

Bron Curtis
Planning Department
Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich, IP1 2BX

3rd January 2024

Dear Bron,

RE: DC/23/05656 | Full Planning Application - Construction of Photovoltaic Solar Array, Ancillary Infrastructure, DNO Substation, Customer Substation, Grid Connection and Landscaping. | Land at Grove Farm and Land East of The Railway Line, Bentley.

Thank you for sending us details of this application, we have the following comments:

We have read the provided Ecological Assessment¹ and support the findings. The assessment that hazel dormice are likely present within the hedgerows onsite is, we believe, correct. Proposed measures to avoid impacting the species are supported and overall, the provision landscape plan will enhance the site for hazel dormice. The buffering of Engry Wood County Wildlife Site (CWS) is particularly welcomed, creating suitable dormice habitat and protecting the woodland itself.

Further enhancement for dormice could include the provision of monitoring of the species onsite, which could provide much needed data on the species, including specific detail on the uptake of connected but newly planted hedgerows. Suitable dormice boxes could also be included.

The provided Biodiversity Net Gain Calculator shows that under solar panels *modified grassland* in *moderate* condition will be delivered. Given that solar panels create significant shading, Suffolk Wildlife Trust consider that delivering the necessary species diversity to meet the criteria for moderate condition may not be achievable, and instead a precautionary approach should be taken, and the grassland assessed as *poor* condition; this change would be highly unlikely to stop the proposed development delivering a net gain well above the national minimum level. Further clarity on how proposed habitats will be delivered in the proposed conditions is welcomed.

Overall, we believe that the proposed layout is reasonable, but that it could still deliver more for nature conservation and contribute more towards nature recovery as well as delivering renewable energy. Further detail on how this can be read in Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Solar farm development and biodiversity Planning Guidance Note for Suffolk which has been submitted alongside these comments to the Local Authority, or a copy can be requested from planning@suffolkwildlifetrust.org.

¹ Avian Ecology, 2023, *Ecological Assessment*, Grove Farm Solar, Version 1 (AxisL-043-3078).

Please inform us of the outcome of this planning application and do not hesitate to contact us should you require anything further.

Yours sincerely,

Alex Jessop
Planning & Advocacy Officer
planning@suffolkwildlifetrust.org