (Ref SGHS-055) They have not answered the question in relation to soil compaction and lack of vegetation growing under the panels.

Please see SGHS answer to Examiners' Questions 2, 2.7.7, point 3

- 3) **Effects on bat populations** – (Ref SGHS-056) Again, they are evading answering the point about the rich bat populations and the research looking at the effects of solar arrays. **They attempt to cast doubt on the validity of the research, but they are unable to produce evidence to support a lack of effect. As the applicant, the onus on them is to provide this.** They state that:

'it is probable that any impacts on bats will be largely neutral; particularly when considering the likely higher value of the habitats present within the operational site (predominately comprising permanent grassland) over the baseline of largely arable land,

together with the large development-free buffer zones which are comparatively wider than the field margins present at baseline)'. However, as in point 2, they cannot claim that permanent grassland will be established under the panels, as there is unlikely to be much growth, and bats cannot and don't forage in fields of solar panels, as clearly demonstrated by the research, for reasons that are not entirely clear, but listed in my document.

They completely fail to address the particular issue of the rare Barbastelle bats, which are internationally protected, and are a species at high risk of extinction, found in significant numbers, particularly Sites F and G. It is required that the Precautionary principle is applied, where there is any reasonable doubt as to the absence of significant effects.

Please also see SGHS answer to Examiners' Questions 2, 2.7.8

SGHS comments on Applicant's responses to Written Representations GH 8.1.13

Response on Ecology and Biodiversity, found on pages 228 onwards.

1) SGHS – 004 Incomplete survey data (p.228) The extract supposedly from my notes is a mix of some of my comments, reworded, and some from Katharine Banham's letters within my document. This is the issues of FLL associated with the Ramsar site/SPA which is best dealt with by Natural England.

2) SGHS – 005 Impacts on Ecology

Evidence of pollution arising from Llanwern Solar Farm on Gwent Levels (p.230) :

They do not specifically address the question of pollution. They state in general that:

‘Each Scheme must be considered on its own merits, and the potential adverse impacts associated with Llanwern Solar are not necessarily comparable or applicable to the proposed Green Hill Solar Farm Scheme.’ But the onus is on them to show that these impacts will definitely not happen.

Please see also SGHS answer to Examiners’ Questions 2, 2.7.7, point 1.

Effects on flora (p231) :

The answer they give is identical to that for SGHS – 055 in GH 8.1.15, **see previous comments, p1., and SGHS answer to EX Q 2.7.7**

Effects on bat populations (p232) :

Identical answer to SGHS – 056 in GH 8.1.15, **see previous comments p.2, and SGHS answer to EX 2.7.8**

Effects on skylarks, other ground-nesting birds and Red-listed birds of conservation concern (p233):

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Skylark:

REP2 – 071, p28-29, addresses skylarks and their territories, and in APP – 091 p.102 and following, there are maps of indicative skylark core territories at all the GHS Sites.

According to my calculations, the total number of territories is 283, 178 (63%) will be definitely lost, 49 (17%) will be retained, and 56 (20%) will be ‘absorbed’. They define ‘absorbed’ territories as follows:

‘ ‘Absorbed’ territory cores relate to territory cores which, although displaced, are nonetheless judged to be able to persist within the operational Site due to the presence of adjacent suitable nesting habitat and the improvement of the carrying-capacity of that adjacent habitat conferred by the presence of permanent grassland (and so a richer foraging resource) within the solar array.’

However, this does not stand up to further interrogation as it is clear that this claim depends on a supposition that under the

solar arrays, the grassland will provide a better food environment, but as I have argued elsewhere, e.g. answer to EX 2, 2.7.7, point 3, the type and size of solar panels planned is unlikely to support very much foraging resource underneath at all. Also, skylarks require long sight-lines around their nesting sites to avoid predators, and are similarly unlikely to forage underneath solar panels where they would be vulnerable. Skylark chicks require feeding purely with insects and spiders; these are unlikely to be in higher abundance in such fields.

‘Absorbing’ territories into adjacent fields for nesting is also very speculative, as there have been no surveys of these adjacent areas with regard to habitat and density of skylark territories already present.

They claim to have secured mitigation for 45.6% of baseline (which I understand relies on a greater density of territories). However, I think my figures show that this is a highly speculative and optimistic scenario, certainly not a worst case. But even this is admitting a devastation of over half the Sites’ skylark population, a species which is Red-listed and has declined in numbers significantly in the last 50 years.

Yellow Wagtail: (Red-listed bird of conservation concern)

They are summer visitors and breed in some parts of the UK. They were found frequently on Sites E, F and G; with highest abundance at Site G. (See APP -091 p. 31). On their maps of indicative territory cores, figures 9.8.8, 9.8.9 and 9.8.10, they indicate that all 5 at Site G will be lost, along with 4 of 5 at Sites E and F. That means 90% will be lost. **They offer no mitigation at all.**

Yellowhammers: (Red-listed bird of conservation concern)

They state the following (APP -091 p.36)

‘Breeding was confirmed at Green Hill A, F and G with individuals noted carrying food, and a family of yellowhammer recorded at **Lime Down F** during Visit DUSK1. At the remaining Sites, it was considered probable that the species were breeding within the Sites given the frequent sightings of pairs and abundant suitable nesting habitat.’

In Site A, there will be significant damage to the relevant important hedgerows, as stated in my OFH submission, from long local knowledge and bird observation. I am not in a position to comment from personal knowledge about the effects on other sites.

I have highlighted the observation about a **'Lime Down'** site as it clearly demonstrates the Applicant's cut and paste approach to all this important ecological information.

They also state that:

'The majority of other species are expected to benefit from the enhanced habitats conferred by the proposals, with neutral or beneficial significant effects predicted.'

However, the mitigation proposed and enhanced habitats are not present at the beginning of construction, when disturbance is greatest. It will be several years before any mitigation or new habitats are established, by which time the populations of affected birds are likely to have been lost or displaced.

Extensive linear habitats along cabling routes have not been surveyed (p234):

They state they did have an Ecologist do a walkover survey of all **accessible land** within the cable route corridors, (although I believe that they may also have now accessed the other areas, but don't have the reference.) The more inaccessible land could have more wide-ranging habitats and ecology which they cannot provide detailed evidence on. The total land area of the cabling routes is very large and I have calculated this to be approximately 250 acres (considerably larger than Site A2 which is 160 acres, for example) - if this was not linear but a distinct site, they would have had to do full ecological surveys of it. It is precisely because it crosses hedgerows, along side major roads, ditches, linear routes for animals, that the cabling route corridors could have very distinct and important ecology from the other mostly arable field sites.

Other Points (p234/235):

They say that OEPMS Rev A (REP1-131) **commits to the provision of bespoke buffers around bat roosts and nesting Schedule 1 birds** e.g Red Kite, but in the Ecological Surveys conducted they did not ascertain the whereabouts of any bat roosts or Red Kite nests. The bat surveys were with static detectors, and they assessed trees on the sites for potential for bat roosts, but they did not seek to find them. **Given that the bats would not be active during the daytime, how do they propose to identify the roosts during construction work, in order to provide a buffer?**

As discussed in my Open Floor Hearing submission (which I am submitting by email as well), I show that having demonstrated a concentration of high suitability trees for bat roosts around field AF24 on Site A, that they have then chosen to place a 132 kV substation immediately adjacent, despite other options for placement clearly being available.

Other Red listed birds include the yellowhammer, grey partridge and dunnock. **Yellowhammer are known to nest every year in the hedgerows in eg Site A – particularly along Newland Road adjacent to field AF29, where the crossing point A-1 is planned. It will not be possible to provide a sufficient buffer for these birds given the heavy vehicle movements required to bring all equipment and plant to the west side of Site A.**

Potential for noise and vibration to impact ecological receptors:

They refer to REP1-033 which states:

‘Disturbance: Pressures or changes in the environment acting on individuals of a species so as to alter their behaviour may arise through noise, movement and vibration during construction operations, as well as increased human presence.’ So they acknowledge the potential for noise and vibration to cause an impact but I could find no evidence of any attempt to quantify it or reduce it.

Heat island effect: They refer to REP1-161 (760 pages in total) which are responses to Relevant Representations, but I could not find any comment about this.

3) **SGHS – 006 and SGHS -007** (p236 – 237):

These are points about the RAMSAR site, SPA and FLL. Natural England have taken up these issues and are the experts.

LCT 14.12.2025