Extended Phase 1 & Protected Species Assessment

Little Snodworth Farm
Snodworth Road,
Langho,
Blackburn,
Lancashire.
Executive Summary

GLM Ecology has been commissioned by Green Cat Renewables Ltd to undertake an Ecological Assessment on land proposed for a potential solar farm at Little Snodworth Farm, Snodworth Road, Langho, Blackburn, Lancashire.

The survey followed standard methodology as published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee 1988, a technique for Environmental Audit. The survey aimed to assess the ecological value of the site and record any protected habitats and species.

The purpose of the assessment was to document the baseline ecological conditions of the site. The potential of the site for protected species of conservation interest that would require further survey on the basis they might comprise an ecological constraint to the proposed development was undertaken using standard methodology.

The site walkover revealed the presence of a poor variety of habitats present within the two survey areas. The predominant habitat is horse-grazing fields with virtually no ground cover present. Lower Snodworth Farm sits centrally between the two survey areas (Fields A & B, Figure 1).

The survey area where the solar panels are proposed has very limited potential to support any protected species and species of conservation concern. Badgers are present in the general area. None of the survey area is designated as a protected area e.g. SSSI.

It is considered that no further surveys are likely to be required on any protected species. It is proposed that a Biodiversity Management Plan is produced if planning permission is granted to look at several ways of greatly enhancing and improving the sites ecological value and biodiversity. If the site is to be fenced then suitable fencing to allow access to badgers will be required if setts are confirmed within 1km of site.
Figure 1. Site map for location of Little Snodworth Farm and proposed solar farm.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

GLM Ecology was commissioned by Green Cat Renewables Ltd to carry out an Ecological Assessment and survey for protected species and habitats including European Protected Species (EPS) at Little Snodworth Farm, Snodworth Road, Langho, Blackburn, Lancashire.

It is proposed to construct a solar farm within 2 separate grazing fields adjacent to Little Snodworth Farm. The purpose of the Ecological Assessment was to determine if any protected species or habitats were present at the site. The overall aims of this assessment were:

- To assess whether protected species, habitats, mammals or EPS were present on site;
- If protected species are present to assess local population status and usage of the site.
- To recommend further survey work and mitigation if required.
- To propose possible ways of enhancing the sites ecological status if planning permission is granted via a Biodiversity Management Plan.

1.2 Evaluation Criteria

An initial desk based search was carried out in June 2015. Designated sites and associated protected species and habitats at a local and regional level have been identified through that process. A description of the local area in relation to designated sites with ecological interests and the findings of an initial desk based review of the area are presented in the context of the following sections. The following resources were used:

- NBN Gateway
- RSPB sensitivity maps
- Natural England
- Multi Agency Geographic Information for The Countryside.
1.3 Legislative Context

A number of sites, habitats and species are protected under European and UK legislation, and may present constraints to site development. These commonly include species such as bats, badgers, otters, water voles, red squirrels and great crested newts, as well as such protected sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The legislative issues for species that might be affected at Little Snodworth Farm are discussed below.

1.4 Badgers

Both badgers and their setts are protected by law under The Protection of Badgers Act 1992. As a result it is an offence to:

- Willfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a badger, or to attempt to do so;
- To intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett;
- To disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett;
- Damage or destroy a sett;
- To obstruct access to, or any entrance of a badger sett.

A badger sett is defined in the legislation as ‘any structure or place, which displays signs indicating current use by a badger’. ‘Current use’ does not simply mean ‘current occupation’ and for licensing purposes it is defined as ‘any sett within an occupied badger territory regardless of when it may have last been used’. A sett therefore, in an occupied territory, is classified as in current use even if it is only used seasonally or occasionally by badgers, and is afforded the same protection in law.

1.5 Birds

All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and it is an offence, with certain exceptions intentionally or recklessly to:
• Kill, injure or take any wild bird;
• Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built;
• Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird; and
Disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act while it is nest building or at a nest containing eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young of such a bird

1.6 Phase 1 Habitat Survey
Legislation exists to protect habitats and floral species from destruction, degradation and loss as a result of development activities and include:
• The Conservation (Natural Habitats, & C.) Regulations 1994;

METHODOLOGY

1.7 Survey Limitations
All mammal or ornithological surveys provide only a snapshot of animal activity and are intended to inform a planning application only. Mammal and bird activity is likely to vary over time and in differing conditions and, as such, a negative result does not prove a lack of all mammal activity, but does provide a strong indication of activity levels.

1.8 Desk Study
A short desktop study was carried out via NBN Gateway, to identify the presence of any protected mammals or species present within the 2km grid square encompassing the survey site.
1.9 Field Survey

Protected species field surveys were carried out in June 2015 in good weather conditions. The survey consisted of walkovers of the site following standardised guidance to visually inspect and assess the site for its potential to support protected mammals. Due to the habitat and data search this survey concentrated on badger and birds however signs for any protected mammals or EPS were searched for.

1.10 Badger surveys were carried out according to recommended guidelines\(^5, 6, 7, 8, 9\). Evidence of badger activity searched for included:

- Setts: badger setts typically have characteristic shapes and dimensions;
- Paw prints and badger hair caught on hedges and fences;
- Foraging signs: foraging badgers leave distinctive marks when foraging;
- Characteristic worn pathways;
- Latrines: badgers defecate in pits, often clustering several pits into a latrine.

Birds

1.11 The breeding bird survey was carried out in June 2015 in suitable weather conditions. The survey work was based on the standard BTO Common Bird Census (CBC) technique (http://www.bto.org/bbs).

Phase 1 Survey

1.12 The Phase 1 Habitat Survey aimed to:

- Identify and record broad habitats within the vicinity of the development area;
- Provide a description of habitat distributions and highlight any areas of ecological constraints in relation to the proposed development; and
- Contribute towards informing planning processes.

1.13 Whilst not a full botanical survey, the Phase 1 method enables a suitably experienced ecologist to obtain sufficient understanding of the ecology of a site so that it is possible either:

- To confirm the conservation significance of the site and assess the potential for impacts on habitats /species likely to represent a material consideration in planning terms; or
To ascertain that further surveys of some aspect(s) of the site’s ecology will be required before such confirmation can be made.

1.14 Phase I habitat survey is a standardised method of recording habitat types and characteristic vegetation, as set out in the Handbook for Phase I Habitat Survey – a technique for Environmental Audit\textsuperscript{10}. The Phase I habitat survey undertaken in June 2015 covered the whole of the site.

RESULTS

1.15 Desk Study
Within the 2km grid square encompassing the survey area the following protected mammals were recorded via National Biodiversity Network;

- Badger
- Otter
- Common Pipistrelle
- Brown Long-Eared Bat

Survey Results

1.16 Badger Activity
No signs of badger were recorded on the grazing fields. NBN Gateway records badger in the general area but it is unknown if setts are present within a 2km radius.

Birds
1.17 There was a very poor species list recorded of potential breeding birds on site in the grazing fields. No lapwings or curlews were recorded on the grazing fields and only a single skylark. There is a dearth of cover with the majority of the site being intensely grazed fields that are not considered good breeding bird habitat. An average variety of species were recorded in the woodland edges and hedgerows around the sites and consisted of common passerines e.g. wren, tits, warblers, thrushes, finches etc.
1.18 **Schedule 1 Species**
No species were recorded breeding which are fully protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

1.19 No suitable habitat was present within the survey area for red squirrel, great crested newt, otter and water vole.

**Phase 1 Habitat Survey**

1.20 The habitats present within the proposed solar field areas (Fields A & B) are presented in Figure 2 below.

1.21 **Grazing and other grassland**
The main use of the fields on site is as improved grazing fields (B4) and are utilised by horses and contain agriculturally improved grasses, such as, perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perrenne*), including clover (*Trifolium repens*), creeping buttercup, (*Rannunculus repens*), common daisy (*Bellis perennis*) and sheeps sorrell (*Rumex acetosella*). The proposed solar farm is within these grazing fields (Figure 3 & 4).
### Phase 1 Habitats Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="A3.1" /></td>
<td>A3.1 Broadleaved Parkland/scattered trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="B4" /></td>
<td>B4 Improved grassland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="B5" /></td>
<td>B5 Marsh/marshy grassland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Boundary Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B6</td>
<td>Poor semi-improved grassland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Running water/ditch system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4</td>
<td>Bare ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A3.1 Broadleaved Parkland/scattered trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J2.4 Fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concrete farm road/parking area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Road</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. Phase 1 map and legend**

![Phase 1 map and legend](image)

**Figure 3. Grazing fields with young plantation along field edge**
Figure 4. Typical habitat with wire fencing delineating fields.

Figure 5. Deciduous woodland to north of grazing fields.
ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

1.22 Impacts on Badger
No signs of badger were recorded.

1.23 Mitigation
No mitigation is needed for the construction of the solar farm.

1.24 If an active badger sett occurs within 2km of site then the fencing that will be placed around the solar farm needs to have badger gates or similar incorporated into the design to allow badger access across site.

1.25 Impacts on Breeding Birds
There were virtually no breeding species recorded on the actual grazing fields. All species recorded were on and around the periphery of the site in hedgerows and woodland edge. The species recorded would be considered as typical for the habitat and of low sensitivity. The magnitude of impact is considered to be negligible and overall the significance of impact to be no more than negligible.

1.26 Mitigation
No mitigation is deemed to be required.

1.27 Impacts on Habitats
A total of six habitats are present within the overall site survey areas, of which the vast majority is grazing fields. No nationally or internationally protected habitats were identified in this assessment. It is expected that the solar farm would be entirely in grazing fields. No trees will be removed for construction.

DISCUSSION

1.28 The purpose of these surveys was to determine whether any protected species or habitats were present on site. The surveys comprised walkovers of the site including an assessment of the habitat present for protected species using standardised methodology.
1.29 The survey work covered the entire site.

1.30 No signs of otter, water vole, red squirrel or great crested newt were recorded and the habitat was not deemed suitable for these species.

1.31 No signs of badger were recorded on site.

1.32 If fencing is to be constructed around the solar farm then badger gates will need incorporated into the design to allow badgers access across the site if a site is present within 2km of site.

1.32 Given the habitat of intensely grazed fields it is deemed that the ornithological breeding bird interest at Little Snodworth Farm is considered minimal. No Schedule 1 species are considered to be present or breeding. No Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern breed on site.

1.33 The habitat on site is considered very poor from an ecology viewpoint and consists predominantly of grazing fields.

1.34 The site (particularly Field A) offers great opportunity to enhance and increase biodiversity in the area. It is proposed that if the application is passed that a Biodiversity Management Plan is produced to investigate the optimum way to enhance the biodiversity and wildlife of the site.

CONCLUSION

1.35 It is the professional opinion of GLM Ecology that the proposed works would not constitute a risk to any protected species or habitats when the relevant mitigation is followed. It is also considered that a Biodiversity Management Plan is produced if planning permission is granted to look at ways of greatly enhancing the sites ecological value and biodiversity.
REFERENCES

1. The National Biodiversity Network (http://www.nbn.org.uk/)
DISCLAIMER

This report has been prepared by Dr Garry Mortimer of GLM Ecology, with all reasonable skill and care within the terms of the agreement with the client. Dr Mortimer disclaims any responsibility to any parties in respect of matters outside this scope.

Best efforts were made to meet the objectives of this study through desktop study and field survey.

Information supplied by the client or any other parties and used in this report is assumed to be correct and GLM Ecology accepts no responsibility for inaccuracies in the data supplied.

It should be noted, that whilst every endeavour is made to meet the client’s brief, no site investigation can guarantee absolute assessment or prediction of the natural environment. Numerous species are extremely mobile or only evident at certain times of year and habitats are subject to seasonal and temporal change.

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Document Prepared By
Dr Garry Mortimer
GLM Ecology