



Biodiversity Management Plan

Allington Lane Solar Farm

19/12/2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. Objectives have been established to enhance and maintain the biodiversity of land circa 0.74km southeast of Eastleigh and circa 2.00km north of Southampton, within the Eastleigh District of Hampshire (the “Proposed Development”).
- 2.2. The objectives include developing species-rich grassland across the site, and installing bat and bird boxes, hedgehog houses, herptile hibernacula, invertebrate hotels and bee banks.
- 2.3. Actions have been formulated within this document to enable the objectives to be met and to maximise the Application Site’s potential for supporting wildlife. Species which have been given priority within this management and enhancement plan include, house sparrow, bees and herptile species.
- 2.4. A UK Habitat survey of the Application Site was undertaken in January 2023. As part of the full planning application, an Ecological Assessment (EcoAs) has been conducted to assess the Application Site’s ability to support a range of wildlife both now and during all phases of the Proposed Development. The enhancements and mitigation measures set out in this document have been developed in accordance with the findings of the habitat surveys conducted on site.
- 2.5. Management recommendations have been made for new and existing habitats. Coupled with the above measures, this will ensure that the Application Site can not only be restored to its current agricultural use upon decommissioning but will result in **biodiversity net gain**.

INTRODUCTION

Background

- 2.6. Neo Environmental Ltd has been appointed by Locogen Consulting Ltd (the “Agent”, on behalf of ‘Eastleigh Borough Council’ the “Applicant”) to undertake a Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) in relation to the development of a Proposed Solar Farm (“the Proposed Development”) on lands circa 0.74km southeast of Eastleigh and circa 2.00km north of Southampton, within the Eastleigh District of Hampshire (“the Application Site”).

Development Description

- 2.7. The proposed solar farm will consist of the construction of PV panels mounted on metal frames, new access tracks, underground cabling, perimeter fencing with CCTV cameras and access gates, a temporary construction compound and all ancillary grid infrastructure and associated works.

Adopted Design Principles

- 2.8. Where possible, measures have been implemented as part of the iterative design process to prevent the various phases of the Proposed Development affecting sensitive ecological features. Ecological measures incorporated into the Proposed Development design include the following:
- Water bodies/water courses – 10m buffer on either side
 - SINC’s – 20m buffer
 - Ancient Woodland – 15m buffer
 - Buffer from RPZ – 5m minimum
 - Buffer from Trees – 5m minimum
 - Buffer from hedges – 5m minimum

Site Description

- 2.9. The Application Site lies at an elevation of approximately 7-17m AOD and covers a total area of c. 44.3 hectares. It is centred at approximate UK National Grid Reference (NGR) E 447754 N 116809 and the nearest town of Eastleigh is located c.0.74km northwest of the Proposed Development, with the city of Southampton located approximately 2km to the south, at its closest point. The Application Site is situated in a rural setting, surrounded by villages and

settlements within the nearby area. The villages of Horton Heath, Fair Oak, Bishopstoke, and West End are situated c. 0.54km east, c.0.68km north, c.1.43km northwest, c.1.3km south, respectively.

- 2.10. The Application Site comprises of seven fields of agricultural land which is split into two sections, eastern and western, by a railway line situated c.10m from the Proposed development boundary. The fields are bound by a mixture of mature trees, hedgerows and post-and-wire fencing, with thick forestry adjacent to the eastern boundary of the eastern section, and adjacent to the western and southern boundaries of the western section.
- 2.11. The Proposed Development is in close proximity to the M27 motorway and other A and B roads such as the B3354, B3037, and the A335 which are situated c. 1.24km south, c.0.92 east, c.1.3km north, and c.1.89km northwest, respectively. Local roads in close proximity include Hogwood Lane, which is located adjacent to the southern boundary, and Allington Lane which runs through the centre of the eastern section, and adjacent to the eastern boundary of the western section. The northern section of the site will be accessed from two entrance points off Allington Lane which dissects this section. The southern section will be accessed from one existing and one new entrance point which are both off Hogwood Lane.
- 2.12. The surrounding area comprises of the River Itchen, which at its nearest point is located c.0.51km northwest, and flows into a small water body located c. 8m south, and the Itchen Valley Country Park, situated c. 0.32km southwest. Southeast of the Proposed Development, there is an industrial estate adjacent to the boundary of the western section; and a business park is located c.0.22km from the eastern section. Southampton Airport is located c. 1.84km west of the Application Site. The Proposed Development lies northwestern to the adjacent, consented Chalcroft Solar Park (Ref: 12/71539).

GUIDANCE

- 2.13. Biodiversity is declining across England; however, recent agri-environment schemes indicate that biodiversity can significantly increase through appropriate land management. Well-designed solar farm developments have the potential to support wildlife and increase biodiversity through appropriate management when located on agricultural land.
- 2.14. Due to the nature of solar farm developments, a large proportion of the site is accessible for plant growth and potential wildlife enhancements. Each solar farm development in the UK requires a Biodiversity Management Plan (“BMP”), the purpose of which is to identify objectives for biodiversity and the means by which these objectives will be achieved. This can include the protection of existing species and habitats and the establishment of new habitats, as well as their maintenance and monitoring.
- 2.15. According to ‘Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments’¹ the BMP should:
- *“identify key elements of biodiversity on site, including legally protected species, species and habitats of high conservation value such as those listed on Section 41 of Natural Environmental and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006², and designated areas in close proximity to the proposed site;*
 - *identify any potential impacts arising from the site’s development, and outline mitigations to address these;*
 - *detail specific objectives for the site to benefit key elements of biodiversity and the habitat enhancements that are planned to achieve these;*
 - *contribute to biodiversity in the wider landscape and local ecological network by improving connectivity between existing habitats;*
 - *identify species for planting and suitable sources for seed and plants;*
 - *consider wider enhancements such as nesting and roosting boxes;*
 - *summarise a management regime for habitats for the entire life of the site;*
 - *provide a plan for monitoring the site; and [sic] adapting management as appropriate to the findings of this monitoring; and,*
 - *set out how the site will be decommissioned.”*

¹ BRE (2014) Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments. Eds G E Parker and L Greene

² Natural Environmental and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, available at www.legislation.gov.uk

- 2.16. Neo Environmental's BMP has been informed by UK Habitat surveys that were conducted in January 2023 by Ecus Consulting's ecologists and by the breeding bird surveys by Phil Budd BSc. (Hampshire Ecological Services Ltd).

OBJECTIVE OF THE BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 2.17. The objective of this BMP is to minimise any potential negative impacts arising from the Proposed Development, while increasing the habitat diversity. Through generation of renewable energy, the enhancement of the land within the development boundary will increase the site's capability of supporting wildlife.
- 2.18. This will be achieved by:
- Creating and maintaining a diverse species-rich grassland with a varied sward structure,
 - Creating and maintaining native tree planting and species-rich hedgerows,
 - Creating and maintaining wildlife shelters for Priority and locally important species,
 - Ensuring no net loss of biodiversity from the site as a result of the habitat creation scheme, and
 - Maximising the floral and faunal biodiversity of the created and retained habitats.

CURRENT POLICY

Environment Act 2021

- 2.19. This Act introduced a legally binding target on species abundance for 2030, aiming to reverse declines of key wild species. It creates a requirement for 10% net biodiversity gain as part of development projects, and for a series of Nature Recovery Strategies to cover England. The new Act makes minor amendments to the 1981 Act and 2017 Regulations (see above). It expands measures taken against illegal deforestation, enshrines a legal duty for water companies to reduce adverse impacts from storm overflow discharge, and gives statutory effect to conservation covenants. To assist in the above, it also creates an Office for Environmental Protection.
- 2.20. The Environment Act supersedes the former UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (“BAP”). While certain provisions of the Act are only likely to enter force later in 2022 and 2023, some are already current.
- 2.21. This BMP aims to demonstrate how the Proposed Development will assist in achieving this target.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

- 2.22. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act³ places a duty on planning authorities to have due regard for biodiversity and nature conservation during operations, ensuring that biodiversity is a key consideration in the local planning process.
- 2.23. A number of habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity (“Priority species” and “Priority habitats”) in England are listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act. These are taken into account in this BMP where relevant.

National Pollinator Strategy: For Bees and Other Pollinators in England

- 2.24. In 2014, the UK joined a small number of countries in Europe who have developed a strategy to address pollinator decline and protect pollination services. England’s national pollinator strategy⁴ was published in November 2014.
- 2.25. Twenty-one governmental and non-governmental organisations have agreed a shared Plan that identifies 34 actions to make England pollinator-friendly. The Plan identifies voluntary actions for farmers to make agricultural land more pollinator-friendly, such as:

³ Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents>

⁴ Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794706/national-pollinator-strategy.pdf

- Sowing nectar and pollen-rich wildflower seed mixtures on fallow land or buffer strips;
- Managing buffer strips through grazing and cutting to help prevent grass domination and further encourage wildflowers; and,
- Management of hedgerows by reducing the frequency of cutting to encourage hedges to produce flowers.

2.26. The enhancements set out within this BMP will create areas of flower-rich habitat and bee banks that will support England's pollinator species, including bees and flies.

Hedgerows Regulations 1997

2.27. Under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, certain hedgerows⁵ are classified as 'Important' based on factors such as the presence of a certain number of woody native plant species. Subject to certain exceptions, the removal of an 'Important' hedgerow is prohibited.

2.28. 'Removal' includes uprooting all or part of the hedgerow, as well as any acts that could lead to the hedgerow's destruction. Removal is permitted under Section 6 of the Act under a small number of exemptions, including:

"[...] for carrying out development for which planning permission has been granted or is deemed to have been granted, except development for which permission is granted by article 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order 1995 in respect of development of any of the descriptions contained in Schedule 2 to that Order other than Parts 11 (development under local or private Acts or orders) and 30 (toll road facilities)."

Protection of Badgers Act

2.29. The Protection of Badgers Act 1992⁶ makes it illegal to kill, injure or take a badger or to intentionally or recklessly interfere with a badger sett. Sett interference includes disturbing badgers whilst they are occupying a sett or obstructing access to it.

Biodiversity Action Plans

2.30. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan ("UKBAP"; 1994)⁷ was organised to fulfil the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992, to which the UK is a signatory. Lists of national Priority species and habitats were produced with all listed species/habitats having specific action plans, defining the measures required to ensure their conservation.

⁵ Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1997/1160/contents/made>

⁶Parliament of the United Kingdom (1992). Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/51/contents>

⁷Available at <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/cb0ef1c9-2325-4d17-9f87-a5c84fe400bd/UKBAP-BiodiversityActionPlan-1994.pdf>

- 2.31. While the UKBAP has since been superseded by the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (see above), regional and local BAPs have been produced to develop plans for species/habitats of nature conservation importance at regional and local levels. While these in turn are no longer valid, the species they listed can be cross-referenced with section 41 of NERC to provide a more local list. This list includes common toad (*Bufo bufo*) house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), West European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) and water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*).

Local Conservation & Biodiversity

Eastleigh Borough Local Plan 2016-2036⁸

- 2.32. Adopted in 2016, this is the current Local Plan for the Eastleigh, in which the Application Site falls. The relevant policies set out within the Plan include the following ecological provisions.

Policy DM3, Adaptation to climate change

All development should be designed to adapt to the predicted climate change impacts for the Borough.

a. To reduce the potential impacts of surface water flooding, sustainable drainage systems need to be implemented as part of an integrated SuDS strategy for the site in accordance with policy DM6 (Sustainable surface water management and watercourse management) and as part of the landscape framework for the site including green open space and green roofs where appropriate.

b. New development should have a cooling strategy which can include: i. cooling through generous green infrastructure ii. areas of shade iii. water cooling iv. building design and orientation to reduce overheating v. 'cool roofs' or green roofs and green walls vi. porous cool pavements

To adapt to water stress, new development should be designed to reduce demand. Measures can include: i. Reduced residential mains water consumption (as per policy DM2) ii. Water efficient appliances, fittings and leak detection devices for non- residential and multi-residential development iii. Rainwater harvesting and grey water recycling iv. Drought resistant landscape design.

⁸ https://eastleighboroughcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/sitenotices/user_uploads/final-local-plan-document-june-2018-print.pdf

Policy DM4, Zero or low carbon energy

“The Borough Council will permit the development of infrastructure to: i. generate zero or low carbon energy; and/ or ii. make more efficient use of energy sources e.g. installations deploying combined heat and power (CHP technology); subject to general development criteria and provided that the development:

- a. has no significant adverse impact on the landscape or landscape features, biodiversity or heritage assets;*
- b. does not involve the loss of land in public recreational use (see policy DM34);*
- c. does not involve the permanent loss of the best and most*
- d. valuable agricultural land.”*

Policy DM8, Pollution

“Development will not be permitted if it is likely to cause loss of amenity or impact on public health or other unacceptable environmental impacts through:

- i. air pollution (including odours or particulate emissions);*
- ii. pollution of surface, underground, coastal waters or other watercourses;*
- iii. noise or vibration;*
- iv. light intrusion; or v. land contamination.*

Development susceptible to particular forms of pollution will not be permitted: a. where it will be affected by such pollution, unless measures can be taken that adequately mitigate the polluting effects; or b. where it would inhibit existing economic or other activities giving rise to acceptable polluting effects. Where a development site is known or suspected to be contaminated, before the site is developed the Borough Council will require the contamination to be remediated to a standard where as a minimum it cannot be defined as ‘contaminated land’ under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.”

Policy DM11, Nature conservation

The Borough Council will work with statutory and voluntary agencies and developers to:

- i. Protect, conserve and enhance areas subject to international, national and local nature conservation designations;*
- ii. Assist in achieving national, county and local biodiversity targets as set out in Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs);*

iii. Protect, conserve and enhance networks of natural habitats and features, including the Priority Biodiversity Areas and Priority Biodiversity Links identified in the Eastleigh Borough Biodiversity Action Plan 2012-2022, and watercourses and wetland complexes, woodland trees and hedgerows important to biodiversity and local character; and

iv. On new development sites seek enhancement of biodiversity through the protection and connection of existing and provision of new habitats and features compatible with the native biodiversity characteristics of the Borough.

The Council will work with PUSH, Natural England, the Environment Agency and other wildlife organisations to develop and implement a strategic approach to the protection of European sites from the direct and indirect effects of development including recreational disturbance. Within Eastleigh Borough this will include:

a. implementing the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy and contributions to recreation mitigation for the New Forest or alternative agreed approaches if required;

b. preserving the water quality and flows within the Itchen and Hamble;

c. protection of the River Itchen SAC including water quality and the southern damselfly from the impacts of nitrogen deposition; and

d. contributing to major elements of the PUSH Green Infrastructure Strategy and other strategies for the provision and enhancement of multifunctional green infrastructure including green routes, ecological networks and biodiversity enhancements (see policy S10).

Development which is likely to adversely affect the integrity of an international or European nature conservation site will not be permitted. Development which is likely to have a direct or indirect adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) will not be permitted, unless the Borough Council is satisfied that there are no alternative solutions and the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the harm to the nature conservation value of the site. Development will not be permitted if it is likely to have a direct or indirect adverse effect on a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) or Local Nature Reserve as shown on the policies map (or on a more recent plan provided by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre), unless it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Borough Council that:

i. the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the adverse effects on the nature conservation value of the site;

ii. the adverse impacts are unavoidable;

iii. measures are taken to mitigate or, if this is not possible, compensate for the adverse effects, such that the development will result in at least no net loss of biodiversity; and

iv. buffers free from development are provided to Locally designated sites within or adjacent to developments to alleviate recreational impact and impacts on edge habitats and to maintain dark skies.

Impacts on priority habitats and protected and priority species will not be permitted unless the applicant can evidence that;

- there has been thorough habitat and species surveys;*
- there is an overall biodiversity gain; and*
- protected species impacts have been avoided or mitigated and their needs taken into consideration within the development design;*
- the great crested newt strategic survey and strategy have been considered in all developments within 500m of a great crested newt pond;*
- the strategic bat trapping survey has been considered in all developments within the locality of a woodland surveyed or connected habitat networks.*

In determining planning applications, the Borough Council will:

- a. seeks opportunities to create or enhance habitats and features of nature conservation interest, having regard to local geodiversity and soils;*
- b. has regard to the need to protect, and opportunities to enhance the Priority Biodiversity Areas and the Priority Biodiversity Links set out in the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan⁴⁵; and*
- c. for residential developments within 5.6 km of the Solent Special Protection Areas (SPAs), require contributions to the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy or site-specific measures to address recreational disturbance as agreed by the Council and Natural England."*

BASELINE

Designated Sites

- 2.33. The Application Site does not lie within or adjacent to any statutory designated environmental sites.
- 2.34. The desk-based assessment identified that within 15km of the Application Site boundary there are eleven internationally designated sites: Four Special Area of Conservation ("SACs"), four Special Protected Areas ("SPAs"), and three Ramsar Sites. The closest of these are River Itchen SAC located 0.35km west of the Application Site at its closest point. No possible SACs ("pSACs"), potential SPAs ("pSPAs"), or proposed Ramsar sites were recorded within 15km. There are three Sites of Special Scientific Interest ("SSSIs"), and four Local Nature Reserves ("LNR") within 5km of the Application Site.
- 2.35. These designated sites have been assessed below. There will be **no adverse effects** on the integrity of any statutory designated sites as a result of the Proposed Development. The only designated sites with potential connectivity to the Application Site is Itchen SAC & SSSI which has ecological connectivity. Solvent & Southampton Water SPA and Lee-on-The Solent to Itchen Estuary SSSI has potential ornithological connectivity.
- 2.36. One non-statutory site has ecological connectivity; Allington Lane Pond which is directly adjacent to the site boundary.
- 2.37. With the implementation of the recommended measures, it has been determined that there will be **no significant adverse effects** on any designated nature conservation site as a result of the Proposed Development.

Habitats

- 2.38. A total of 14 habitat types were noted within the Ecological Study Area ("ESA") during the UK Habitat Classification surveys undertaken in January 2023 by Ecus Ltd (**See Appendix D: S1, S2 & S3**). During the survey visits, these habitats were assessed for their potential to support protected and notable species. Overall, the current site is considered to be of medium ecological interest in terms of habitats.
- g3c - Other neutral grassland
 - g3c8 - Holcus-Juncus neutral grassland
 - h3d - Bramble scrub
 - r1 - Standing open water and canals
 - r1e - canal or ditch

- u1d – Suburban / mosaic of developed / natural surface
- w1f7 – Other Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- w1g6 – Line of trees
- h3h – Mixed scrub
- f2 – Fen, Marsh, and Swamp
- u1e – Built linear features
- u1c – Artificial unvegetated unsealed surface
- w1d – Wet woodland
- f2e – Reedbeds

Flora

- 2.39. No plant (flowering or otherwise) of Priority or protected status was observed within the Application Site. No plant species of high biodiversity value was noted at the Application Site, whether in the margins or otherwise. There is potential that lands within and adjacent to the Application Site could potentially provide suitable habitat for vascular plants.
- 2.40. Due to the management of the land within the ESA and surrounding landscape, species such as rarer lichens that are sensitive to fertilisers will not thrive.

Fauna

- 2.41. Suitable potential habitat within and adjacent to the survey area is present for bats, badger, brown hare, hedgehog, otter, water vole, amphibians including great crested newt (“GCN”), reptiles, breeding birds and invertebrates.

Badger

- 2.42. No evidence of badger was noted onsite, with no latrines, setts, hairs, distinctive scent observed. The woodland within the local area provides sett-building habitat for this species, while the terrestrial semi-natural habitats within the Application Site may offer foraging opportunities.
- 2.43. It is likely that badger may present in the local area and uses the site from time to time, either to forage or to cross to other foraging grounds.

Bats

- 2.44. Following the habitat survey completed by Ecus Consulting Ltd, the suitability of habitat features within the Application Site to support roosting bats was categorized as moderate or high. A number of trees with bat roost potential and bat boxes were noted on the site.
- 2.45. During the survey, all trees were assessed for their potential to support roosting bats. Five trees were identified in the North site, containing a number of potential roost features (PRFs) based on the number and type of roosting features and surrounding landscape character. These trees had medium to High Bat Roost Potential (BRP).
- 2.46. Six trees were identified in the Hearts site, containing a number of potential roost features (PRFs). One bat box was noted on this site (See **Appendix 2D: S2**)
- 2.47. Four groups of trees were identified in the Hogwood site, containing a number of potential roost features (PRFs). However, these were considered to have a low suitability for BRP.
- 2.48. More information can be found in **Appendix 2D: S1, S2 & S3**.
- 2.49. The hedgerows and trees within the Application Site, provide foraging and/or commuting features for bats. These features are largely unlit, being screened from lighting associated with nearby houses, farm buildings or roads. The majority of the site is arable land, offering limited foraging interest.
- 2.50. There are a large number of trees around the site that offer low roosting suitability for bats.
- 2.51. No bats were encountered during the habitat survey. The majority of records from the data search in the local area are for pipistrelle species which prefer structures to roost.

Other Mammals

- 2.52. The hedgerow within the Application Site and the local woodland and hedgerows on the site provides suitable habitat for hedgehog. Whilst no signs of hedgehogs were found onsite, the hedges and vegetated boundaries offer good foraging areas and linkages for dispersal to the wider local area. Hedgehog is a UK Priority species.
- 2.53. Brown hare was noted on site by surveyor during the species scoping survey. This is not unexpected as the site offers suitable arable habitat for the species, and the data search returned 17 records of the species within 2km.
- 2.54. No signs of other protected mammal species were recorded during the survey. It is likely that the site holds a minor assemblage of common small mammals.

Amphibians

- 2.55. As the data search returned 109 records of great crested newt (GCN) the Application Site was assessed for its suitability to support the species and other amphibians.

- 2.56. Whilst the hedgerows, ditches, and pond on site may be suitable for commuting newts, no suitable evidence of presence was found during the GCN assessment (see **Appendix 2H** for further detail).
- 2.57. However, considering Allington Lane Pond SINC is designated for supporting GCN, and there is suitable habitat on-site for, a District Level Licence for GCN is proposed.

Reptiles

- 2.58. The Application Site was assessed for its suitability to support reptiles.
- 2.59. No distinctive signs or presence of reptiles within the Application Site were found during the habitat survey.
- 2.60. The data search results indicate that slow worm and grass snake are within the local area.
- 2.61. It is important to note that if any reptiles are discovered/and or there is any change in design that causes hedgerow or habitat disturbance/removal, the recommendations in **Table 2-11 of the accompanying Ecological Assessment** must be adhered to.

Birds

- 2.62. The habitats within the Application Site may be used by Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (BoCC 5) - Eight species are listed on the amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern (bullfinch, dunnock, kestrel, sedge warbler, song thrush, stock dove, woodpigeon and wren), whilst three species (cuckoo, curlew and skylark) are listed on the red list. The hedgerows on site are suitable for nesting birds.
- 2.63. A Barn Owl nest with two chicks was recorded during the survey on the 11th of June 2023. The proposed development may result in the loss of foraging and commuting habitat for Barn Owls. To minimise negative impact, the development will retain all hedgerows and woodland (plus the majority of individual trees) and there are no field margins of importance. For more information on the survey and the survey findings, please refer to **Appendix E: Breeding Bird Survey Report**.

Invertebrates

- 2.64. Most plant assemblages were relatively poor in diversity and/or ability to support invertebrates, whether due to the flora present or to management (grazing/cuts). The more species-rich areas, such as field margins, are likely to support a more diverse invertebrate assemblage.

Fungi

- 2.65. No fungi were observed within the Application Site boundary. The management of the Application Site at present does not support rarer grassland fungi. It is likely that the soil

fertility is high, due to potential use of fertiliser. There are more likely to be fungal populations within the local wooded areas, especially where standing or decaying deadwood is present.

Other Species

- 2.66. No evidence of other protected or Priority species, or of invasive plant species that pose as a threat, was recorded during the habitat survey.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 2.67. Potential impacts which could arise from the development of a solar farm include:
- Potential habitat loss and fragmentation,
 - Disturbance during construction and decommissioning, and
 - Potential contamination of surface waters.
- 2.68. Without mitigation, potential impacts during the construction phase could include the direct loss of grassland habitat and fragmentation of hedgerow under the Proposed Development footprint, and indirect loss of appealing habitat due to noise and vibration disturbance, and dust and water pollution. The loss of these primarily agricultural habitat areas is considered to be of negligible significance to nature conservation interest within the local area.
- 2.69. The main habitat loss will occur under the Proposed Development footprint in regard to structures such as access tracks and hardstanding for buildings and inverters. Solar panels will be mounted on frames which will be pile driven into the ground in a similar way to fence posts, therefore limiting soil disturbance. The Application Site can be fully restored upon termination of its use as a solar farm.
- 2.70. A number of existing habitats will be enhanced, identified local species will be protected, and proposed habitat loss will be compensated for. New habitats will be created using native species appropriate to the Application Site, and biodiversity value will increase. The proposals will limit fragmentation and provide improved connectivity between wildlife habitats. It is therefore considered that habitat loss and fragmentation from the Proposed Development **will not be significant**.
- 2.71. Full details of other potential impacts are given in the main body of **Technical Appendix 2: Ecological Assessment**.

HABITAT CREATION

- 2.73. The existing agricultural groundcover will be replaced by a more diverse species rich grassland. New wildflower meadow and enhancement hedgerow and tree planting will be undertaken within the Application Site. These habitats will be in place and managed for the duration of the Proposed Development (circa 40 years).
- 2.74. Various options exist to enhance the biodiversity value of a solar farm site, including the creation of different habitats, such as hedgerows, field margins, wildflower meadows, nectar-rich areas and winter bird crops. Habitat creation planned as part of the Proposed Development is summarised in **Table 2-3** below. Habitats that will be created include:
- Species-rich grassland,
 - Wildflower meadow,
 - Wet meadow
 - Hazel scrub
 - Bat and bird boxes,
 - Bee banks,
 - Invertebrate Hotels, and
 - Hibernacula (see **Appendix 2.2**).
- 2.75. These habitats individually offer shelter and a food source for supporting a variety of wildlife. The mosaic of these new habitats, combined with the existing hedgerows and ditches, will support the existing wildlife within the Application Site. By offering a wider range of habitats that benefit local wildlife, they also have excellent potential to increase the biodiversity of the site.
- 2.76. The grassland and wildflower meadow will also contribute towards the National Pollinator Strategy, by offering new habitats that will support important pollinator species such as bees and flies.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.77. Management recommendations have been made below for new and existing habitats with the aim of achieving the following:
- to maintain and improve species biodiversity within the site,
 - to enhance the quality of the habitats,
 - increase the site's potential for supporting wildlife, and
 - to avoid any potential negative impacts arising from the development of the site.
- 2.78. Recommended management actions required to achieve the desired site conditions are summarised in **Table 2-2** of this document. The table also provides a brief résumé of the rationale for, and possible constraints on, adopting the recommended management.

Responsibilities

- 2.79. It will be the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that the proposed biodiversity management and monitoring is undertaken. It is expected that suitably qualified and experienced vegetation management contractors, arboriculturists and ecologists will be engaged by the Applicant for this purpose.

Grassland

- 2.80. The sowing of species-rich grassland will occur within the Application Site over areas of current other neutral grassland *Holcus-Juncus* neutral grassland.
- 2.81. Habitat that will be disturbed during the construction phase. This will primarily be beneath and between the solar PV panels, in all fields where these panels are present. The management regime will ensure a varied sward structure.
- 2.82. Among other wildlife, species-rich grassland is of benefit to invertebrates, including a variety of beetles. This will in turn encourage foraging by species such as the bats, badger and other grassland species.
- 2.83. It is recommended that soil inversion take place prior to grassland sowing.

Soil Stabilisation and Sward Establishment

- 2.84. Prior to sowing, the area of existing grassland will be sprayed with an approved herbicide, with repeat application where necessary to kill off any persistent weeds and regrowth of grasses. A semi-shade mix will be sown to provide a locally appropriate mixture of wildflowers

and some tussocky grasses, limiting erosion as well as increasing interest to pollinating invertebrates.

- 2.85. Species such as common couch, broad-leaved dock, stinging nettle and creeping thistle can be difficult to eradicate and may cause problems with sward establishment. These species should therefore be monitored when undertaking weed control on site. If required, they may need to be targeted by selective scything before they seed in late summer / autumn.
- 2.86. Low intensity sheep grazing will ensure that areas of shorter sward height will be managed and maintained. When appropriate, grazing will be introduced in the months from August to November inclusive. This limited period will allow the sward to establish, in accordance with Forest Research grassland creation guidance⁹.

Grazing Regime

- 2.87. Due to selective grazing habits, low intensity sheep grazing can lead to a diverse sward structure, if stocked at correct numbers. Sheep-grazing the grassland areas after construction will benefit local biodiversity by reducing the requirement for pesticide use. It will also lead to an increase in the nesting suitability of fields for bird species, including the national priority species skylark.
- 2.88. An appropriate stocking mix (in terms of age and sex) and density will be agreed with a suitably experienced ecologist or conservation grazier. Stocking density should fall between 0.2 and 0.5 livestock units per hectare per year, as advised by Plantlife¹⁰, with stocking density at the low end of this range for the first three years.
- 2.89. In any years that sheep grazing cannot occur, a sit-on mechanical mower and/or manual scything will be used. Cuts down to 50mm will be taken in April, early September (to avoid conflict with nesting birds) and (if necessary) in October.

Hedgerows, Scrub and Trees

- 2.90. The Proposed Development will involve removal of two small (<5m) sections from the end of two hedgerows in order to facilitate the construction.
- 2.91. The native woodland on the southern (Hearts boundary) side of the site will be managed (see **Figure 1.11 of Volume 3, Technical Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA)**) for additional ecological interest and to strengthen green infrastructure across the site and the nearby designated sites. This will be done by undertaking selective thinning of low value trees to improve the overall health of the woodland and removing scrub and some of the deadwood noted within the woodland. This will allow a higher value NVC community to naturally generate when considering the reduction in anthropogenic influences resulting from the change in land use.

⁹ Harris, P *et al.* (2014) Lowland Neutral Grassland: Creation and management in land regeneration.

- 2.92. Woodland planting will include pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), birch to name a few species as well as holly (*Illex aquifolium*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) in the understory. This will increase the amount of available foraging habitat for dormouse and encourage the presence of this protected species onto the Application Site. Around 5m of hedgerow will be removed in order to facilitate the site entrance to the south of the site.
- 2.93. Maintenance of existing hedgerows will benefit a range of local species including Priority Species such as terrestrial mammals and great crested newt. Hedgerows provide food and shelter throughout the year, as well as connecting existing green infrastructure and wildlife movement corridors.
- 2.94. Much of the existing moderate condition mixed scrub habitat (detailed in the Hogwood preliminary appraisal) will be enhanced to become good condition mixed scrub. This will be achieved by the removal of undesirable species and replanting in new and existing gaps with species of greater value to priority small mammals (such as harvest mouse, dormouse, and European hedgehog) including hazel, hawthorn, and blackthorn. This will be further enhanced by the addition of species rich grassland mix beneath and around the scrub, to provide a greater diversity.
- 2.95. Polygons of bramble scrub on-site will be enhanced to become more ecologically valuable hazel scrub habitat, with a moderate target condition. This will be achieved through planting of young hazel trees.
- 2.96. There will also be areas of hedgerow enhancement at east boundaries within the site. Further detail on planting specifications can be found in **Figure 1.11 of Volume 3, Technical Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA)**.
- 2.97. Additional Details of mitigation planting can be found in drawing 8121-DRW-DES-0025-Proposed Mitigation Planting-v1.0.

Management Regime

- 2.98. New trees will be planted within the first available planting season (November to March).
- 2.99. In year 2, existing hedgerows and scrub will be cut on a two- or three-year cycle (two years if hawthorn), with no more than 1/2 cut in any one year. From year 5, new hedgerows and scrub will also enter this cycle.
- 2.100. Newly planted trees will be pruned as needed in years 2 and 3, and as necessary until established. They will then be left to continue their natural development.
- 2.101. For all hedgerows, scrub, and trees, any pruning or cutting should be done outside of the breeding bird season (which is March to August inclusive) to minimise disturbance to nesting birds. The sole exception to this will be for any works that eventually need to be undertaken

for great crested newt mitigation. This would only occur after an ecologist has carried out a nesting bird check. All hedgerow and tree management will be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced arboriculture professional.

- 2.102. There will also be areas of hedgerow enhancement at boundaries within the site. Further detail on planting specifications can be found in **Figure 1.11 of Volume 3, Technical Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA)**.

Ditches and Pond

- 2.103. The existing pond and ditches which immediately connect to it will be enhanced and managed to improve the value these habitats provide.

Ditches

- 2.104. Vegetation in the form of a wildflower or wetland mix or small shrubs will be planted either side of the ditch where beneficial (either to cover bare ground or provide structural diversity) to minimise surface water runoff and further reduce the pollutants which may enter the watercourse (compounding the effect of the reduction in anthropogenic impacts stemming from land use change).
- 2.105. Undesirable aquatic vegetation should be removed where noted, and native aquatic vegetation should be allowed to naturally populate the ditch. Additionally, ditches will be cleaned on a rotating yearly basis to maintain a variety of available habitat for local wildlife populations.
- 2.106. Any cut vegetation from nearby habitats should be left within a close proximity of the ditch to create impromptu 'wildlife pile' for protected herptile species.

Pond

- 2.107. The pond relating to the adjacent SINC will be enhanced by the removal of low value trees from the perimeter of the pond to 15m where possible to minimise shading. Additionally, the banks should be shaped using locally sourced substrate to provide a more distinct bank and variety ledge heights at the edges.

Wildlife Shelters

- 2.108. The creation of wildlife shelters, placed strategically throughout the site, will provide shelter for a range of species.

Bird and Bat Boxes

- 2.109. Six bird nest boxes will be erected on retained mature trees across the site. These will be a mixture of:
- Schwegler 1B Nest Box with 26mm entrance for very small species,
 - Schwegler 1B Nest Box with 32mm entrance.
- 2.110. A similar mix will be used if either of these are not available at the time of purchase. The Schwegler 1B Nest Boxes will be positioned 2-4m up each tree with a clear flight path to each box entrance. The boxes will be slightly tilted forward so that any driving rain will hit the roof and bounce clear, and will face between north and west, thus avoiding strong sunlight and the harshest winds. Indicative locations are shown in **Figure 1.11 of Volume 3, Technical Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Assessment**); final locations will be decided during the installation process.
- 2.111. Six Woodcrete bat boxes will be erected on retained mature trees. These will be a mixture of Schwegler 1FD and Caudon® General Purpose Bat Box. A similar mix will be used if either of these are not available at the time of purchase. The boxes will be positioned 3-5m up the trees with a clear flight path to each box entrance. Boxes will face between southeast and southwest, thus providing natural heating. Indicative locations are shown in **Figure 1.11 of Volume 3, Technical Appendix 1: LVA**. Final locations will be decided during the installation process.

Maintenance Regime

- 2.112. All boxes will be maintained for a minimum of five years after installation. Boxes will be checked annually by a suitably competent and qualified ecologist. Where necessary, boxes will be cleaned by removing debris with a clean cloth. Any missing or damaged boxes will be replaced as needed. For boxes where bat roosting is discovered, subsequent checks should be carried out by a licensed bat worker.

Herptile Hibernacula

- 2.113. Three hibernacula will be constructed within the Application Site, close to other features of potential reptile interest. Each hibernaculum comprises of log, rock and stone piles and is aimed at providing shelter for reptile and amphibians to hibernate. It may also be used by a variety of insects and small mammals.
- 2.114. Hibernaculum creation will follow the instructions laid out within **Appendix 2.2A** below.

Management Regime

- 2.115. The hibernacula can be installed at any stage within the first year, and then left to allow natural vegetation colonisation to continue over the subsequent years.

Invertebrate Hotels

- 2.116. Two invertebrate hotels will be erected close to the Application Site margins to provide nesting and sheltering habitat for invertebrates including pollinator species. A number of non-swarming bees, which often adopt these habitats, are Priority species for England.
- 2.117. For optimal warmth, the hotels will be erected in south- or southeast-facing areas not shaded by solar panels (see **Figure 1.11 of Volume 3, Technical Appendix 1: LVA**).

Maintenance Regime

- 2.118. The invertebrate hotels will be checked once each summer for a minimum of five years after installation. Any missing or damaged hotels will be replaced within seven weeks (to allow for sourcing and deployment).

Bee Banks

- 2.119. Two bee banks will be created in south-facing locations across the Proposed Development. This will consist of mounds of loose sand and similar materials, set aside for mining bee species to burrow into. A number of mining bees are Priority species for England.
- 2.120. To create warm conditions, this will be constructed in areas not shaded by solar panels. Further details are provided in **Appendix 2.2B**.

Management Regime

- 2.121. The bank can be created at any stage within the first year, and then left to allow a cycle of vegetation colonisation and natural disturbance to continue over the subsequent years.

Table 2-2: Habitat Creation, Management and Maintenance

Objective	Action Plan Task	Timescale	Notes
Enhance the quality of habitats present	<u>Create a diverse grassland with varied structure</u> After the development of the solar farm, sections of species-rich grassland seed mix will be sown across the site.	Year 1	Most of the site will be sheep-grazed with a light stocking rate that will allow varied sward structure across the site. Species-rich grassland and enhanced areas of scrub will support invertebrates, which can encourage foraging by bat species. Implementation of a wet meadow to encourage bird species such as Curlew. Hazel scrub to encourage smaller rodents such as hazel dormice and shrews.
Create a diversity of habitats within the site	<u>Wildflower meadow</u> planting after the development of the solar farm <u>New tree planting</u> This will include pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>), beech, (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>), hornbeam (<i>Carpinus betulus</i>), birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>), sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>) and aspen (<i>Populus Tremula</i>) <u>Understorey</u> Holly, (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>), hazel	Year 1	Wildflower meadow will support invertebrates, which can encourage foraging by Priority bat species. Planting will strengthen ecological connections within the local area. Increase foraging and nesting habitat availability for dormice.

	(<i>Corylus avellana</i>), hawthorn, (<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>), blackthorn (<i>Prunus spinosa</i>), field maple (<i>Acer campestre</i>), yew (<i>Taxus bacata</i>)		
	<u>Install hibernacula</u>		See Appendix 2.2A The hibernacula comprise of log, rock and stone piles, which are aimed at providing shelter for herptile species to hibernate. However, the hibernacula may also be used by a variety of insects and small mammals.
Create diversity	a of <u>Create bat roosting habitat</u>	Year 1	The creation of roosting habitat, along with the creation of species-rich

habitats within the site	Native tree species will be planted, which, in time, will create new bat roosting resources.		habitat that will encourage an abundance of invertebrate life (a potential food source), will be beneficial to local bats.
	<u>Create bird nesting habitat</u> Native tree species will be planted, offering new nesting resources. Low intensity sheep grazing will increase nesting opportunities for skylark.		The creation of nesting habitat, along with the creation of species-rich habitat that will encourage an abundance of invertebrate life (a potential food source) and diverse grassland seed-fall, will be beneficial to local birds including specialist farmland birds. Increase foraging and nesting habitat availability for dormice.
	<u>Create bee banks</u> Two earth banks will be created across the site to support bees and other invertebrates.		See Appendix 2.2B Banks will be left bare and south-facing for insects such as solitary bees
	<u>Install invertebrate hotels</u>	Year 1	Features aimed at raising invertebrate numbers and diversity will also benefit insectivorous predators such as bats, birds and herptiles.
Maintain tree planting	<u>Tree pruning</u>	Years 2 and 3 (longer if needed) between January and February	Management will ensure optimal availability of blossom for wildlife as a potential food source.
Maintain new species-rich ground flora	<u>Low intensity sheep grazing</u>	Each year	Low intensity sheep grazing will ensure that the areas of shorter and longer swards will be managed and maintained. This will result in an overall

around solar PV installation			increase in biodiversity within the site.
Maintain hedgerows	<u>Cut section of hedgerow</u>	Each year between January and February	Cutting on a rotational basis, following standard advice ¹¹ , to ensure the optimal availability of berry and blossom for wildlife throughout the year as a potential food source. Management will also ensure a good base is maintained within the hedgerow to provide suitable habitat for a range of wildlife.
Maintain new wildlife shelters	<u>Check bird and bat boxes, hedgehog houses and invertebrate hotels</u>	Summer of years 1 to 5+	Licensed bat worker required for future checks for all bat roosts discovered. Bird and bat boxes to be cleaned as necessary. All boxes that are missing or are damaged so as not to be functional will be replaced.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Obligations

2.122. During each of the development phases there are a number of legal obligations that should be considered by all those involved in site work:

- Ensure obligations of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017¹² are met by all involved with the site (see also **Table 2-1** in **Technical Appendix 2: Ecological Assessment**).

¹¹ Hedgelink UK, The Complete Hedge Good Management Guide, Available at www.hedgelink.org.uk

¹² Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2017. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made>

- Ensure obligations of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)¹³ are met by all involved with the site (see **Technical Appendix 2** for further detail).
- Ensure all relevant Health & Safety at Work Act obligations¹⁴ are met.

Good Ecological Practice

2.123. Whilst management practices should only be altered if there is a good ecological reason for doing so, they should not rigidly be adhered to if they are obviously detrimental to wildlife.

¹³ Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1981. Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

¹⁴ Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1974. Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (as amended). Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37/contents>

INDICATIVE MANAGEMENT SCHEDULE

2.124. **Table 2-3** below shows possible months in which activities will occur during habitat establishment and continued management.

Table 2-3: Timeframes for Management Activities

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Year 1 – Initial Habitat Enhancement												
Hedgerow and tree planting	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓
Removal of existing vegetation and seeds beneath solar panels			✓	✓	✓							
Cultivate and allow soil to settle						✓	✓					
Grassland sowing beneath solar panels								✓	✓			
Wildflower sowing								✓	✓			
Years 2 and 3 - Annual Habitat Management												
Grazing of grassland beneath solar panels (once sward is established)								✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pruning of newly-planted hedgerow sections and trees	✓	✓							✓			
Checks by contractor through the initial			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				

maintenance period to comprise weed clearance, watering and pruning												
Replacement of any dead, dying or diseased newly planted trees or hedgerow										✓	✓	✓
Existing hedgerows cut on a 2- or 3-year cycle, with no more than 1/2 cut in any one year	✓	✓										
Ongoing Annual Management – Year 3 onwards												
Grazing of grassland beneath solar panels			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ongoing Annual Management – Year 4 onwards												
Light pruning of newly planted hedgerow sections	✓	✓							✓			
Existing hedgerows cut on a 2- or 3-year cycle, depending on species. All hedgerows from year 5, with no more than 1/2 cut in any one year.	✓	✓										

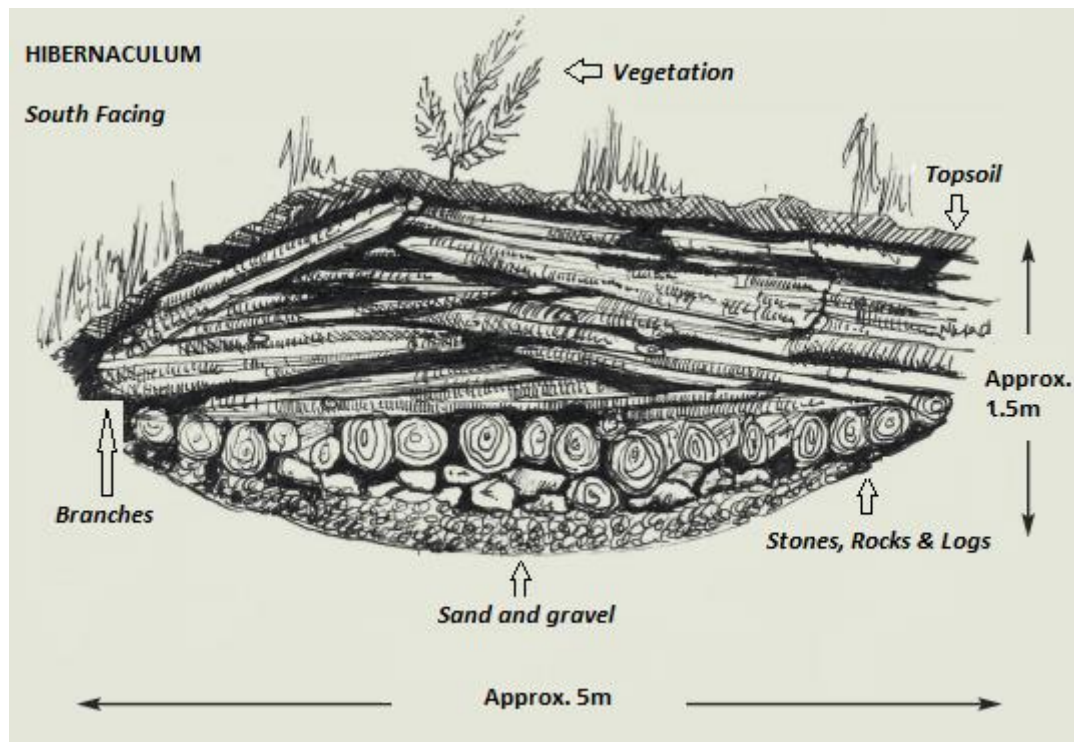
DECOMMISSIONING

- 2.125. At the end of the operational period, decommissioning will take place. This will entail dismantling and removing all of the materials and equipment in order to reinstate the land to its original condition. Where possible, retaining features such as species-rich grassland and maintaining the hedgerow boundary beyond the 40-year lifespan of the Proposed Development will be of benefit to wildlife. This will enable improvements for biodiversity to be sustained long-term.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 2.2A - HIBERNACULUM CONSTRUCTION

2.126. The hibernaculum will follow the basic construction set out below, with the log and stone piles situated to the north of the hibernaculum.



- A 5m long east-west running ditch 1m deep and 1m wide will be dug.
- The base will be lined with sand and gravel.
- This will be followed with layers of stones, rocks and logs.
- Smaller branches will then be placed on top, and covered soil from the excavation will be placed over the pile, leaving gaps for access.
- The soil will be shaped into a mound.
- The north-facing side of the mound will be seeded / planted with species that will attract insects and will also provide extra shelter.
- The south-facing side will be maintained with a sparse vegetation cover to provide an area to bask.
- A log pile of approximately 2m by 1m will be placed to the north of the hibernaculum.

APPENDIX 2.2B – BEE BANK CREATION

- Material will be built into a crescent-shaped mound with various slopes, hollows and angles that may be utilised and favoured by different species.
- Aggregate and/or soil will be used to create the core of the bank. Builders' sand will be used to cap the bank in a layer of >30cm deep. Bank faces will then be compacted with the back of a spade.
- Banks will be between 0.5m and 1.5m high. A variety of bank heights will be created to provide habitat microdiversity.
- Vertical faces created on bee banks take much longer to vegetate, and this makes them attractive to many species. Over time a bee bank will be vegetated over through succession.
- Planting appropriate vegetation in an open structure in front of a bee bank will provide extra habitat for invertebrates that are attracted to the bee bank.
- These banks will be created close to flower-rich areas that will create important foraging opportunities for pollinators.