Removal of ancient hedging and reduction in biodiversity prior to submission of planning application.

Brooke – Site 9

The purpose of this report is to highlight the amount of biodiversity removed from site 9 (Brooke) in the months prior to the EPS proposal being made public. The reduction in biodiversity was in the form of the coppicing to the ground of approximately **1,250 metres** of ancient hedging and more recently the filling in of **350 metres** of ditch. Most hedges run adjacent to a ditch. The ditches were created for the obvious reason of drainage, the soil removed was heaped to one side of the ditch and a hedge planted in the heaped soil. This provides two forms of habitat for wildlife and not just a place for birds to nest. Owls, bats and all manner of creatures use the hedges and ditches for foraging and cover.

A few weeks following the completion of the above mentioned hedge removal, a 'nesting bird' survey was carried out on site 9 in relation to the EPS proposal.
Two further 'nesting bird' surveys were carried out on site 9, one 12 months after the first one and another one 13 months after the first one.
More recently approximately **350 metres** of ditch was filled in and not even piped. This ditch ran adjacent to one of the previously mentioned coppiced hedges.
My concern is that the planning inspectorate will not be made aware of this by EPS just as the 'nesting bird' surveyors were not aware that **1,250 metres** of ancient hedge had disappeared weeks before they carried out their first survey. Apart from hedge coppicing being illegal at the time of the year it was carried out, it raises the question of how reliable and accurate is EPS's data that they have submitted with their planning application.

If a critical and required part of this planning application is to achieve a biodiversity net gain then it is equally critical that the starting figure accurately reflects what is has been the norm for a period of some years prior, not on one that has been intentionally reduced just prior to the application submission. This practice also renders the findings of the bird nesting survey inaccurate and of no use as a valid supporting document for East Pye Solar's application.

The hedge coppicing was reported to Natural England, RPA and South Norfolk Council ecology department and sadly none of them were interested in investigating. As for the filling in of the ditch, this was reported to Norfolk County Council and they are not enforcing for the reinstatement of the ditch.

Below is the timeline of events.

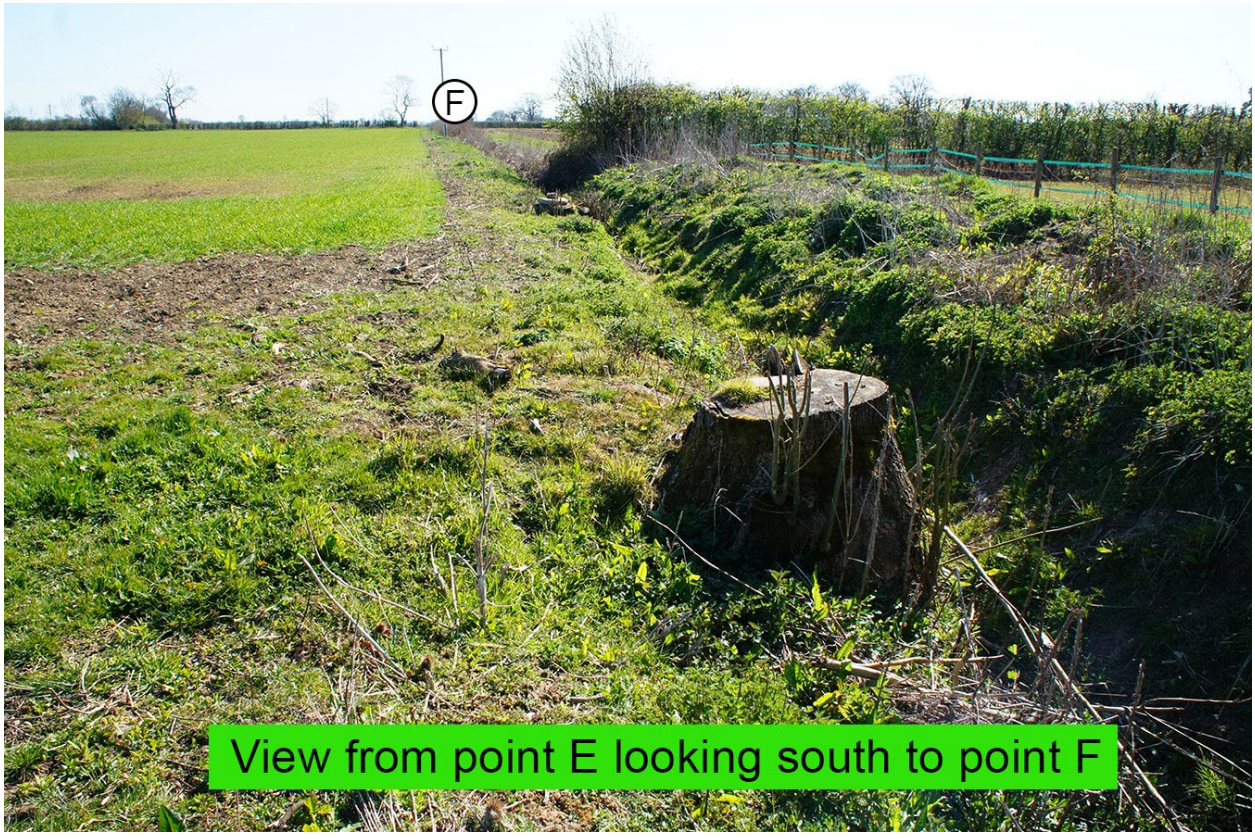
2023

The current owner purchased the land (150 acres) in Brooke known as 'Site 9' in the East Pye Solar proposal.

Soon after buying the land the approximately **240 metres** of hedge was coppiced and trees cut down on the West boundary of the 20 acre field located in the south west corner of site 9.
See picture below (points E to F)



Picture below is looking from point E to point F (refer to above picture) approximately 2 years after coppicing.



March 2024 (Bird nesting season)

Approximately **650 metres** of Ancient hedge (including trees) running the full width of site 9 from the southern boundary at Mill Lane (**point A**) to the Northern boudary near High Green (**point C**) was coppiced to the ground.

This also included the clearing of some trees around a pond (**point B**) within the hedge line.

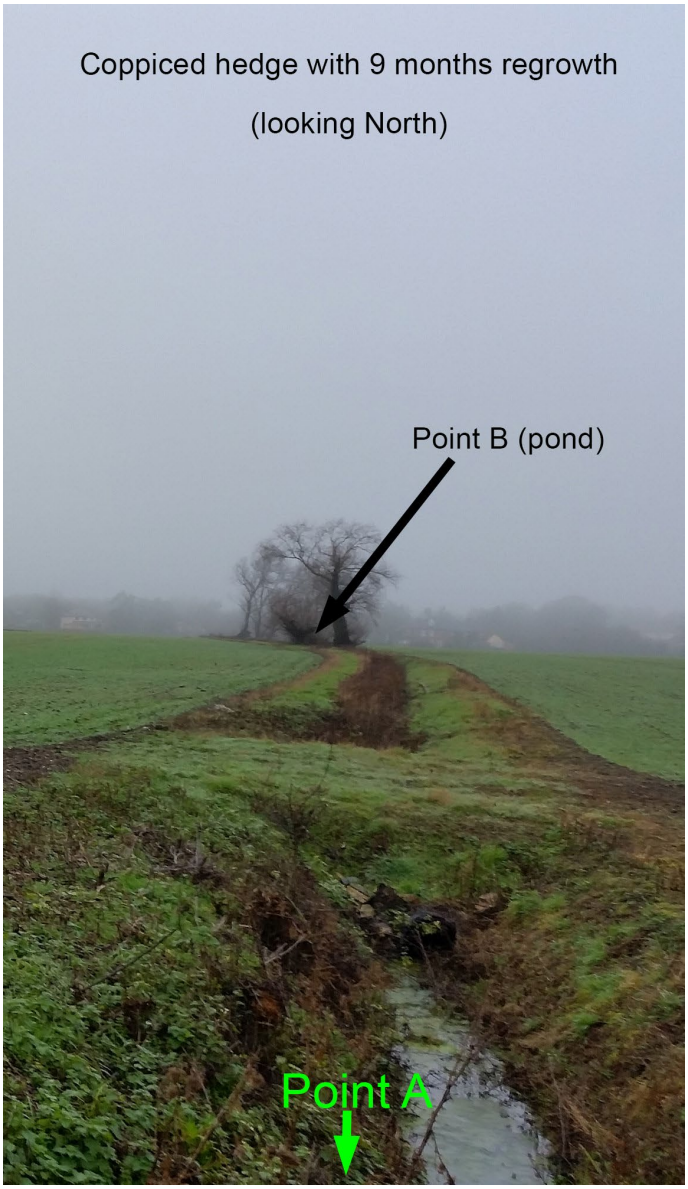
A further hedge line of **350 metres** that runs from **point B** to the western boundary at **point E** was coppiced to the ground too.

NB. This is the bird nesting season.

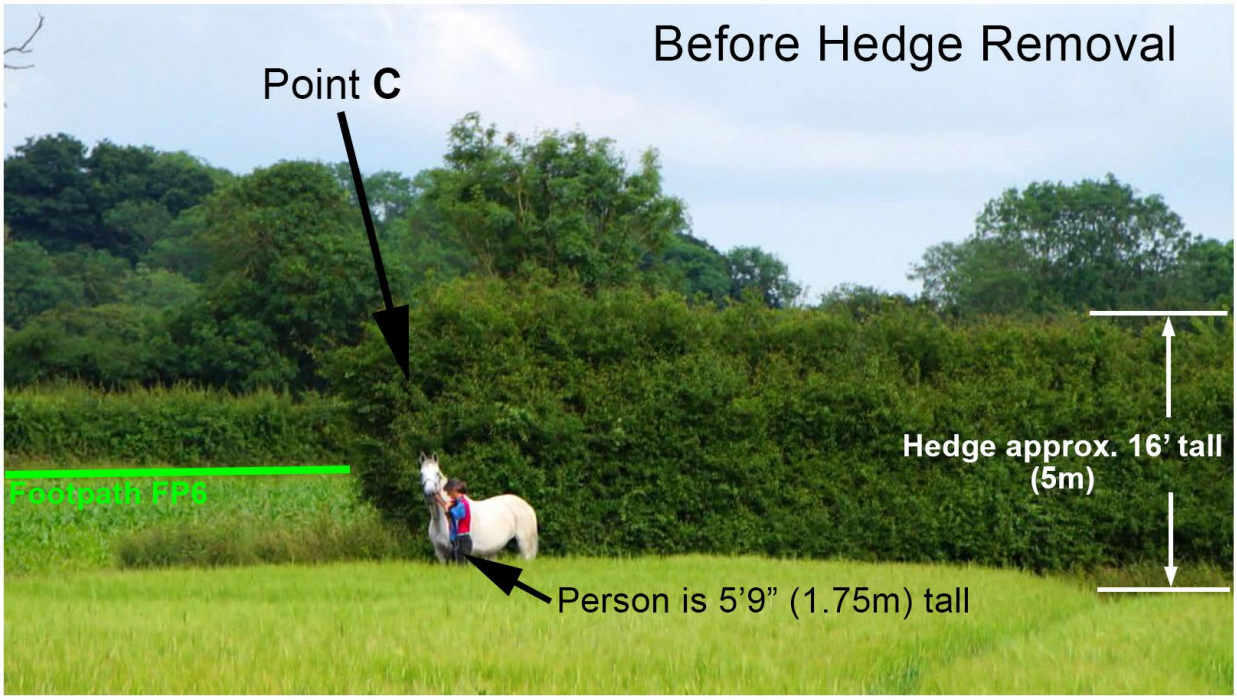
See pictures below.

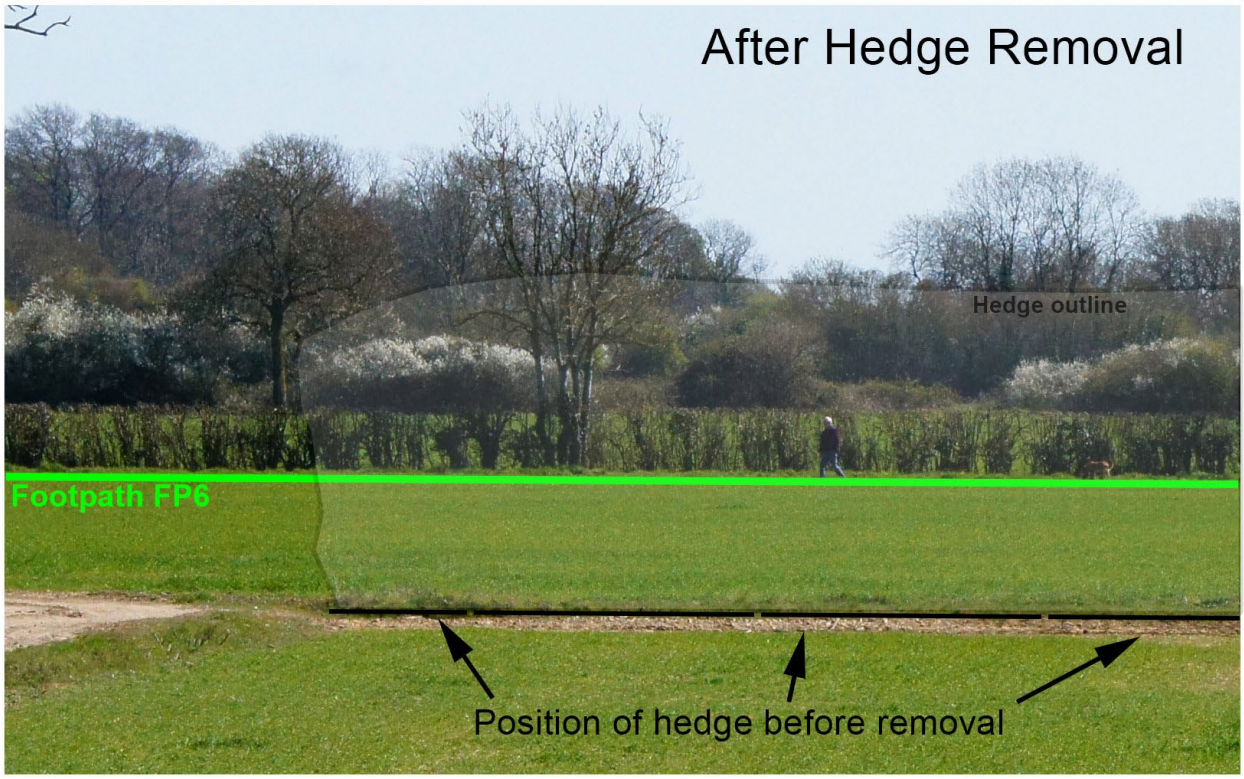


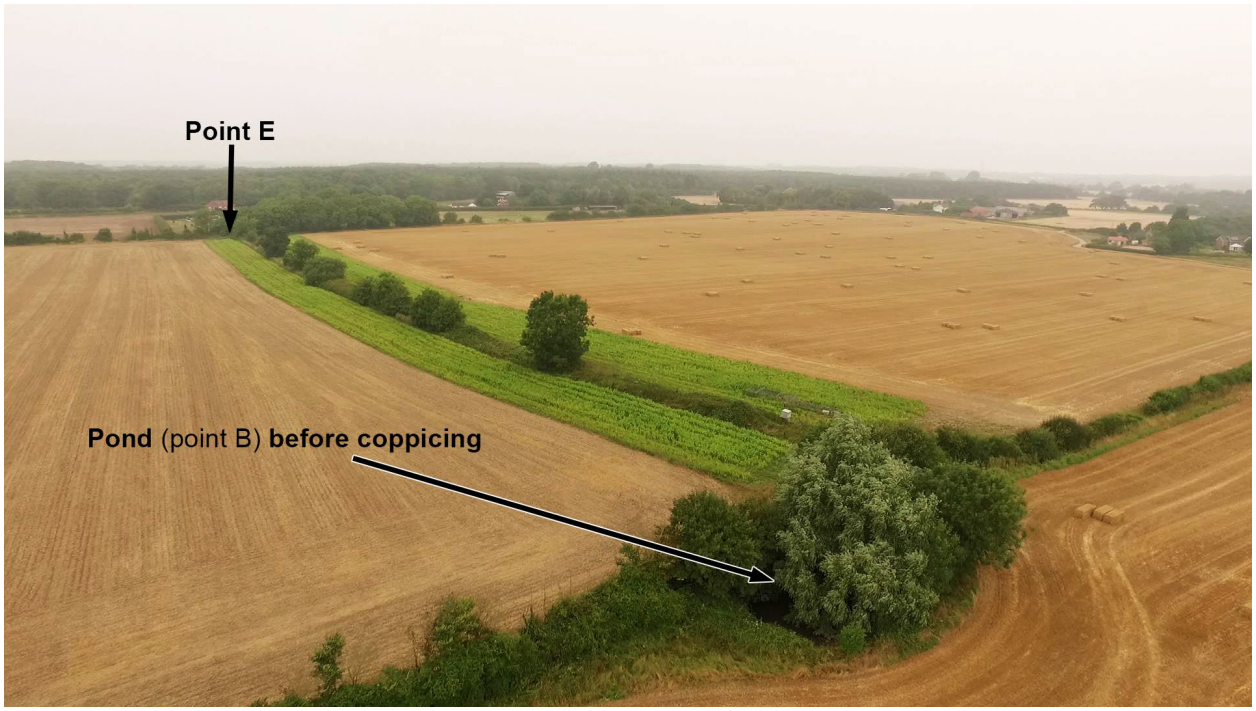

Coppiced hedge with 9 months regrowth
Point B (Pond)
Point C


Coppiced hedge with 9 months regrowth
(looking North)
Point B (pond)
Point A

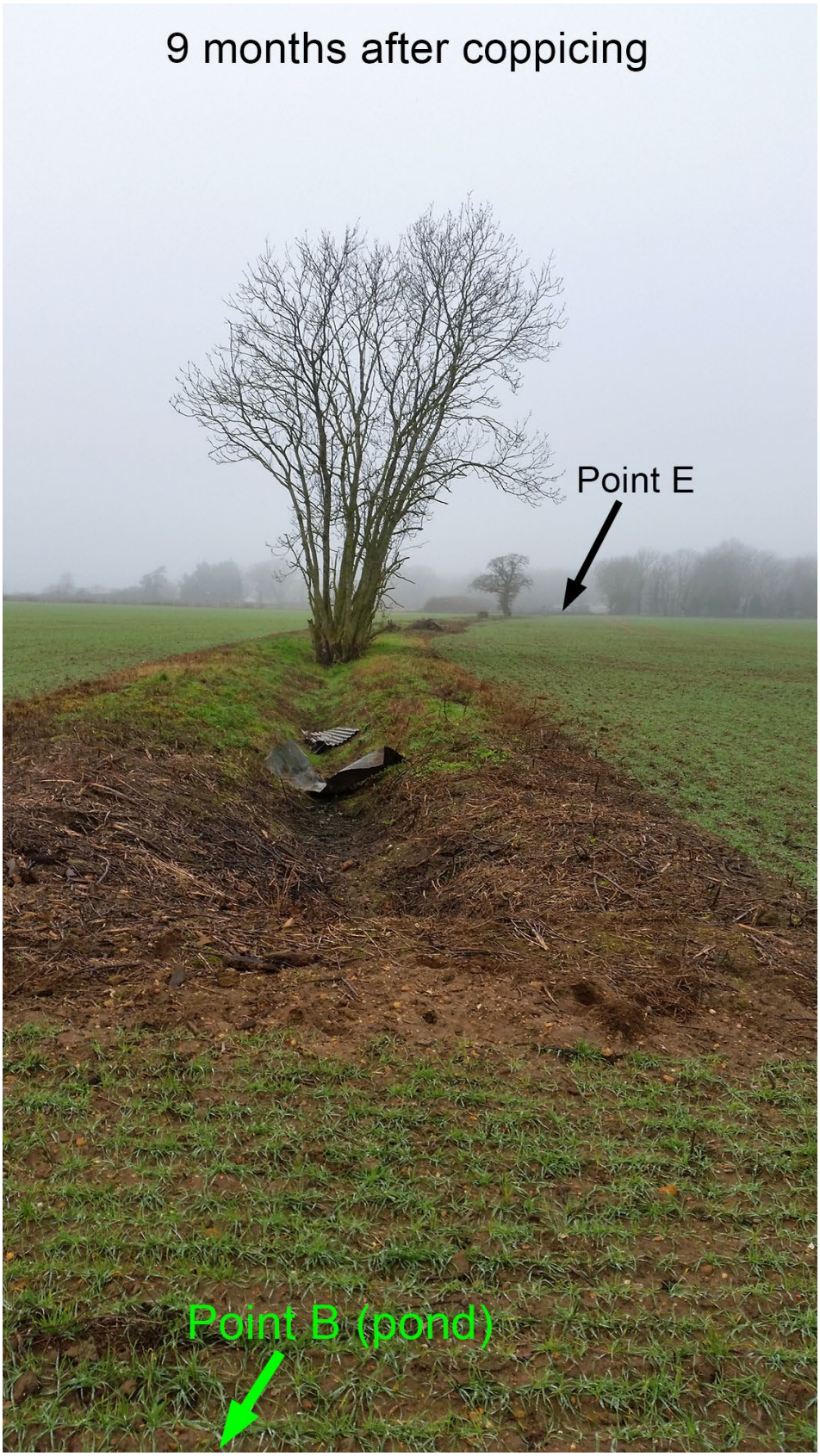
Continued


Before Hedge Removal
Point C
Hedge approx. 16' tall
(5m)
Footpath FP6
Person is 5'9" (1.75m) tall


After Hedge Removal
Hedge outline
Footpath FP6
Position of hedge before removal


Point E
Pond (point B) before coppicing


Pond (point B)
9 months after coppicing


9 months after coppicing
Point E
Point B (pond)

April 14th 2024

Cut hedged piled next to original hedge line ready for burning.



May 2024

Hedge piles burned and ash cultivated in immediately.

May 29th 2024

A 'Nesting bird' survey was carried out in the early evening. This was confirmed in a conversation with the person conducting the survey.

July 2nd 2024

National grid workers fitted pole strengtheners to the electricity poles located in the fields of site 9.

July 24th 2024

Two people inspected site 9 in respect of nearby historic buildings.This was confirmed in a conversation with the people.

September 10th 2024

Leaflet through door notifying of EPS proposal. This is the first public notification of EPS's proposal.

September 11th 2024

By this date the coppiced hedges had grown back shoots of about 2 feet high. Today these were mown down to the ground by the landowner.



October 2nd 2024

The illegal coppicing of the hedge was reported to:-

RPA (DEFRA) – They confirmed no enquiries need to be made and no action taken.

Natural England – They confirmed they were not able to get involved.

South Norfolk Council (Ecology, Biodiversity and Tree management department). -They took over 2 weeks to respond to the report and said they would take no action and that they have no control over timing of such works.

April 9th 2025

Second nesting bird survey carried out.

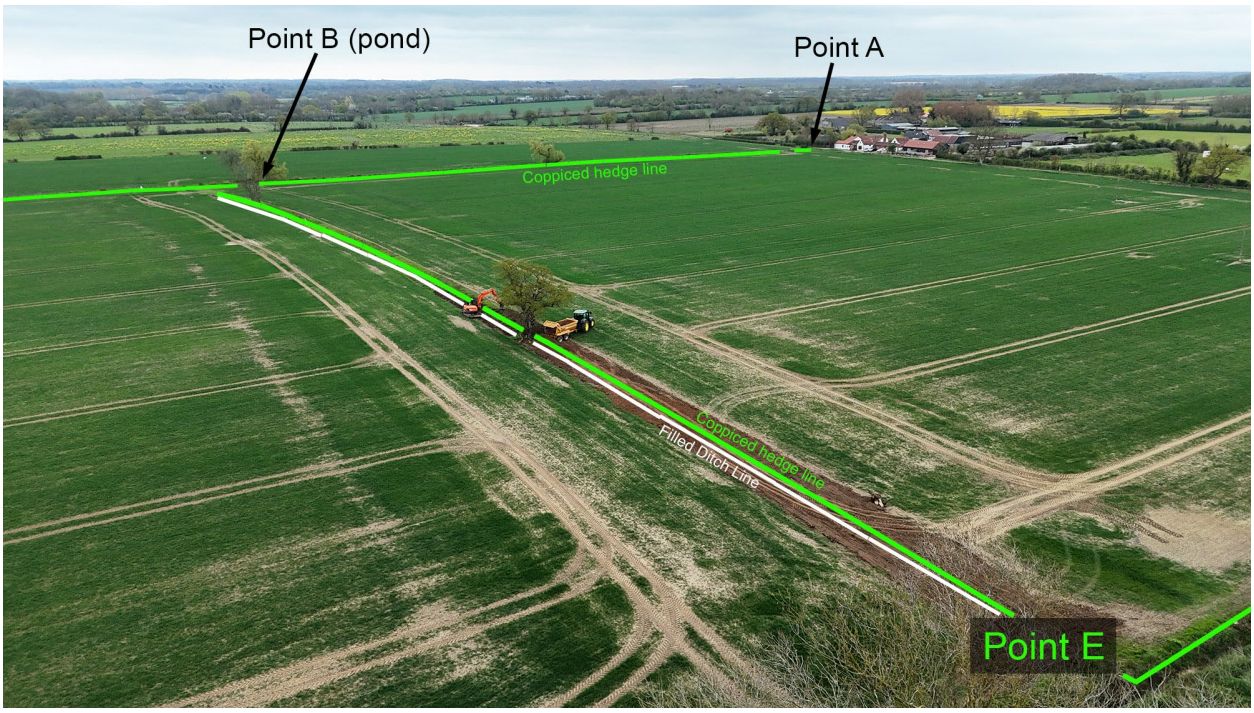
May 7th 2025

Third nesting bird survey was carried out.

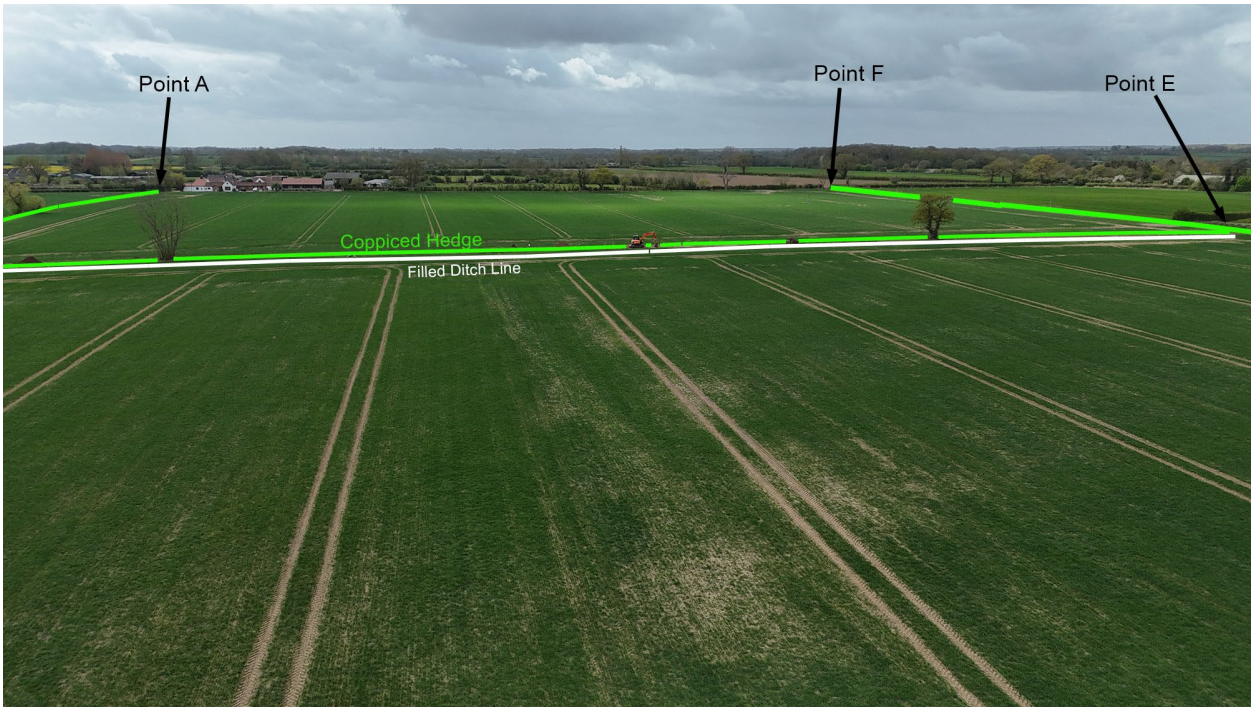
In a conversation with the surveyor they were told about the hedge coppicing which they were not aware of and agreed that was not the correct thing to do. They were asked to enter the detail about the coppicing work in their report, they said they would give the information to their manager and it was up to him.
The surveyor gave their email address for pictures to be sent to them of the hedge prior to the coppicing work and a map showing which hedges were coppiced.
NB. It is important to know if that information was presented in the 'nesting bird' surveyors report.

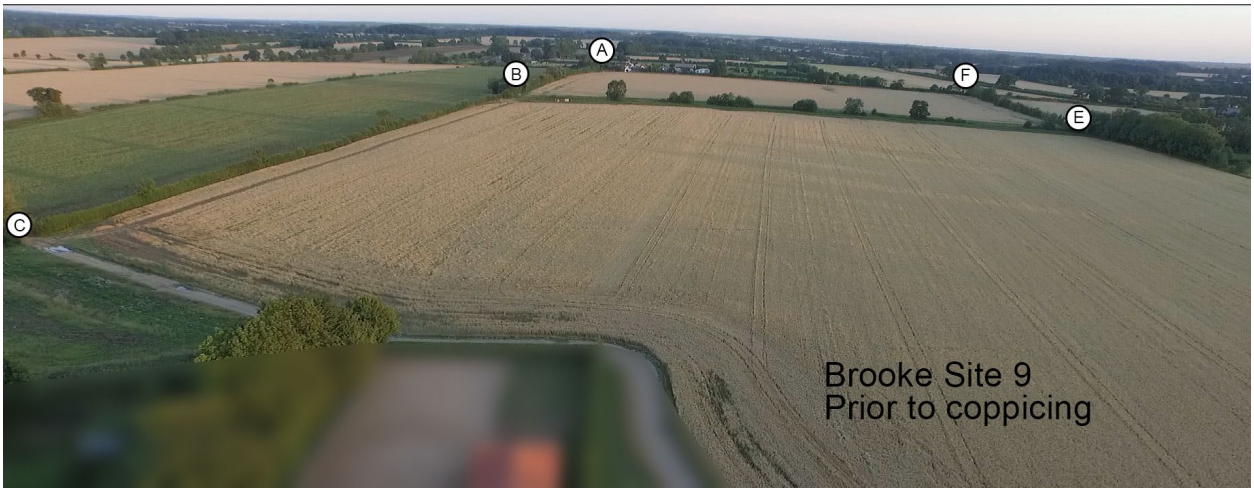
15/4/26

The landowner commenced filling **350 metres** of ditch that ran between the western boundary of site 9 (**point E**) and the pond (**point B**). This ditch runs adjacent to the hedge line that was coppice as previously mentioned in March 2024.
See pictures below.



Continued

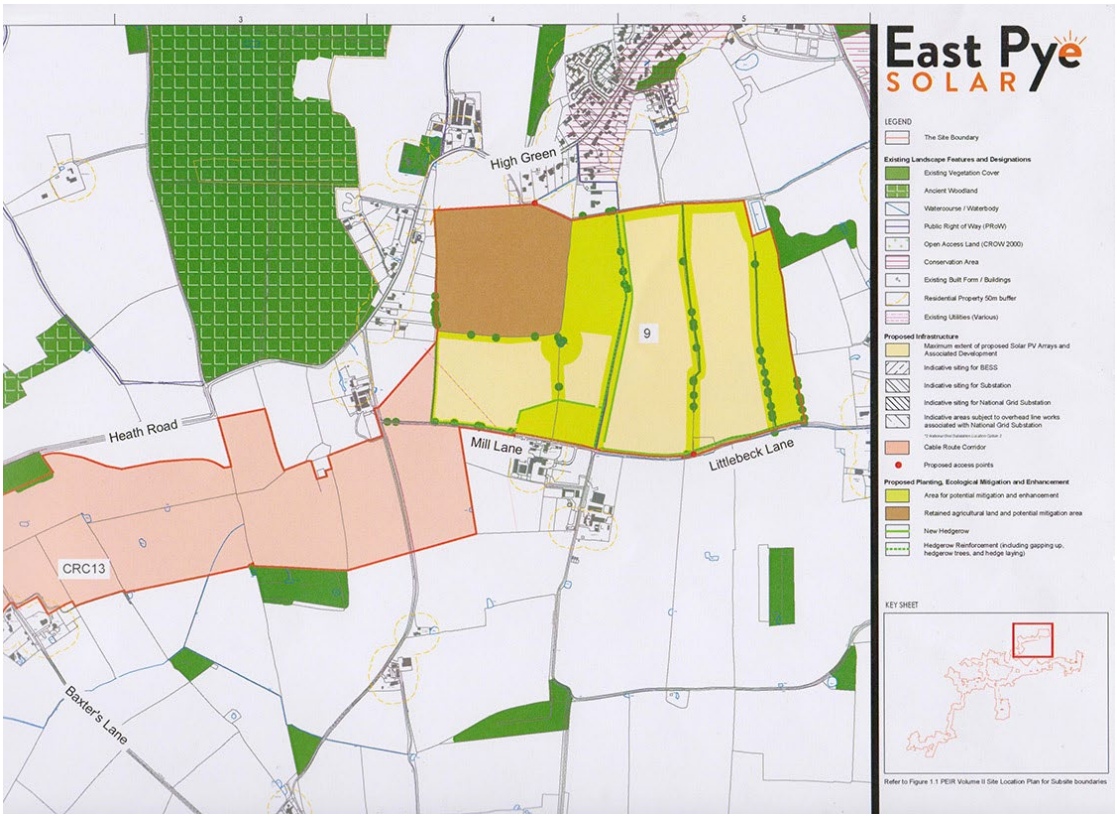




A discrepancy of East Pye Solar's maps raises some questions.

The map below of site 9 was produced in June 2025 and shows the field boundaries that run between points A and C and B and E but it does not show the hedges or trees that were/are on those boundary lines yet all other field boundaries on the site that have hedges, show them. Furthermore, the trees that remain to this day after the above mentioned coppicing works, are shown.

The next map down of site 9 was produce in April 2026. It no longer shows the field boundaries that run between points A and C and B and E yet all other field boundaries are shown.


East Pye
SOLAR
High Green
9
Heath Road
Mill Lane
Littlebeck Lane
CRC13
Baxter's Lane
LEGEND
The Site Boundary
Existing Landscape Features and Designations
Existing Vegetation Cover
Ancient Woodland
Watercourse / Waterbody
Public Right of Way (PRoW)
Open Access Land (CROW 2000)
Conservation Area
Existing Built Form / Buildings
Residential Property 50m buffer
Existing Utilities (Various)
Proposed Infrastructure
Maximum extent of proposed Solar PV Arrays and Associated Development
Indicative siting for BESS
Indicative siting for Substation
Indicative siting for National Grid Substation
Indicative areas subject to overhead line works associated with National Grid Substation
Cable Route Corridor
Proposed access points
Proposed Planting, Ecological Mitigation and Enhancement
Area for potential mitigation and enhancement
Retained agricultural land and potential mitigation area
New Hedgerow
Hedgerow Reinforcement (including gapping up, hedgerow trees, and hedge laying)
KEY SHEET
Refer to Figure 1.1 PEIR Volume II Site Location Plan for Subsite boundaries


BROOKE
Solar panels have been removed from parts of SubSite 8B to reduce effects on heritage sites, views and the surrounding landscape.
SITE 9
The western part of Site 9 will remain in farming use to reduce visual impact on nearby homes on Mill Lane and within the Brooke Conservation Area.
SITE 8
MARKET LANE
BAXTER'S LANE
WOODTON ROAD
GREEN LANE
SITE 7
Section Map D
Scheme Site Boundary
Solar PV Arrays
Cable Route Corridor
Permissive Paths
Indicative Access Points (Construction, Operation & Decommissioning)
Area for Potential Mitigation and Enhancement
Retained Agricultural Land
Ancient Woodland
Internal Access Tracks
Public Right of Way (PRoW)
Veteran trees