



CLEVE HILL SOLAR PARK

THE APPLICANT'S RESPONSES TO EXQ2 - APPENDICES **Appendix 1 - HMSG Meeting Notes - 23 August 2019**

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CLEVE HILL
SOLAR PARK



Meeting Note

Project: Cleve Hill Solar Park
Type: Habitat Management Steering Group Meeting
Date: Friday 23 August 2019
Time: 10am – 1.30pm
Location: Natural England, International House, Ashford Kent
Present: Alison Giacomelli, Natural England [AG]
Paul Hyde, Natural England [PH]
Greg Hitchcock, Kent Wildlife Trust [GH]
Martin Randall, Kent Wildlife Trust [MR]
Julian Nash, RSPB [JN]
Simon McCarthy, Cleve Hill Solar Park Ltd [SM]
Mike Armitage, RPS [MA]
David Hope-Thomson, Arcus Consultancy Services Ltd [DHT]
Mike Bird, Arcus Consultancy Services Ltd [MB]
Tom Reid Environment Agency

Notes:

AR HMA Brent Geese

MB - NE in agreement?

GH - queried 300 goose days point

MA - ExQ2.1.11 slightly misinterprets the statement made. The Applicant's response to the question will clarify.

AG - don't fertilise around edge, less bird days than target

MA - reduced numbers to account for 10 m buffer of unfertilised

AG - agree 300 bird days is acceptable

GH - 300 not a big number overall but still doesn't meet the principle of providing for the target number.

PH - is there potential for additional rough grassland within the AR HMA as short sward not the best for small mammals etc

MA - no, contrary to AR HMA aims

AG - as well as the 10 m buffer of ditches, 50 m buffer of other features has been included as "non-functional" land

MA - made the point that the summer management of the AR HMA can be more beneficial for other species

MB - asked if there were any specific comments on the AR HMA prescriptions in the LBMP?

JN - Set out the different approaches RSPB has utilised. Great Bells, was just left following arable reversion. Harty was seeded. Pros and cons to each approach

JN/PH discussed the seed mixes used elsewhere.

JN - as we are talking about large areas, seeding preferred

PH - seed mix should reflect surrounding species and should include native good quality mixes without unusual cultivars etc

MR - ryegrass, agrostis, bents and fescues and crested dog tails

MR - asked about the management prescriptions, 2/3 haycuts (collected), with sheep grazing for the first couple of years to promote a dense sward.

JN - **ACTION** - provide mix used at Harty

GH - highlighted an incorrect reference in section 5.1 to the wrong appendix

MA - acknowledged the error which will be corrected.

PH - possible that more than 1 cut will be required to deal with weeds.

MB - requested feedback on the content of Table 7.1 of the LBMP.

PH - check the SSSI designation for species.

All - general agreement on ryegrass and white clover to be utilised in Table 7.1

AG - Vickery and Gillings species mix not there but management info is provided

JN - having a good grazier is key

SMcC - happy to receive recommendations **ACTION** - recommendations from HMSG members to be sent to CHSPL

TR - are docks an issue?

JN - not here, mainly in scrapes, which aren't proposed initially

MR - always some unknowns with habitat creation, the ability to adapt is key

MA -- we need to secure the opening management regime for HRA purpose, but CHSPL keen to give the ability to adapt through the documentation

GH - is there an issue with manuring legumes?

PH/MA - not particularly

JN - what grass do brent geese eat?

MA / AG - First flush of growth more important than particular species. Suggestion that CHSPL should look at the standard Swale / Sheppey sward and seek to replicate.

GH - white clover / red clover + appropriate grasses preferred

AG - management and structure as important as species

GH - requirement is dealt with in the sward management section
Brent geese probably not that selective.

MR - geese create their own sward through selective grazing



GH - reiterated both clovers and a few grasses.

PH - both clovers, predominantly rye bents and fescues

MR- discussed influence of the ditch and water levels on grass

GH - current levels are lower than historically, getting boards back is considered to be important

TR - additional controls - eels and elvers need to be considered

TR - LIDAR data available - suggest CHSPL check flows to confirm the movement of water through the catchment. **ACTION**

JN - -raising water levels can only be good

MR - some variation in water levels through the site also beneficial with different habitat zones created.

DHT - reprofiling and ditch management proposed to be staged over multiple years taking water voles into account.

=TR - mentioned ADA / NE guidance on watercourse management - ACTION - TR to send on. Done during the meeting

JN - set put management regime in winter and summer and the variation between seasons.

MB - confirmed the applicant's position that the liaison over water levels would be better with the Development than with the arable baseline.

JN - advised that the boards be set at their winter level and left there.

JN - acknowledged that historically water levels were higher and the Development will help restore some of the previous habitat.

AR HMA Lapwing Golden Plover

MA - Gillings evidence based on personal communication but looking to get in writing

AG - Q is, is the management for brent geese compatible with achieving bird days for lapwing and brent golden plover. NE has raised previously as an uncertainty

MA - grassland is better than arable according to the evidence provided but a precautionary approach has been used. The Applicant's position on this has not changed.

JN - -discussed the importance of standing water to lapwing and golden plover

MR - asked if the priority was roosting or feeding?

JN - asked if standing water could be introduced for Lapwing and golden plover.

AG - within the functionally linked land it's a mixture of roosting and feeding the priority has been to replicate the feeding potential of the existing land.

JN - golden plover and lapwing have small beaks and need soft soil to feed on invertebrates

AG - adaptive management important to prioritise the brent geese, then adapt for lapwing and golden plover, which may include the introduction of other habitat features.

MA - there is a strong preference in the literature for old pasture

MB - set out that the grassland would represent several benefits over the existing arable for



the species in question.

MR - in autumn KWT typically top or graze off then stop - Would FYM application affect that?

All - not too concerned

JN - every year conditions are different so the adaptive management is key

MA - the management regime and application of FYM is to guarantee availability

JN - probably ok for lapwing and golden plover to be together on the land later in the year, using the land after the brent geese have used it earlier in the year

AG - the management has been predominantly focussed on foraging and mitigation impacts on the SPA.

MR - lapwing and golden plover numbers are highly variable across the country

AG - we are looking to reduce the uncertainty to an acceptable level and adaptive management is an important principle in that.

GH - compared the SSSI grazing marsh usage vs the arable usage by golden plover and lapwing in the baseline data and found that arable use was greater than grassland, but not necessarily for both species - not a significant trend. General density of lapwing and golden plover across the site was discussed.

AG - scrapes in SSSI would form complementary management which may add extra confidence in the birds using the AR HMA

MB - this would form an enhancement that would complement the mitigation in the SSSI.

AG - this may also provide additional feeding resource

MA - what does the HMSG think of foot drains within the AR HMA?

MR / JN - all wet edges are good

PH - It's important that we have accounted for everything for the HRA, the Gillings response on lapwing / golden plover usage is key, NE would support the use of adjacent habitats to provide additional beneficial capacity. The AR HMA will provide the adequate theoretical resource, then enhancements to the SSSI would provide additional beneficial enhancement

GH - Gillings response sorts out bird days question, but does grassland perform the function needed?

PH - adaptive management key. Initial establishment will be tough, but there will still be an invertebrate resource.

MA - the Gillings study was specifically targeted on an arable area. There is other evidence available which sets out the preference for grassland, particularly in cold weather

GH - sure that they will use the grassland, but will it replace the function of the arable?

GH - the complexity of the interactions across the whole site between the three species (lapwing, golden plover, and brent geese) was difficult to fully understand and capture mitigation in the smaller AR HMA area.

MB - pointed out that humans were a fundamental part of that complexity, with farm



management, notably crop choice being one of the biggest factors in governing bird use.

MA - the consistency of availability is very important in counteracting the complexity and variability of the existing baseline.

AG - raised NE comments on offsite mitigation as a fall back option

MB - set out the applications position which is that this is not required, and the triggers for its use would be very difficult to capture adequately in the context of the natural variability.

MB - if there is agreement in place that the AR HMA is providing the correct habitats, and that through the further meetings of the HMSG during operation there is agreement that this is the case, if the birds are not using the area, it is likely that this is because they don't need to rather than this representing an adverse impact on the SPA.

AG - NE keen to see additional enhancement of adjacent habitats to complement the aims of the AR HMA.

MR - agree, the more appealing the SSSI land is, the higher probability of birds using the AR HMA.

MB - summarised the discussion that it seemed overall that members of the AR HMA were broadly in agreement that the AR HMA will theoretically perform the function it is designed for, but there is some residual uncertainty about the reality of the bird use within the natural variation of numbers more widely and habitat preferences observed in the area.

MA - an evidence based approach is the correct approach.

JN - asked if subsoiling was included in the AR HMA management to remove the plough pan and reduce compaction

MA - it isn't

JN - suggested that subsoiling and aeration is included in the management prescription. Tests should be carried out ahead of undertaking this to determine the management required.

Marsh harrier

JN - asked how the temporary stock proof fences would be powered? MB - not sure, will revert but there were several options, incl. solar powered solutions and fences mounted on structures.

GH - pleased with additional detail on grazing management in LBMP. Interested to see Applicant's responses to ExQ2.

AG - management of land ought to attract marsh harriers in, their desire for food likely overcoming any issues with the change in landscape

AG - a carrying capacity calculation of arable vs. rough grassland for small mammals would be helpful, but the project will provide good habitat and there is expected to be more food available overall

JN / AG - discussed Bob Gomes response and lack of evidence for the position set out.

PH - it would be unusual for marsh harrier to hunt over wide spaces, PH not concerned about the loss of arable crops, but questioned the amount of rough grassland available. The question is whether solar panels will deter the marsh harrier, and are there any other areas

that could be adapted to marsh harrier habitats? NE think that they will still use the area. Monitoring would be helpful to confirm.

GH - KWT not certain that the marsh harriers will use the corridors between panels.

MB - there is an issue with the use of "corridors" to describe the gaps between arrays, the spacing is a minimum of >30 m in most locations, in some places much wider. Even where the panels are highest, they start at 2.1 m and slope up to 4 m. The term corridor is therefore considered to be misleading, particularly in the context of the bean crop onsite being 2 m or higher in places and much closer to ditches.

AG - suggested additional cross sections would be helpful to demonstrate this point

ACTION

JN - discussed the 0.5 ha of reedbed creation proposed as an enhancement.

TR - highlighted that long term management is important and it shouldn't be too wide. Need to make sure the ditch can still be managed.

PH - agreed, ensure access from at least one side, don't lose the ability to manage.

MA - how is the KWT reedbed managed?

PH - managed as a ditch with reed margins

GH - marsh harrier has historically nested closest to highest panels.

MR - is there any evidence relating to marsh harrier nesting near solar panels.

MA - yes, at Kemsley paper mill, marsh harrier nest and continue to nest during construction of the energy centre there.

TR - suggested the Applicant check to see if there is any further information available associated with the energy Centre at Weatherly, Great Stour peninsula. **ACTION**

GH - discussed the desirability of the Marsh Harrier monitoring to be robust enough to pick up use of the ditches and associated habitats (or not, as the case may be), to see if there's a correlation between distance between panels and behaviour. This is not just about accuracy of location, but recording when 'commuting', searching for food and actively hunting.

Eels

TR - Applicant referenced the eel and elver manual, could all references refer to all life stages of eels, i.e., include elver **ACTION** CHSPL to update LBMP

MB - asked if there was an update on the Nagden Sluice in respect of eel and elver passes as this had been mentioned by Mr Hatchwell in discussion?

TR - not that TR aware of.

MB - asked whether the EA would retain a role post-consent in relation to Nagden Sluice if CHSPL took over the management of the defences.

TR - refer to Karolina Allu (on leave next week)

MB - asked if there is any further feedback on the MEASS publication - TR - DEFRA signed off last week so should be published soon.

MB - asked what KWTs position was in respect of the flood defence management?

MR - EA have rights to manage the asset, but all management subject to assent as works within SSSI. 5 year assents typically used. KWT and EA has good working relationship in respect of agreeing biodiversity friendly management and this would want to be continued with CHSPL.

TR - the existing assent detail would be helpful to see **ACTION**

SMcC - CHSPL keen to replicate the good working relationship.

SSSI enhancement

JN - scrapes and water levels are the solution.

PH - works would need SSSI assent in similar form to flood defences. Hold the water level high, may require an abstraction licence to pump water in.

TR - use LiDAR data to check variation across site to understand water levels in more detail.

MB - project to continue to use HMSG members considerable experience to help deliver the proposals.

Monitoring

All - Management plans and triggers discussed.

MA - initially monitor in same way as baseline data captured. If lower numbers found, discuss with HMSG and potentially increase survey effort using methods such as cameras.

GH - there are other variables to consider which could affect numbers which could be monitored but acknowledge difficult to capture.

All - ongoing role of HMSG discussed. MB agreed to provide more detail in the LBMP on the ongoing role of the HMSG. **ACTION**

MA - set out hierarchy of monitoring:

- Monitor as per baseline
- Increase monitoring
- Look at other disturbance factors
- Hold annual HMSG to discuss results and agree next year's protocols

JN - how will marsh harrier be monitored?

MA - flight activity survey as per baseline.

JN - is water level monitoring proposed

DHT - yes

AG - will monitoring results be published

SMcC - yes, happy to publish any results for wider benefits

SoCG

KWT - MB to update and issue to GH for agreement next week if possible

NE - the agreed points are straightforward. Other points more detail required - will try to get out before DL4 in some form



RSPB - still not intending to agree a SoCG.

Meeting closed.