

03/03/2015

WSSC Ecological Response to...

APPLICATION No.: LU/385/14/PL

PROPOSAL: Construction of a solar energy park to include the installation of solar panels, security fencing, transformer housing, access and other associated works.

SITE: Land at Brookbarn Farm, Courtwick Lane, Littlehampton, BN17 7PX.

No ecological objections subject to the following condition:

The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the recommended measures set out in the Ecological Assessment by Grassroots Ecology, dated December 2014 (ref 1038) submitted in support of the application.

Reason: to conserve and enhance local biodiversity, in accordance with para 118 of the NPPF.

Comments

I understand that objections to this proposal have been received partly on grounds of impact on bats and barn owls. The ecological report submitted with the application indicates that the land where the solar panels are to be located comprises species poor semi-improved / improved grazed grassland. This is of low value for bats or barn owls, as well as being of low biodiversity value generally. Good bat foraging areas are associated with insect diversity and abundance, which in turn are positively associated with structurally diverse and species diverse vegetation. Currently, this is low and, whilst I would expect some foraging by relatively common species, (eg. those listed from the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre search results), I would expect the proposed enhancements to improve foraging value for these species. Barn owls rely on small mammals such as field voles as an important part of their diet, which in turn are associated with rough grassland and rank field margins. Again, the proposed enhancements would provide improved opportunities for this species to find suitable prey as a result of the sowing of meadow species and replacement of intensive grazing with annual cutting or low intensity grazing. In addition to these specific species, the proposed enhancements will be of benefit to wildlife generally.

Mike Bird MCIEEM
Principal Ecologist, Calyx Environmental Ltd

