Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

ECOLOGY

Officer name:	Max Hemmings
Date:	19/09/2023
Application number:	PL/2023/06758
Proposal:	The installation of 24 ground solar panels within the grounds (field) of the property
Site address:	Ash Hill Cottage, Ash Hill Common, Sherfield English, Romsey, SO51 6FU
Case officer:	Amy Houldsworth

Recommendations:

	No Comment
	Support
	No objection
X	Condition (no objection subject to conditions)
	Objection - further information required
	Objection in principle
	HRA completed

Further Information Required:

	Issue	Policy/Legislative Compliance	Date information requested & Further information required	Satisfactorily addressed (Document & Date)

The outstanding document(s) listed above are needed to enable the council's ecology team to consider all the relevant impacts and benefits of the proposed scheme. The council's ecologists will provide a further response once all the above information has been submitted via the case officer.
Please Note: When resubmitting a revised document, ALL changes must be highlighted to enable review.

The submission of the ecology report to this planning application is welcome. The report confirms the grassland area to be impacted by the proposed works is of low distinctiveness and no evidence of protected species or habitat likely to support them were recorded in the vicinity of the proposed array. The siting and design of the panels above ground and away from the grassland of higher species diversity and a suitable distance from the hedgerow is a great example of design to avoid/minimise ecological impacts and is supported.

Wiltshire Council considers land under solar arrays to be recorded as 'modified grassland' of low distinctiveness due to potential issues with changes/environmental conditions/shading and management. This is in line with advice Wiltshire Council has received from Natural England. We recognise that it may be possible to create habitat of greater biodiversity value beneath panels, however as this is still a relatively young industry supporting evidence is not yet available.

There is no anticipated significant net loss in biodiversity since the size of the array is relatively small and ecology report confirms the grassland to be impacted already has low distinctiveness.

Since this is a householder development of a relatively small scale, the requirements detailed in Wiltshire Council's Solar Farm PV advice note (SolarPVFarmEcologyAdviceNoteJuly2021.pdf (wiltshire.gov.uk) is considered to be too onerous for this application.

There is a lack of reported research into the impacts of solar panels on commuting and foraging bats. Recent evidence suggests impacts are likely and therefore the precautionary principle should be applied. However, the reported research is focussed on large scale solar PV arrays where larger areas of land are proposed to be converted into Solar PV farms. Given the scale of the development along with the design and siting it is considered any impacts will be de-minimums and therefore are scoped out for further assessment in this instance.

Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) – Test of likely significance for New Forest protected sites, the River Test and associated protected sites and Mottisfont Bat Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

A test of likely significance has been carried out by the relevant Competent Authority (Wiltshire Council) as required by Regulation 63 Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. This concluded that given the scale and nature of the development any temporary construction impacts and operational impacts would be de-minimus. **The HRA has concluded that the application is not likely to have significant impacts on the protected sites and Appropriate Assessment is not required.**

CONDITIONS:

1. **Compliance with submitted documents**

The development will be carried out in strict accordance with the following documents:

"Reducing Impacts" section of the report: Preliminary Ecological Assessment of Land at Ash Hill Cottage, Romsey, Date: July 2023 by Ilex Ecology

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and for the protection, mitigation and enhancement of biodiversity.

2. Lighting

No external light fixture or fitting will be installed within the application site unless details of existing and proposed new lighting have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority in writing. The submitted details will demonstrate how the proposed lighting will impact on bat habitat compared to the existing situation.

REASON:
to avoid illumination of habitat used by bats.

INFORMATIVES:

Artificial Lighting
The habitat within the proposed development site and the surrounding area is suitable for roosting, foraging and commuting bats. An increase in artificial lux levels can deter bats which

could result in roost abandonment and/or the severance of key foraging areas. This will likely result in a significant negative impact upon the health of bat populations across the region. Artificial light at night can have a substantial adverse effect on biodiversity. Any new lighting should be for the purposes for safe access and security and be in accordance with the appropriate Environmental Zone standards set out by the Institute of Lighting Engineers in their publication GN01:2021, 'Guidance for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light' (ILP, 2021), and Guidance note GN08/23 "Bats and artificial lighting at night", issued by the Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals.

Final sign off – all matters addressed:

Ecologist **Max Hemmings**	Date **19/09/2023**