

PROPOSED CABLE ROUTE Cefn Park and Wrexham PV

Ecological Appraisal

Introduction

This document has been produced to inform the a planning application for a proposed cable installation between the consented solar farm and battery storage at Little Llwyn Onn, Cefn Road (P/2022/0541) and the consented solar farm on Land north of Maelor Gas Works (P/2021/0676). Etive Ecology Ltd was commissioned by Novus / Innova to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) of the proposed cable route for the development site. The cable route runs between National Grid Reference SJ37784825 in the east and SJ36824858 in the west, with a substation located at SJ36724829.

This document presents the findings of an ecological walkover and assesses the anticipated ecological impacts of the proposed cable route. The findings of previous ecological studies for both of the consented solar farms have been used to inform this appraisal. The proposed scheme is described in detail within the full planning submission and is illustrated in the Cable Route Plan within **Appendix A**.

Methodology

The site walkover was undertaken on 3rd May 2023.

The survey comprised an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey. This survey method follows the habitat assessment and classification procedures outlined by the Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (JNCC, 2010), whereby all habitats are identified, described and assigned an ecological value.

The extended component of the survey is developed from the methodology described in Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment (IEA, 1995). All habitats and features within the survey area are assessed for their potential to support legally protected or notable species (nationally or locally).

Limitations

The initial Phase 1 Habitat Survey was taken within the recommended survey season. Given the current land use and management of the site it was also possible to classify all habitats and to identify the majority of species on site. There are therefore considered to be no other significant limitations to the undertaking of the survey work or subsequent ecological

appraisal.

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

The walkover survey was undertaken by Russell Grey (BSc, CEnv, MCIEEM) and Sophie Frost (BSc, GCIEEM). The survey was undertaken on a clear dry day with temperatures around 12°, with no constraints to the survey of any part of the red line application site.

The cable corridor runs from an existing solar farm north of Maelor Gas Works, along an existing highway, crossing Sesswick Way and running through arable land to a new substation. From the substation, the cable route will run north through further arable land, across the Afon Clywedog, under Cefn Road and through arable land to a new solar farm site. The cable route is surrounded by industrial buildings, broadleaved woodland, arable land, hedgerows and trees.

Habitats

The proposed cable route runs ~650m along Bedwell Link, ~70m north along Sesswick Way, and then approximately 450m through an arable field west of Sesswick Way before connecting to the new substation. From there the route runs ~175m northwards through arable land to the Afon Clywedog, cross Cefn Road and extends ~120m into the arable field to the north.

Along Bedwell Link the proposed cable route runs within the existing carriageway comprising of hardstanding. Semi-improved neutral grassland and semi-natural broadleaved woodland are present just outside of the redline boundary, with scattered broadleaved trees also present including horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*), whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*).

To the west of Sesswick Way the proposed cable corridor comprises arable farmland which had been recently ploughed at the time of survey. A stock-proof fence runs along the southern edge of the red line boundary. A single mature oak tree (*Quercus robur*) is located adjacent to the south of the red line boundary near to the new substation.

The route runs through further arable land northwards towards the Afon Clywedog. There is a line of mature broadleaved trees through which the route passes, including oak and ash, with ivy coverage. The riparian zone of the Afon Clywedog comprises semi-mature willow and scattered Himalayan balsam.

To the north of Cefn Road and the Afon Clywedog, there is a species-poor hedgerow along the roadside and further arable land beyond through which the cable corridor runs to connect to the new solar farm.



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Based on the composition of the habitat within the cable corridor, the overall ecological value of the site is considered to be low. The key habitats of value are existing native hedgerows, mature broadleaved trees and the Afon Clywedog.



Photograph 1; Bedwell Link



Photograph 2; Sesswick Way



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Photograph 3; arable field west of Sesswick Way



Photograph 4; mature oak adjacent to the south of the route



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Photograph 5; looking north towards Cefn Road with mature trees on the right.



Photograph 6; arable land at Cefn solar farm

Protected Species

Due to the nature of the habitats within the application site; dominated by arable land and hard-standing, the likelihood that any legally protected species are present within the red line boundary is considered to be very low.

However, the general location around Wrexham Industrial Estate is known to support GCN and whilst low value to the species, all semi-natural habitat within the route corridor has the potential to support the species. There are, however, no known breeding ponds <250m of the corridor.

The mature broadleaved trees within the arable land to the east of the substation offer a number of Potential Roosting Features (PRF) such as cracked and failed limbs, knot holes and occasional woodpecker or rot holes of Low Bat Roost Potential. The trees also provide suitable habitat for nesting birds.

The habitat is of negligible value to reptiles and no evidence of badger was found <30m.

Himalayan balsam is known to be present alongside the Afon Clywedog. No other invasive non-native species (INNS) were identified during the site walkover.

Likely Impacts

The proposed cable will be installed using a combination of open-cut and trenchless techniques. The working width is likely to be 5-10m and the duration of installation is likely to be 4-6 weeks, i.e. relatively short. Therefore, the scheme is considered to be relatively low impact.

The scheme has very low potential to impact upon ecological receptors. There is a low risk of harm and disturbance to individual GCN during installation works, of damage/disturbance to nesting birds and of damage/disturbance to bats or their roosts. There is also a risk of causing Himalayan balsam to spread further than its current extent.

The Afon Clywedog may be at risk of adverse impacts unless the cables can be installed without direct disturbance to the channel or its riparian zone.

Recommendations

To mitigate for the potential impacts posed to the known ecological receptors, the following recommendations are proposed:

- A scheme of Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) will be prepared to minimise the potential impacts to GCN during installation works. These measures will include direct ecological supervision and pre-commencement searches for GCN, the back-filling or covering of excavations overnight and the operation of a tidy-site policy whereby potential refugia are not stored on the ground.
- A scheme of RAMs will be prepared to minimise the potential impacts on bats and bat roosts within adjacent trees. This will include a climb and inspect survey prior to the commencement of works of all trees <10m of works. If bats are found to be present, works within 10m of the tree must be undertaken under ecological



supervision to ensure there is no disturbance posed to the bat roost. Further measures such as the restriction of reversing beeps and a 10m exclusion zone for all vehicles.

- Any vegetation requiring removal prior to the start of works must be subject to a nesting bird survey if removal is planned during the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive).
- The Afon Clywedog and its riparian zone must not be subject to any direct impacts. It is therefore recommended that installation of the cable be via directional drill techniques. No construction/installation activities are to encroach within 5m of either bank of the water-course, to further protect the riparian zone habitat.
- To prevent the spread of Himalayan balsam, no earth or spoil will be removed from site. Furthermore, by avoiding the riparian zone of the Afon Clywedog, the risk of encountering Himalayan balsam is significantly reduced.

Conclusion

The proposed cable corridor runs through primarily low value habitats. There is a low risk of encountering protected species but GCN and roosting bats are potentially present in close proximity to the works. However, proportionate mitigation measures are recommended herein which adequately manage the risk of impacted legally protected species, such that the scheme can be installed without the need for and species licensing.

Prepared by; Sophie Frost

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Reviewed by; Russell Grey

Date; 20th June 2023

Appendix A

Cable Route Plan

