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CONSULTING

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Technical Report

Biodiversity Net Gain Plan

Yardley Road Solar Farm

Yardley Road Solar Farm Limited

your project our expertise

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1. Introduction

1.1 Terms of Reference

Atmos Consulting Ltd ('Atmos') were initially commissioned by Yardley Road Solar Farm Limited (the 'Applicant') in May 2021 to undertake ecology surveys to support the proposed solar farm, Yardley Road.

The proposed solar farm (the 'Proposed Development') comprises the installation and operation of 40 megawatt (MW) ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels fixed to a dual-axis solar tracking system, and associated infrastructure including access roads, cabling, inverter platforms, control room; a Distribution Network Operator (DNO) station; storage containers; security fencing and CCTV; and temporary construction compound. The planning application also includes the grid connection cable route.

Updated surveys of the solar Site were undertaken within 2024 and additional areas were surveyed in 2025 to cover the grid connection route.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The Site is located near the village of Potterspury, approximately 11.3km northwest of Milton Keynes (NGR SP 76758 44116) in the council area of West Northamptonshire. It is dominated by arable fields separated by hedgerows, with smaller fields of grazed grassland present, pockets of woodland are present in the south of the site.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this report are:

- To summarise the habitat baseline and condition of the Site;
- To demonstrate that the mitigation hierarchy has been followed;
- To quantify the baseline biodiversity value of the Site and the measures required to achieve a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain; and
- To indicate the potential need for longer term monitoring over 30-years based on the habitats to be enhanced or created.

2. Legislative Requirements

2.1 National Legislation

The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** states that planning policy should identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable gains for biodiversity.

Paragraph 180 in Chapter 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment includes the following requirements for planning applications to demonstrate:

a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons(63) and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and

d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while 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 or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

The relevant primary legislation for the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain is principally set out under **Schedule 7A (Biodiversity Gain in England) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990**. This legislation was inserted into the 1990 Act by Schedule 14 of the **Environment Act 2021**, and was amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. The Biodiversity Gain (Town and Country Planning) (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2024 made consequential amendments to other parts of the 1990 Act.

From 12th February 2024, all qualifying developments are required to demonstrate a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain. This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat, evidenced via completion of the **statutory biodiversity metric**. This increase must demonstrate it has followed the **biodiversity gain hierarchy** first through onsite biodiversity gains, second registered offsite biodiversity gains or third statutory biodiversity credits.

For 'small sites' defined as residential developments on land less than 0.5ha in size or between 1 and 9 dwellings, or commercial developments on land less than 1ha in size or less than 1,000 sqm, these are required to also demonstrate 10% gain via the 'small sites metric'.

Where achievement of 10% BNG relies on 'significant on-site enhancements' or where off-site habitat measures are required in order to deliver 10% BNG, a **Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP)** will be required as a condition of consent. A **Biodiversity Gain Plan** will also be required as a condition of consent.

Further detail on the criteria is available in the secondary guidance at www.gov.uk

2.2 Local Planning Policy

There are no specific BNG requirements separate from statutory guidance within the West Northamptonshire Council Local Plan.

Local Strategic Significance

To determine the 'strategic significance' of the habitats as part of the BNG assessment any habitats referenced within the Northamptonshire BAP 2015-2020. Habitats that have not specifically been listed within the local habitat initiatives but have been deemed as important habitats within the local area have been classified as 'Location ecologically desirable but not in local strategy' and all other habitats have been classified as 'Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy'.

3. Methodology

3.1 Reasoning for Approach

3.1.1 Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy

The process must demonstrate how the Proposed Development has sought to protect or minimise losses of the most valuable habitats within the Assessment Boundary. This is done by implementing the 'Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy', as follows: