

Appropriate Assessment of Effects on a European Site

This is a record of the appropriate assessment of Wiltshire Council required by Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017. The project has been assessed as unlikely to have significant effects on one or more European protected sites and is not directly connected to or required for the management of such sites. This assessment is made in accordance with the relevant guidance documents.

PART A: INFORMATION REVIEWED	
Information about the plan or project	This Appropriate Assessment relates to planning application PL/2026/00795 – Land north of A303, and northwest of approved EV hub, Chicklade, SP3 5ST The site comprises an arable field with sections of hedgerow on all sides, a field margin at the northeast, and a strip of land at the east (proposed as access). It is proposed to construct a solar farm of approximately 4,500 solar modules over approximately 12-13 ha. As well as the loss of some arable field margins and cropland (~12 ha), approximately 0.01 ha of hedgerow will be removed to accommodate access. The development is located within the bat consultation zone associated with the statutory designated site Chilmark Quarries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and therefore has potential to result in significant adverse impact on the qualifying features of those sites. Namely, the site falls within three parcel buffers of Barbastelle bats. There is the potential for likely significant effects on qualifying bats as a result of the following: • Loss of foraging and commuting habitat • Disturbance as a result of lighting during demolition/construction and post-development. Chilmark Quarries SAC is considered to be one of the best in the UK for Bechstein's bat, barbastelle, and greater horseshoe bats, and supports a significant population of lesser horseshoe bats. The surrounding woodland, grassland and open water habitats provide vital roosting, commuting and feeding areas for these important populations. <i>In light of the judgement in Case C 323/17 CJEU "people over wind" (12 April 2018) the Council has determined that the application should be subject to an appropriate assessment under Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017.</i> Survey information: <i>"Preliminary Ecological Appraisal & Biodiversity Metric Assessment, EcoLogic, January 2026"</i> updated May 2026 The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal states that the cropland is of limited value to foraging bats as it is a monoculture with "limited invertebrate suitability". However, the field margin and hedgerows provide potential foraging and commuting habitats.

	No roosting features were identified. No bat activity surveys were undertaken.
	Chilmark Quarries SAC
List of European Site interest features	<u>Qualifying Features</u> Annex II species that are a primary feature of this site: 1. Greater horseshoe bat <i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i> 2. Barbastelle bat <i>Barbastella barbastellus</i> 3. Bechstein's bat <i>Myotis bechsteinii</i> Annex II species present as a qualifying feature but not a primary reason for site selection: 1. Lesser horseshoe bat <i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> The conservation objectives are to 'Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features by maintaining or restoring; • The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features • The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features • The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely • The population of each of the qualifying features, and, • The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.
Information about the SPA/SAC	Chilmark Quarries SAC comprises two separate SSSIs situated in the Chilmark Vale to the west of Salisbury: Chilmark Quarries and, 2½ miles further west, Fonthill Grottoes. They form a complex of abandoned mines and subterranean follies regularly used by an important assemblage of bat species as a hibernation site. The current condition of the European site is favourable/unfavourable recovering. The extensive system of abandoned mines at Chilmark Quarries is undisturbed and displays constant temperature and humidity while the subterranean follies at Fonthill Grottoes also offer a wide range of niches. Together these sites provide suitable conditions for large numbers of hibernating bats.
Other relevant plans or projects	• Wiltshire Core Strategy adopted January 2015 • Adjacent service station with electric vehicle charging facilities (PL/2022/06298)
PART B: IMPACT PREDICTION	
Impact	Predicted Effect of Impact
Chilmark Quarries	
Temporary / permanent loss of	Approximately 12 ha of cropland, 0.6 ha of field margin, 0.05 ha of modified grassland, and 0.01 km of hedgerow will be lost.

foraging and roosting habitat and flight corridors.	There are no roosting opportunities on-site, and there will be no significant fragmentation/loss of linear flight features. The proposed solar panels would be set back from the existing boundary hedgerows by a minimum of ~10m at the closest point along the south, ~20m at the east and nearly 40m at the west. The BNG proposals across the wider site include improvements that will benefit bats, such as ~1 ha of orchards, ~8 ha of other neutral grassland and ~0.6 km of hedgerow. Overall, it can be argued that there will be no net loss of core foraging or commuting habitat for Annex II bats.
Does retained core bat habitat connect to the wider habitat network?	Yes. The boundary hedgerow links to woodland to the north (Bockerly Coppice). Further afield, the site will remain connected to woodland to the northeast via connected fields and hedgerow.
Risk of collision and bat fatality	No risk considered likely.
Disturbance to bat flight/foraging/roosting activity from light spill.	Artificial lighting introduced during development may cause disturbance to bat flight paths and foraging activity.
Disturbance to bat flight/foraging/roosting activity from noise or human presence – construction and operational phases	During the construction phases of the development, there is potential for disturbance to bat flight and foraging activity due to increased noise levels and human presence. These impacts are considered temporary and moderate in nature but may affect sensitive species and potential flight paths along, e.g., the hedge lines surrounding the site. Disturbance from additional noise/human presence is not likely during the operational phase.
PART C: CONSEQUENCES FOR CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES	
Does the project or plan have the potential to:	
Cause delays in progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site/s?	Unlikely
Interrupt progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?	Unlikely
Disrupt those factors that help to maintain the favourable condition of the site?	No overall loss of core habitat is proposed, and there will be improvements for bats across the wider site (within the redline boundary).

	However, light spill on boundary features during construction/operation may reduce the extent and distribution of habitats available for qualifying species, although this risk is considered to be low, given that the proposed solar array is set back from the hedgerow features, and that only one “small” light on the transformer station is proposed.
Interfere with the balance, distribution and density of key species that are the indicators of favourable condition of the site?	As above
Change the dynamics of the relationships that define the structure and/or function of the site?	As above
Reduce the population of key species?	Unlikely
Reduce diversity of the site?	Unlikely
PART D: MITIGATION	
Loss of bat habitat	
BNG/habitat mitigation secured via condition and monitoring agreement	It is considered that there will be no net loss of bat habitat provided the proposed habitats/BNG are implemented. The habitat creation will be secured via a compliance condition (landscape plan and ecology report), and BNG secured with a HMMP condition and 30-year monitoring agreement. Details of habitat management will be provided via a LEMP condition. A condition should also be used to ensure that the removal of solar arrays will not occur without a decommissioning scheme, including measures to protect wildlife.
Disturbance to bat flight/foraging activity from light spill	
Lighting scheme condition	The updated ecology report states that there will be no introduction of lighting. This contradicts the updated Planning, Design and Access statement which states that the transformer station “might have a small” light installed. In the absence of submission of details of the proposed light fixture nor lighting scheme (as requested on 19/03/2026), a condition should be applied to ensure that any new lighting installed is bat-sensitive. This will ensure that any potential disturbance from light spill can be suitably controlled/mitigated.
Disturbance to bat flight/foraging activity from noise or human presence – construction and operational phases	
CEMP	These impacts are considered manageable through controlling construction lighting, and measures to reduce noise pollution and impacts on adjacent habitats. Such measures will be detailed within a Construction Environmental Management Plan. Should permission be granted, the submission of and adherence to a CEMP will be secured by condition.

PART F: CONCLUSION	
Is the project likely to affect site integrity?	
a) Alone?	No
b) In combination with other plans or projects?	No
Recommendation:	
The appropriate assessment concludes no adverse effects on the SAC site. The application can therefore be positively determined, subject to suitable mitigation measures being secured by condition and implemented. <i>A full list of recommended conditions is included in my consultation response.</i>	
Name of officer(s) making the assessment and date	Abi Gazzard (Ecologist) Natural & Historic Environment Wiltshire Council 01/09/2026
Natural England Comments	
Name of Natural England officer and date	
Authorised by: Wiltshire Council Manager and date	