

Habitat Monitoring Plan

Cable Route for Forest Gate Solar Farm, Chippenham, Wiltshire

Prepared for Eden FG Solar Ltd

by

Wychwood Biodiversity

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Report Date	Version	Author	Reviewer
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Introduction

This Habitat Monitoring Plan (HMP) has been prepared to discharge Condition 7 of the full planning permission (application number PL/2024/05649) for the cable route linking Forest Gate Solar Farm to Chippenham Substation.

Condition 7 states:

No development shall commence on site until a Habitat Monitoring Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority to include:

- The proposed habitat restoration procedures to be implemented to ensure all habitats have been restored to their original condition within 2 years.
- The monitoring methodology to be implemented to ensure the above. The details of which will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority in year two post construction.

REASON: To ensure the impacts upon biodiversity are temporary.

As outlined in the Preliminary Ecological Assessment (Wychwood Biodiversity, 2024), any habitat loss resulting from the construction process will be addressed in accordance with paragraph 7.3.6 of the Biodiversity Metric Guidance¹, “accounting for temporary loss”, which states that a temporary loss is where there is a restoration of habitat, to its baseline type and condition within two years of the date of the initial loss, delivered in the same location.

The accompanying CEMP report (Wychwood Biodiversity, 2025) details how key ecological features will be protected during the construction phase, and what mitigations will be required to bring all impacted habitats back to their original habitat type and condition within 2 years.

The purpose of this report is to present the habitat restoration measures required to ensure all impacts are addressed, and to establish the programme of monitoring needed to demonstrate that the target habitat and conditions have been met within the 2-year timeframe.

Project design

The connection for the Forest Gate solar farm is a 33kv cable approximately 4.02km long. It connects the substation on Cocklebury Lane on the northeastern side of Chippenham to the substation within the permitted Forest Gate solar farm (Figure 1).

The route is approximately south easterly from Chippenham, initially along a short section of Cocklebury Lane and then along public byway CHIP44 including the bridge over the rail line, followed by public footpath CHIP45 and then alongside, within and under the National Cycle Network trail 403 (the majority of this section of the route will be alongside the cycle track, with the western wooded section being directionally drilled) which runs along a former railway line.

There are two options at the section between Stanley Lane and the National Cycle Network trail 403, this include either locating the cable along the farm track itself (Hither Lane), which is considered an artificial surface; or within the adjacent verge or within the grassland in the fields to the west of the farm track, which are both classified as Modified Grassland under UK Habitat criteria (Wychwood Biodiversity, 2024). The route is then followed by a stretch along Stanley Lane, before the cable route crosses pastureland to connect with the solar farm.

The route is 4.02km long and 5m wide (**except for when the cable follows the tarmac road, when the impact is limited to the trench width**), with all construction activities being limited to this corridor. The corridor occupies 1.95ha, with 0.86ha occurring within artificial habitats, including a public bridleway, a national cycle network trail along a former railway, a farm track and a rural lane for route option 1 (Figure 1). For option 2, the amount of artificial habitat is lower, at 0.62ha (Figure 2).

For option 1, 1.09ha of the cable route occurs within grassland habitats (Figure 1), and for option 2 1.33ha occurs in grassland habitats (Figure 2). In all cases the grassland habitats affected are Modified Grassland in poor condition. These grassland habitats will be the focus of this monitoring report.

Figure 1. Baseline habitats for option 1 along the cable route

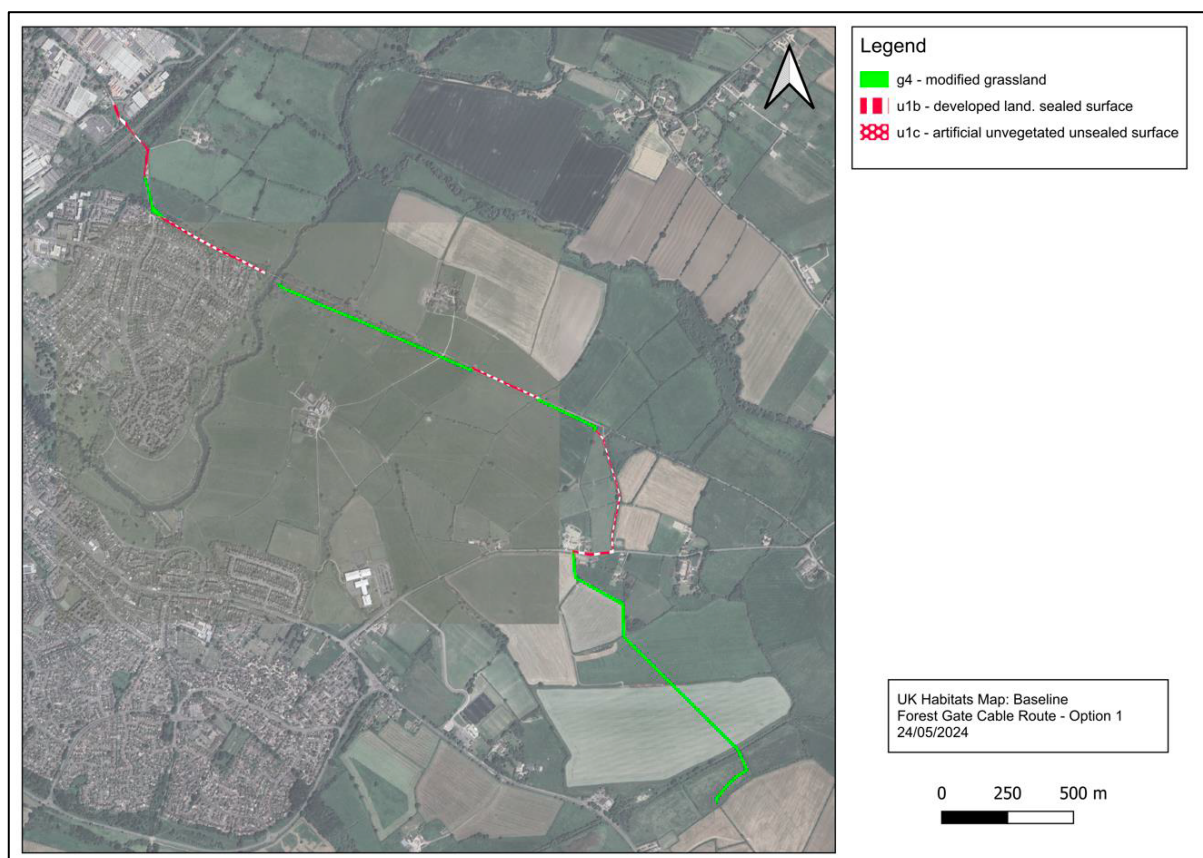
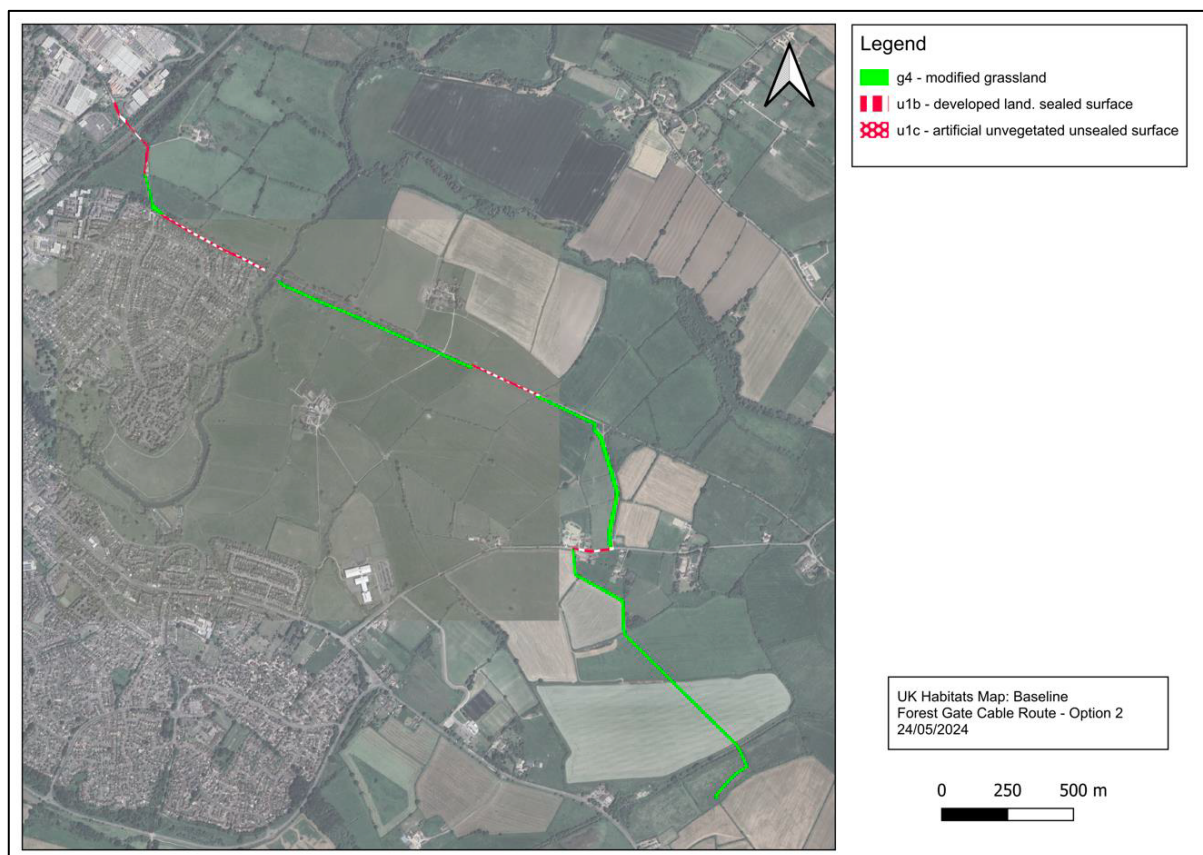


Figure 2. Baseline habitats for option 2 along the cable route



Potential impacts of the cable route

The key potential impacts to grassland habitats as identified in the PEA (Wychwood Biodiversity, 2024) are as follows:

1. Direct disturbance to ecological features, e.g., where the cable trench crosses hedgerows or intersects with priority habitats, UK Habitats, and designated sites.

Key habitats, predicted impacts and proposed mitigations

The following grassland habitats were identified in the PEA (Wychwood Biodiversity, 2024) as being potentially impacted by the cable run works. Any features deemed to have negligible impact pre-mitigation have been screened out. Proposed mitigations are summarised within the table and presented in detail in the following sections.

Table 1. Key habitats, predicted impacts and proposed mitigations

Category	Ecological feature	Potential impact	Proposed mitigations	Residual impact
UK Habitat (options 1 and 2)	Modified Grassland, poor condition	Direct disturbance	Reseeding with appropriate grassland, weed control	Negligible

Objectives and target habitats

The key objective is the preservation of the boundary features, and the restoration of Modified Grassland (UKHab: g4) to poor condition, through appropriate reinstatement and monitoring. The target is to achieve full habitat recovery within the defined two-year period, with monitoring and, if necessary, adaptive management applied to secure successful reinstatement.

Modified Grassland is defined as species-poor vegetation (<9 species per m²) dominated by a few fast-growing grasses on fertile, neutral soils. It is frequently characterised by an abundance of ryegrass and white clover. Most broadleaf species present will be associated with high fertility.

To achieve 'poor' condition, 0, 1 2 or 3 of the following criteria must apply:

A. There must be 6-8 species per m² including at least 2 forbs (this may include creeping thistle, spear thistle, curled dock, BL dock, common nettle, creeping buttercup, greater plantain, white clover, cow parsley.

NB this criterion is essential for achieving moderate condition.

B. Sward height is varied (at least 20% <7cm and at least 20% >7cm) creating microclimates which provide opportunities for insects, birds and small mammals to live and breed.

C. Some scattered scrub (including bramble) may be present but accounts for <20% of total grassland area. Note - patches of scrub with continuous (>90%) cover should be classified as the relevant scrub habitat type.

D. Physical damage is evident in <5% of total grassland area. Examples of physical damage include excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, erosion caused by high levels of access, or any other damaging management activities.

E. Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 10% including localised areas (e.g. concentration of rabbit warrens)

F. Cover of bracken is <20%.

G. There is an absence of invasive non-native species (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA, 1981).

Habitat Mitigation and Management Plan

As the installation of the electrical cable is considered a temporary habitat loss, this section outlines the mitigation and management measures for the Modified Grassland 2.5 m strip either side of the cable route.

The grassland surrounding the cable route will be reinstated within a two-year period from installation. Mitigations designed to minimise impacts during construction are presented in the CEMP (Wychwood Biodiversity, 2025). Restoration measures to restore the grassland to its target state are described below.

Restoration of trench and construction impacts

To address residual impacts post-construction, the following restoration measures will be undertaken. These measures are designed specifically to restore impacted grassland to its baseline type and condition:

- The trench will be refilled according to good practice in soil management, with subsoil covering the aggregate around the cables, and topsoil being replaced in the uppermost section of the trench to bring it up to ground level.
- Any ruts or compaction will be removed through cultivation of the topsoil to a depth of 100mm, leaving a level soil surface.
- Grassland creation will take place on any bare soil as soon as possible post-cable installation once all construction vehicle movements have ceased.
- Sowing of grassland seed is best undertaken in early autumn, whilst soil temperatures remain high and there is moisture in the soil. Sowing can also take place in spring, but seedling development success will be lower if the weather is dry for a prolonged period.
- The reinstated cable route should be mechanically worked to a fine tilth prior to seeding. The seed should be sown at the desired rate using a tractor mounted seed broadcaster or by hand where machines cannot access. On bare ground approximately 40kg of seed is required per hectare. The seed should be rolled in using a Cambridge roller or similar, wherever possible.
- Seeding must be protected from vehicle, human and livestock traffic for at least 6 months and inspected for weeds and controlled using hand pulling (or spot treatment with a selective herbicide where weeds occur at high density) for 2 years.

- The sections running through the south field (between the site and Stanley Lane) will be Modified Grassland - poor condition. These areas will be seeded with a grazing seed mix and managed as agricultural grassland, as per the rest of the field area.
 - The sections running through the field edges adjacent to the cycle route will be Modified Grassland - poor condition. These areas will be seeded with a grazing seed mix and managed as agricultural grassland, as per the rest of the field area.
 - If option 2 is used for Hither Lane, the cable route will be seeded with a grazing seed mix and managed as agricultural grassland, as per the rest of the field area.
 - The margins astride the short section of footpath that leads up to Cocklebury Lane is Modified Grassland, good condition. Directional drilling will take place along the entire length of this of footpath and byway so no impacts are anticipated.
- All restoration areas will be monitored twice annually in the growing season to a) identify any weed problems and b) track progress towards the target habitat type and condition. Monitoring is described in greater detail in the following section.

Monitoring

Following completion of the cable installation, a monitoring programme will be implemented over a two-year period to assess the recovery of the Modified Grassland habitats affected by the works. Monitoring will be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist and will comprise two visits per year: the first in April-May and the second in July-August to capture key periods of vegetation growth. The condition of the grassland along the cable route will be assessed annually using UKHab criteria to ensure that reinstatement is progressing towards Modified Grassland, poor condition throughout the two-year recovery period.

This programme will ensure that the habitats affected by the cable installation are progressing appropriately, supporting the long-term ecological integrity of the site.

Weeds

Though technically none of the criteria for Modified Grassland conditions need to be met to achieve poor condition, the habitat will be managed to control weeds.

If any plant species listed by DEFRA as invasive and non-native (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA, 1981) are encountered, the guidance of a suitably qualified ecologist will be sought to determine appropriate control measures.

During the two-year recovery period, the reseeded areas will be inspected twice annually for the presence of injurious or undesirable weeds, which may indicate sub-optimal habitat condition. This includes Creeping Thistle, Spear Thistle, Broad Leaf Dock, Curled Dock and Common Ragwort. Where such weeds are identified, they should be removed by hand-pulling wherever possible. If hand removal is not feasible, targeted spot-treatment with a selective herbicide may be applied, ideally when the plant is at the rosette stage, when it is most susceptible to treatment. The use of non-selective herbicides or boom spraying is strictly prohibited. In addition, repeated targeted cutting may be employed as an alternative or complementary method to control persistent weed growth.

Bare ground

Monitoring will measure the cover of grasses and determine the % bare ground of each section of restored cable corridor. If more than 10% bare ground is observed, then such areas will be marked and cultivated and re-seeded using the methods defined above in the next seeding period.

Adaptive management

Management of the restoration areas will be reviewed annually (for 2 years) and if deviation from target habitats is noted, then an ecologist specialising in habitat management will make recommendations which will be used to adapt this management plan as needed.

Table 2. Monitoring schedule

Task	Description	Timing	Outcome
Monitoring 1	Walk entire cable run, inspect for injurious and invasive weeds and bare soil. Confirm Modified Grassland target reached.	April-May year 1	Recommend actions, e.g. reseedling or weed control as needed
Monitoring 2	Walk entire cable run, inspect for injurious and invasive weeds and bare soil. Confirm Modified Grassland target reached.	July-August year 1	Recommend actions, e.g. reseedling or weed control as needed. Compile annual report.
Monitoring 3	Walk entire cable run, inspect for injurious and invasive weeds and bare soil. Confirm Modified Grassland target reached.	April-May year 1	Recommend actions, e.g. reseedling or weed control as needed
Monitoring 4	Walk entire cable run, inspect for injurious and invasive weeds and bare soil. Confirm Modified Grassland target reached.	July-August year 1	Recommend actions, e.g. reseedling or weed control as needed. Compile annual report.

References

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