



ECOLOGICAL ADVICE SERVICE

TO: *Amanda Grout*

FROM: *Biodiversity Officer*

DATE: *04 August 2022*

SUBJECT: *20220538 – Abbey Farm Barn, Higham*

The following is provided by Kent County Council's Ecological Advice Service (EAS) for Local Planning Authorities. It is independent, professional advice and is not a comment/position on the application from the County Council. It is intended to advise the relevant planning officer(s) on the potential ecological impacts of the planning application; and whether sufficient and appropriate ecological information has been provided to assist in its determination.

Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant or other interested parties may have must be directed in every instance to the Planning Officer, who will seek input from the EAS where appropriate and necessary.

Summary

No ecological information has been submitted with this application. As a result of reviewing the data we have available to us (including aerial photos and biological records), and the information submitted with the planning application, we advise that the proposed development has limited potential to result in ecological impacts. As such, we are satisfied that there is no requirement for an ecological survey to be carried out. However, if the removal of vegetation or intrusive works are required outside the blue line boundary (e.g., to link up the PV array with nearby houses), a review of this position will be required.

Reasoning

We have taken this view because the proposal is for a PV array with a surface area of 54 m² which will be mounted on existing hardstanding with negligible biodiversity interest. The submitted photo of the site and land within the blue line boundary includes very small bushes and short managed grassland; equally likely to have negligible biodiversity interest.

The site for the PV array is approximately 85m west of the Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar and South Thames Estuary and Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, the site and land within the blue line boundary is unlikely to form functionally linked land with the nearby designated sites. Further, the site is visually screened from the

designated sites by Abbey Farm Barn's boundary wall and, aerial imagery suggests, trees. This reduces the risk of disturbance effects during erection of the array. The proposed development is also not understood to fulfil any of the SSSI Impact Risk Zone listed criteria for consultation with Natural England by the local planning authority regarding the project.

The proposal has the potential to provide a small contribution towards government environmental targets with regards to climate change and indirectly with regards to biodiversity. There are opportunities for the proposed development to make direct contributions to local biodiversity net gains in line with one of the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework: *"...opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity..."*. We advise that details of how the site will enhance biodiversity be provided. Biodiversity enhancements could include providing substrate suitable for invertebrates below the solar panels, the installation of bat and bird nesting boxes, and/or provision of native species planting.

Ecological Enhancements – Suggested condition wording:

"Prior to the completion of the development hereby approved, details of how the development will enhance biodiversity will be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The approved details will be implemented and thereafter retained."

We have reviewed the information submitted in support of this planning application and advise that the proposed development is unlikely to result in any negative ecological impacts.

If you have any queries regarding our comments, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Emma England
Biodiversity Officer

This response was submitted following consideration of the following documents:

OS Survey (2022) Block Plan: Abbey Farm Barn, Church Street, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7LS.

Invicta Clean Energy Ltd (2022) Design and Access Statement supporting an application for the siting of a ground mounted 10.88 kWp photovoltaic array at Abbey Farm Barn, Church Street, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7LS.

Photo submitted with the application