

Alexandra Battle

From: Mark Speck <MSpeck@nottswt.co.uk>
Sent: 16 May 2024 16:38
To: Planning
Subject: 24/00384/FUL Installation and Operation of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System
Attachments: Natural_England_s_Advice_Notes_on_the_Sherwood_ppSPA_2014.pdf; Skylarks In Practice Article HF.pdf

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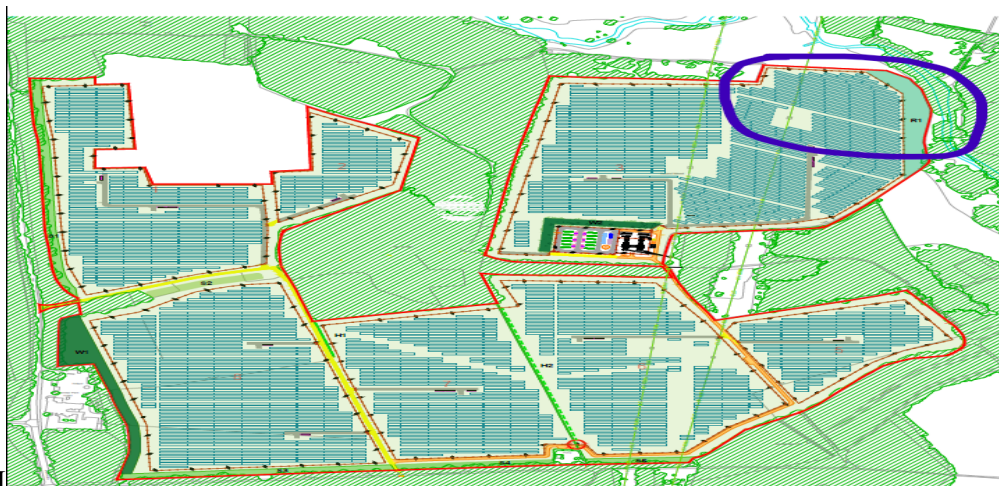
FAO James Mountain

Re: 24/00384/FUL Installation and Operation of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (Output up to 40 MW), With Associated Works, Equipment, Infrastructure and Landscaping

You have consulted Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust on the planning application highlighted above. We have assessed the following document submitted in support of the planning application:

- **Land adjacent to the A614, Normanton Larches, Worksop, Nottinghamshire S80 3PA Ecological Impact Assessment & Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment March 2024 (Windrush Ecology Limited, March 2024)**

We note that the Nottinghamshire Biological and Geological Records Centre (NBGRC) was contacted in February 2024 to collate records that it holds for protected/notable species and non-statutory sites of nature conservation importance within a 1km radius of the site. **Section 3.1.3.4** highlights woodlark has been recorded within the search area. A local birdwatcher contacted NWT claiming that Woodlark nest within the red-line boundary (see image below). In addition, Cettis Warbler also occurs in the area. Both species are listed under Schedule 1 the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the Environmental Protection Act 1990). It is an offence to intentionally disturb any of these species during the breeding season without a valid licence. The Birds of Nottinghamshire Annual Report for 2020 describes Woodlark as “*an uncommon breeding bird and passage migrant*” and a “*Nottinghamshire Bird of Conservation Concern*”. Every effort should be made, therefore, to maintain the favourable conservation status of woodlark in Nottinghamshire. The absence of breeding bird surveys has prevented a thorough assessment of the potential impacts on Schedule 1 species and farmland birds of conservation concern (see below).



Skylark

The ecological walk-over survey undertaken on the 2 February 2024 did not record skylark. That is to be expected because they wouldn't have been back on breeding territories at that time. We disagree with the suggestion in the ecological report that skylark will utilise areas under the solar panels for nesting. Skylarks avoid nesting under solar arrays because they require large open areas to nest within that don't provide perching places for avian predators. This is supported by the attached 'Skylarks in Practice' Article and the following communication provided by Harry Fox Principal Ecologist, Clarkson & Woods Ltd. (personal communication, 15 May 2024).

The research in question was a borne out of an ecological monitoring exercise we conducted as a company nearly ten years ago now. In it, we documented several positive observations in terms of wildlife on solar arrays, along with some inconclusive, or less clear, results.

Regarding skylark, the observation which is quoted in your email below was a very early one and something of an outlier as we were to find out in subsequent years. It is unfortunate that this still gets quoted and relied upon as it is very much at odds with our current understanding. The observation came from a locaton within a very large grassland easement at the edges of a small, relatively early, solar site. In any case, it would be highly unlikely that the site would support anything like the number of territories that would have occurred in the arable pre-development since the easements only occupy a fraction of the overall development areas. It is therefore highly likely that, overall, there would have been a significant net loss of nesting opportunity. The site was a community-owned enterprise and was heavily geared towards providing nature conservation and enhancements. As you know, skylarks often are seen singing or foraging on solar sites. However, this is not indicative or confirmatory of nesting and we are still waiting to find or hear of the first confirmed, successful skylark nest within a solar array. While finding skylark nests is very difficult in the best of circumstances, it is not impossible and even despite our annual solar monitoring efforts and small masters-level investigations there has yet to be a convincing report of one.

An interesting effect we suspect is taking place on recently developed sites is that of nest-site fidelity. That is, where birds return to the location of previous nesting attempts (or perhaps natal nest locations) and attempt to set up territories there. We have observed at a number of sites which we have returned to year after year, a slow waning of the number of birds singing above panels. This could explain why people often assume that solar parks still harbour nests.

Happily, though, we have also observed young skylark being fed by parent birds, which may well reflect the improved habitat in terms of abundance of soft bodied insects and spiders upon which fledglings are fed, compared to neighbouring conventional arable. Therefore, solar farms may be important in supporting the breeding success of nearby but still off-site nests.

In the absence of breeding bird surveys, it is not possible to thoroughly assess the potential impacts on skylark (and other ground nesting birds) because the number of nesting skylarks that will be displaced by this proposal is unknown and consequently the level of mitigation/compensation for this ground nesting species cannot be accurately calculated. We advise the LPA that further ecological information is required in the form of breeding bird surveys so that the impacts of this proposal on breeding birds can be fully assessed.

Sherwood ppSPA

We also draw your attention to the attached Natural England Advice note on the Sherwood ppSPA. The area within the red-line boundary is within the RSPB IBA Boundary with 5km buffer.

Regards, Mark

Mark Speck
Senior Nature Recovery Officer - North
Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
Tel: 0115 9588242
Mobile: 07734 573863
www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org



<https://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/attenborough-meetings-conferences>



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