



OCTOBER 2024 (amended April 2025)

Technical Note: Proposed Biodiversity Monitoring Scheme

Site: Mynydd y Gwrhyd Solar Park, nr Pontardawe

Author: Siân Musgrave BSC (Hons) MCIEEM Principal Ecologist AEC Ltd

Introduction

Amber Environmental Consultancy Ltd was commissioned by Dulas Ltd to devise and implement a biodiversity monitoring scheme for the proposed solar park on fields at Mynydd y Gwrhyd, near Pontardawe.

The site currently consists of marshy grassland fields currently used as agricultural land, grazed by sheep with the rush cut on a regular basis.

Planning permission has been granted to install a solar park with associated infrastructure. An 8m wide tree belt is proposed along the southern boundary. A landscape plan has yet to be agreed and remains a planning condition.

Along with condition 7 regarding the landscaping scheme, planning condition number 4 states:

“Prior to the commencement of development a monitoring scheme for biodiversity shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Reason: To ensure that the ecological mitigation is overseen by an appropriately competent ecologist, and to ensure the development complies with Policy EN7 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan.”

Proposed Biodiversity Monitoring Scheme

Following discussion with Neath Port Talbot Council planning ecologists the following scheme is proposed for any newly created habitat:

- Fixed point photography of all newly created habitats on an annual basis for five years, with a full National Vegetation Classification survey on Year 5. Following this, the habitats will be monitored every 5 years up until year 30 or the decommissioning of the scheme, whichever is sooner. A report on the progress with habitat management measures, and any remedial works advised, shall be submitted to the LPA every five years.
- Any newly created hedges within the scheme shall be managed by hedge laying on a 7-year rotation. The 8m wide tree belt will be allowed to grow into a dense belt of connecting habitat. However, it may need managing in order not to shade the panels. This may mean

Mynydd y Gwrhyd Solar Park

appropriate management such as coppicing or pollarding on a rotational basis may need to be implemented.

- Any trees/plants within the newly created habitat that fail within the first five years of the scheme will be replaced in the next planting season with a similar size and species.

The annual fixed point photography will measure the progress of the newly created habitats and the associated report will provide recommendations to ensure that the habitats are maintained in good condition. It might also recommend specific tasks such as coppicing, pollarding, hedge laying, mowing regimes and other management appropriate for the new habitats.

The full NVC survey in Year 5 will also provide information on the condition of the new habitats and how well they have established. Recommendations for appropriate management for the long term will be provided in the Year 5 report, to be followed by further management reports every 5 years for the duration of the scheme.

If any plantings fail within the five year cycle, then measures should be in place to remedy this, such as replacements with similar size and species in the next planting season.

A plan of the solar park is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Mynydd y Gwrhyd Solar Park plan.

