Ilex Ecology



Preliminary Ecological Assessment of Land at Ash Hill Cottage, Romsey

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Client: Phillip Andrews Date: July 2023

Summary

A Preliminary Ecological Assessment was undertaken of an area of grassland at Ash Hill Cottage, near Romsey in July 2023. The purpose of the survey was to assess the conservation value of the grassland and examine any potential impacts from the installation of a single row of solar panels, with associated cabling and construction.

The grassland comprised a former paddock of low conservation value, due to a combination of a relatively recent re-seeding (to a sports pitch) and a current regular mowing regime. An area of slightly higher value grassland (which is managed as a hay meadow) was recorded to the south of the proposed location and will not be affected.

A narrow ditch will be dug to bury the cabling for the grid connection, through the same habitat of mown amenity grassland, and the old gateway in the hedge (currently overgrown with Bramble) will be re-instated to allow access for construction

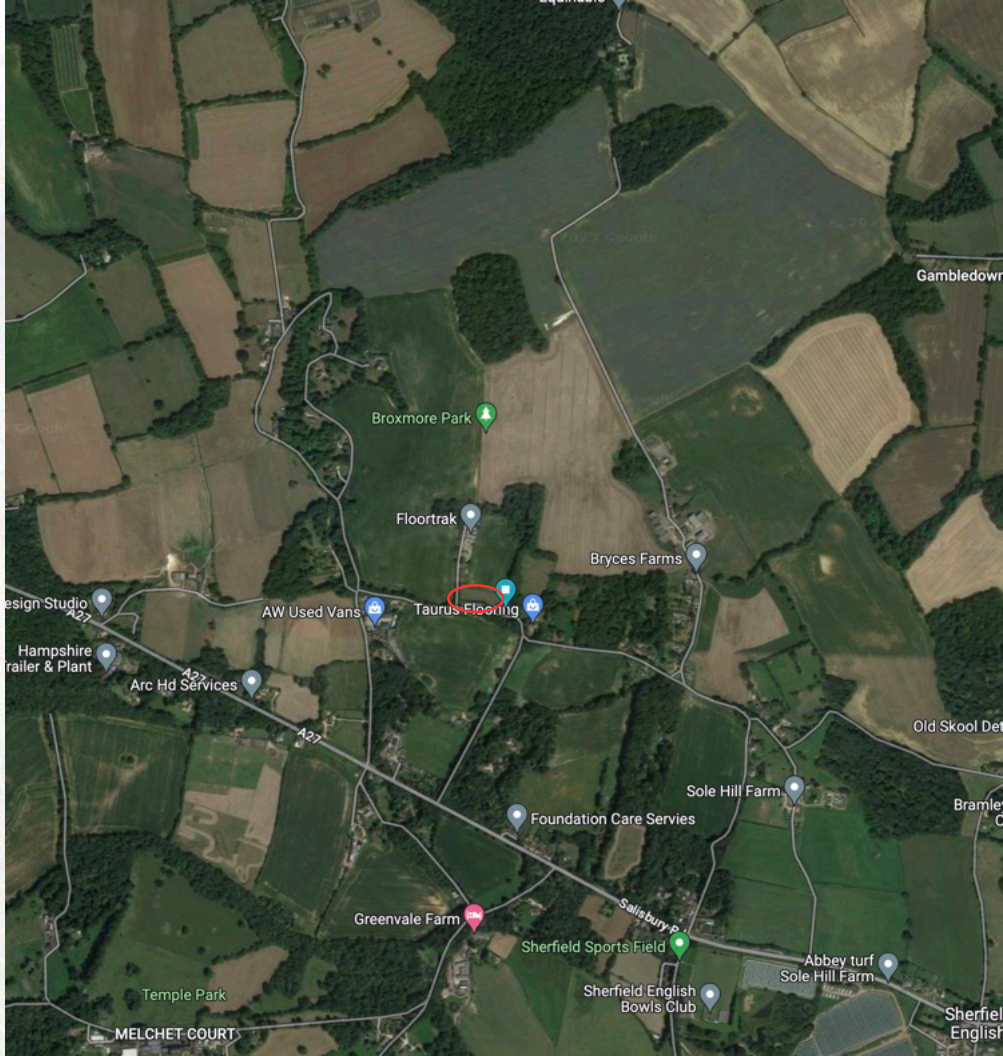
The area of grassland which will be shaded by the panels is approximately 25x1.5m, with a further area of 5x5m likely to be temporarily impacted during construction. The shading from the panels (in a raised array) will allow the grassland to persist and not result in the net loss of this habitat.

Methodology

Survey

An extended botanical survey was carried out of the site. This comprised a walkover of the entire area to map all habitats and list all the plants species present on the site, including forbs, graminoids, pteridophytes and bryophytes.

The grassland and immediate area was also assessed in terms of its ability to support animal species, and in particular any legally protected species.



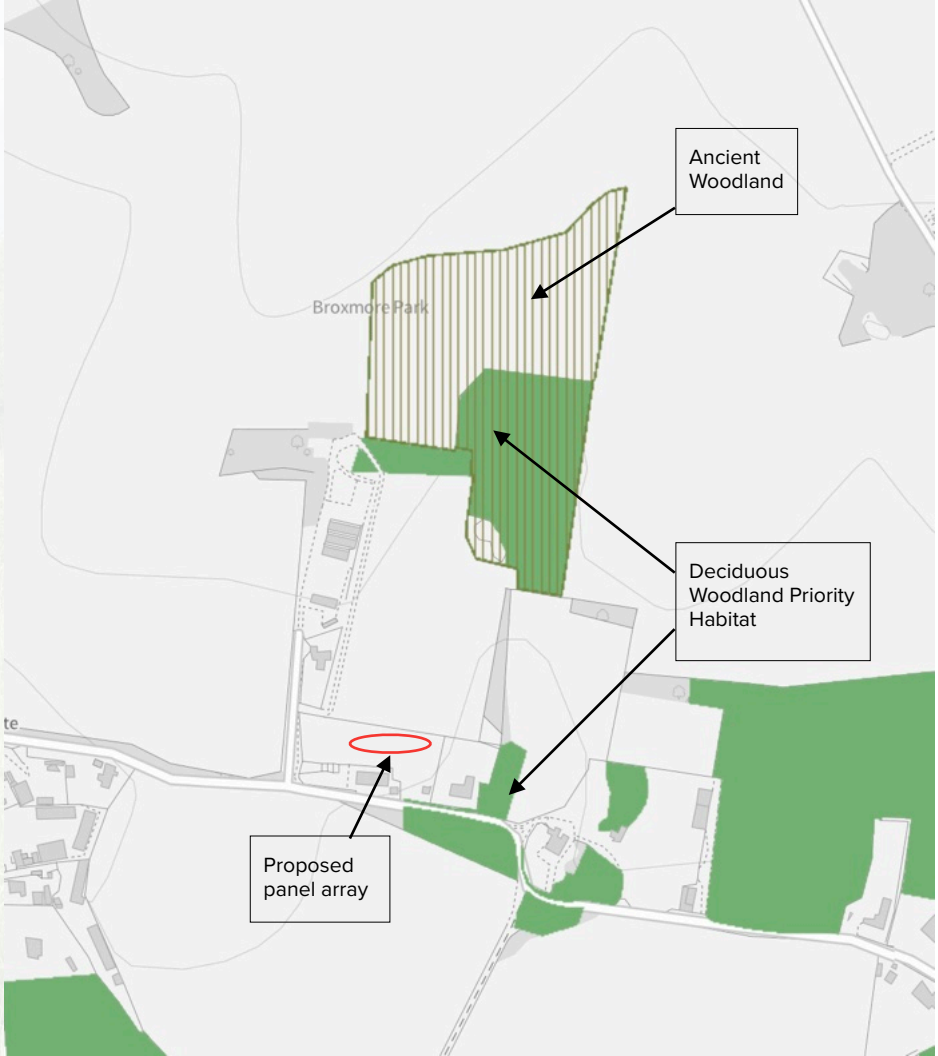
Results - Site Context

The site lies in a mixed agricultural/rural residential setting, bordered to the north by an arable field (currently maize) and to the south and west by small areas of woodland. These are listed as Priority Habitat Inventory - Deciduous Woodland (England) but not classed as Ancient Woodland.

The field itself was re-seeded by a previous owner who intended to develop the field as a sports pitch.



Arable Field to north of site



Results - Survey

Habitats

The area where the array is to be placed comprises a strip of 25x1.5m of mown grassland, maintained as an extension of the lawn of the property. Despite this regular mowing, the strip supported a reasonable range of species.

The sward was overwhelmingly dominated by grasses, with a mixture of **Creeping Bent, Common Bent** and **Sweet Vernal-grass**. Few forbs were recorded, with **White Clover** most regularly observed, and smaller amounts of **Creeping Buttercup**, **Rough Hawkbit, Common Cat's-ear, Curled Dock, Hogweed** and **Lesser Stitchwort.**

Although some of these species have an affinity with more acidic grassland, there was an insufficient presence of key species to classify the grassland as such.

This strip of grassland would be classified as poor semi-improved (Phase 1) as it lacks any clear affinity with any grassland type. Under UKHAB it would be classified as g3c Other Neutral Grassland



The adjacent area (which is managed with an annual cut) was also surveyed to assess whether the grassland could support a wider range of species under different management, and this area was found to support the same assemblage of species, although with a different sward height and structure.

Results - Survey

(Habitat cont.)

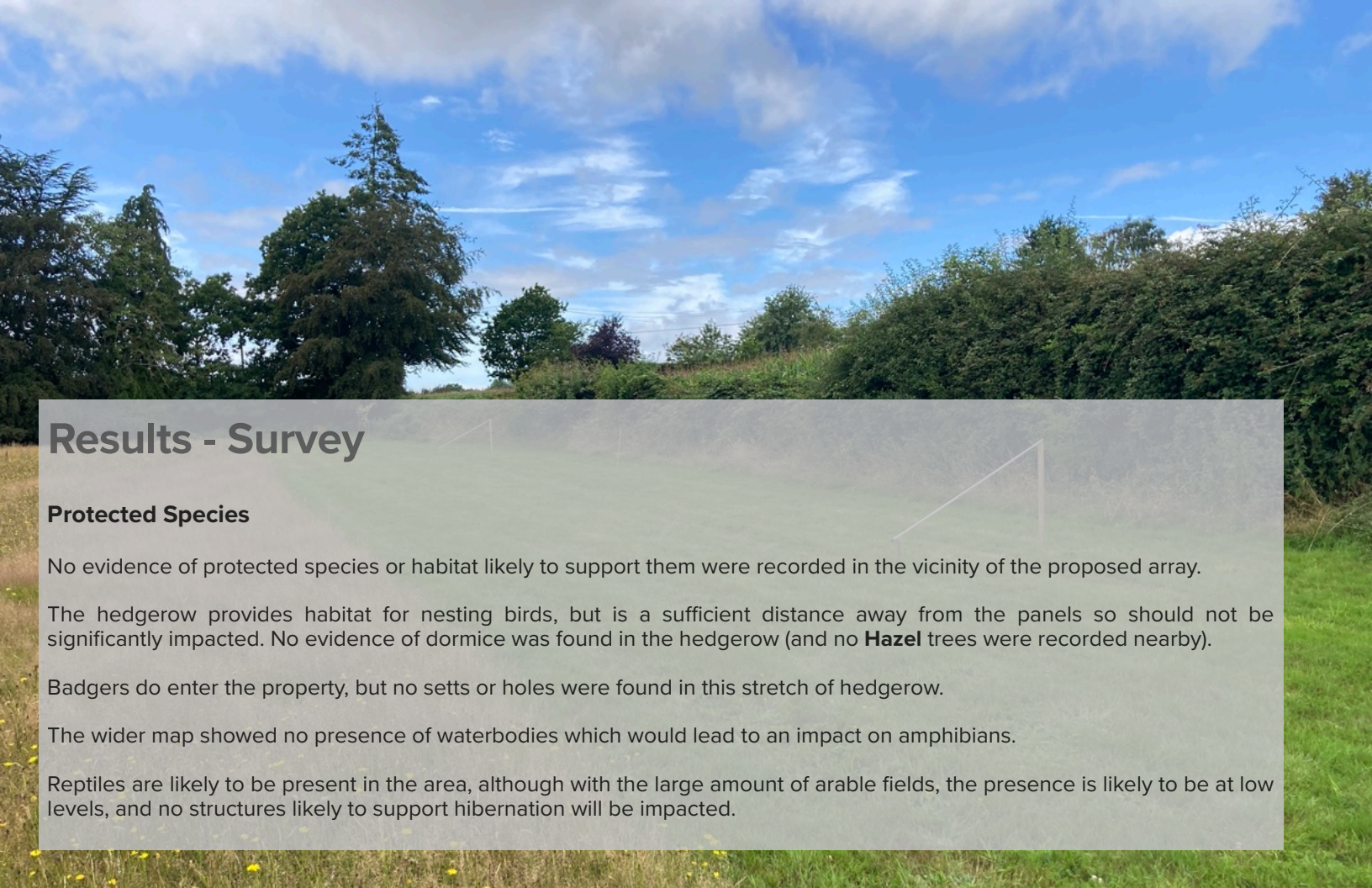
The area of proposed panels is bounded to the north by a length of hedgerow. This was classified as species-poor with just three species (**Hawthorn**, **Elder** and **Oak**) present alongside **Laurel**.

An existing gateway will provide access during the construction phase. At present this gateway has been allowed to grow over with Bramble, to improve security to the property, which will be cut back temporarily to allow access.

A small trench will be required to run cabling down to the grid connection, and this runs through a similar area of mown grassland.







Results - Survey

Protected Species

No evidence of protected species or habitat likely to support them were recorded in the vicinity of the proposed array.

The hedgerow provides habitat for nesting birds, but is a sufficient distance away from the panels so should not be significantly impacted. No evidence of dormice was found in the hedgerow (and no **Hazel** trees were recorded nearby).

Badgers do enter the property, but no setts or holes were found in this stretch of hedgerow.

The wider map showed no presence of waterbodies which would lead to an impact on amphibians.

Reptiles are likely to be present in the area, although with the large amount of arable fields, the presence is likely to be at low levels, and no structures likely to support hibernation will be impacted.

Evaluation and Impacts

The grassland is considered to be of low conservation value, due to its history and current management regime (amenity use). g3c grassland is a common grassland type, and supports a relatively low range of species.

The central area of grassland which has been managed as a hay meadow is of slightly higher value, particularly as a nectar/pollen resource but will not be affected by the development.

The hedgerow is of low value due to a lack of species diversity and the present of non-native **Laurel** shrubs, but will lose some connectivity temporarily when the gate is re-instated - however this is a return to the previous status of the paddock hedge, which had the gateway permanently present.

The placement of the panels will have a shading impact of the grass below, but this will not significantly differ from the impact of the current mowing regime, and the need to brush-cut rather than mow may lead to the development of a more varied sward type.

The trenching works will be carried out by removing grass turves, digging the trench and replacing the turves, which will limit the longterm impact of this.

As such it is considered that the proposal to build a single row of panels will have low impact in the longterm, and be more than compensated by the eventual carbon reduction of the functioning solar array.



Reducing Impacts

1. The gateway must be cleared outside the bird nesting season (ideally in October through to February) to avoid the destruction of nests or disturbance to nesting birds
2. The cabling trench should be dug by removing turves of grass and replacing when works are finished
3. Consideration should be given to placing the solar array with 10cm gaps between the panels, which will allow significantly more light to reach the ground, and better maintain the health of the grassland beneath.

Appendix 1 - Species List

AREA		DAFOR
Achillea millefolium	Yarrow	R
Heracleum sphondylium	Hogweed	R
Hypochaeris radicata	Cat's-ear	R
Jacobaea vulgaris	Common Ragwort	R
Leontodon hispidus	Rough Hawkbit	O
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort Plantain	R
Ranunculus repens	Creeping Buttercup	A
Rubus fruticosus	Bramble	R
Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel	R
Rumex crispus	Curled Dock	R
Stellaria graminea	Lesser Stichwort	O
Taraxacum agg.	Dandelion	R
Trifolium repens	White Clover	O

Agrostis capillaris	Common Bent	A
Agrostis stolonifera	Creeping Bent	A
Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal Grass	O
Arrhenatherum elatius	False Oat-grass	O
Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire-fog	A
Schedonorus pratensis	Meadow Fescue	R
Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus	Springy Turf-moss	R

D	Dominant
A	Abundant
F	Frequent
O	Occasional
R	Rare



Ilex Ecology

© Ilex Ecology
37 Albany Road
Salisbury
SP1 3YQ
ilexecology@gmail.com
www.ilexecology.co.uk