



CLEVE HILL
SOLAR PARK

Cleve Hill Solar Park

Community Newsletter

July 2024

In this newsletter:

We take a closer look at a long-running project monitoring bird life on the solar park site.

Plus, two public information events announced for August, the latest construction progress update and the Battery Safety Management Plan appeal decision announcement from the Planning Inspectorate.

Construction Update

As of 13 July:

Pile installation: 71.5% complete

Solar module installation: 17.9% complete

Testing is underway to decide the method of pile installation in zones U, V, X and W which is due to commence shortly. Where impact driven piling is unavoidable, the project team will continue to make all efforts to reduce the impacts that have already been assessed and accepted within the DCO order. We will ensure that comprehensive noise mitigation measures are in place including shrouding the pile heads and the use of acoustic fencing.

Battery Safety Management Plan appeal approved by Planning Inspectorate

On 5 July the Planning Inspectorate announced their approval of the appeal submitted by Cleve Hill Solar Park against the decision by Swale Borough Council to reject the Battery Safety Management Plan.

Energy storage is an integral part of the Cleve Hill project and was consented under the Development Consent Order. The Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will significantly enhance capability to store and manage renewable energy, helping to ensure a reliable supply of low-cost electricity to the National Grid.

An Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero considered whether the submitted Battery Safety Management Plan meets the criteria set out in Requirement 3 of The Cleve Hill Solar Park Order 2020. The Inspector made an unaccompanied site visit and highlighted the safety concerns expressed by the local community in his report.

Our project team appreciates that there are genuine local concerns around safety planning and is inviting the community to meet our safety planning expert and project managers at two public information events in August.

Residents are welcome to ask questions and raise any issues regarding the solar park project at these drop-in sessions at Graveney Village Hall. Details of these events can be found towards the end of this newsletter.

Bird ringing at Cleve Hill Solar Park

Terry Hilsden is a frequent visitor to the solar park site at this time of year. He is a familiar sight to walkers along the Saxon Shore Way who will have spotted his HQ close to the seawall at the western end of the site.

Terry is a licensed bird ringer, carrying out a long-term monitoring project for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). The BTO is a non-governmental, non-campaigning organisation focused on securing the future for birds and nature.

Terry has been bird ringing for ten years, he explained; *"Since selling my IT business, I have devoted my time to conservation work, and I have a particular interest in this part of the Kent coast. My colleagues have been ringing along this stretch of marsh for over twenty-five years and so have provided baseline information on the birds in this area before the construction of the solar park began. There are encouraging signs of an increase in some species over the last couple of years, notably Corn Buntings."*

Having discovered a previously unknown Swallow roost close to this spot, Terry now returns each year to erect nets for bird ringing. The large nets take around an hour to put up, which Terry does in the evening. He returns at around 4am to open the nets out to catch birds flying into them – the birds are unharmed; the nets contain pockets that the birds drop into.



Terry Hilsden with CHSP project manager Reece Monk.

Most birds are caught between 5 – 6.30am, when Terry removes them from the nets into small bags to identify, weigh, ring and record each one before releasing it. He notes the ring number if a bird already has a ring, he explains; *"The data I collect helps to monitor populations of different species as well the fitness of the birds and survival rates of adults. It all helps to build up a national picture. I am still amazed when I find a Reed Warbler that I personally ringed in 2021 and remember that that individual bird has been to Africa and back three times since I last held it."*

One of the rarer birds in Kent Terry has recorded as breeding on the solar park site is the Bearded Tit. The reed beds along the edge of the Cleve Hill site support a thriving population. Another species which he often catches is the Linnet, which sadly is declining in many areas, and is now Red Listed.

Terry continued; *"The information collected by the BTO feeds into DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) research institutes and universities, for the benefit of birds and people"*

The Cleve Hill Solar Park site is also a good breeding ground for Yellow Wagtail, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler and Meadow Pipit.



Terry records the weight of a bird and fits a ring to the leg of a bird before recording all the details of that individual in his log.

Ecological Clerks of Works update

Our ECoWs (Ecological Clerks of Works) are busy carrying out bird surveys across the site.

They have spotted a male Marsh Harrier hunting over an area of the site which has been converted from arable land to grassland and was designed to attract this bird and other bird species.

A Barn Owl was seen foraging along one of the ditches running through the central area of the site. The ECoWs have also reported a couple of remaining Skylark nests with chicks ready to fledge.

The endangered species Corn Bunting is also nesting on site. The nest with four chicks about to fledge was discovered on 9 July. It is the largest of the buntings and its dramatic population decline in the UK makes it a Red List species. Read more about the Corn

Bunting on the RSPB website: www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/corn-bunting.

The ECoWs have also been helping with fence crossing places on the site, which involves removing wildlife from affected ditches and moving them to unaffected areas. There is abundant life in the ditches, including many eels.

It has been an unfortunate year for the Oystercatchers on site as all the nests have failed. The ECoWs suspected a fox was responsible and set up a camera trap which did indeed catch a fox "red handed" stealing eggs from an Oystercatcher nest.

The team are also continuing to encourage water voles to live away from areas where work is taking place.

The vegetation is kept cut short along these ditches which leads the animals to settle in areas with the longer vegetation they prefer. This is a temporary solution whilst the site is under construction.



Corn Bunting chicks ready to fledge.

Graveney Primary School Summer Fair

We were delighted to support the first summer fair to be held at Graveney Primary School for several years.

The CHSP construction project team donated a selection of tombola prizes and had a stand featuring the wildlife that can be spotted on the site.

With games, giveaways and prizes of flower, fruit and vegetable seeds to be won, the solar park stand was popular with parents and children.

Reece Monk, construction project manager, said; *“The fair was a great chance to show the children the variety of wildlife on their doorstep and highlight the work we’re doing to protect a wide range of species.”*

Headteacher Alison Blackwell, pictured with Reece Monk at the Cleve Hill stand, said; *“The fair raised more than £600 for the school and was the first event we’ve held since 2019. Thanks to the CHSP team for their support and to everyone who helped make the event such a success, especially the PTA.”*

Three lucky winners were presented with bird box kits and certificates at the school’s Gallery Stars prizegiving event. These winners can see their bird boxes installed on the solar park site to support birdlife.



Community drop-in information events and site visit

Everyone is welcome to come along to find out more about the solar park project, including safety planning, ecological works, construction progress and more.

Call in at any time at these events at Graveney Village Hall:

Tuesday 6 August: 2.30pm - 6.30pm

Thursday 29 August: 5.00 - 8.00pm

We are also offering the opportunity for residents to visit the solar park site on **Saturday 21 September**.

You can contact us via our communication channels on the back of this leaflet, or you can contact your Parish Council to register your interest in visiting the site as numbers will be limited. We will confirm arrangements when we know how many people wish to attend.

Contact Us:

If you would like to be kept updated via email, please get in touch with the project team via the communication channels below:



Write to us at:

Freepost: Cleve Hill Solar



Email us at:

info@clevehillsolar.com



Call our Freephone information line:

0800 328 2850

Available Monday - Friday, 9am-5pm
Saturday, 9am - 1pm
Voicemails can be left outside of these hours



Visit our website at:

www.clevehillsolar.com