

Sellindge Converter Station Sellindge, Kent

AMS Joint Venture (Alstom, Mott MacDonald, Skanska) - SEESA

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Large scale permanent

Project overview

The site is located approximately 2km west of Sellindge and approximately 10km south east of Ashford in Kent.

There are no statutory designated sites present within 2km of the proposed development site. There is one non-statutory designated site within 2km of the site –blackhouse wood. There are also nine separate woodlands listed on the ancient woodland inventory within 2km of the site.

The proposed extension to National Grid Sellindge Converter Station at Church Lane, Aldington to provide a 400kV Gas Insulated Electricity substation housed within a building set on a raised platform, together with associated switchgear, busbar equipment, overhead conductor landing gantries, modular buildings housing control equipment, landscaping and a standby generator and lighting columns.

Project cost is estimated at £27 million. Located in a rural setting in Kent and will involve over 200+ staff.



Photo: Crawleys Cave

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The site footprint was cleared in accordance with mitigation levels outlined in site plans. However it was agreed a wide range of reinstatement enhancements including wildflower areas, landscaping planting, hedgerow replacement and woodland management.

Once implemented and established it is anticipated there would be an overall benefit to biodiversity as a result of the works, through the provision of better quality, more diverse habitat than which was originally present.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

In accordance with Ashford Borough Council planning conditions all hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the details set out in the SEESA

Woodland Management Plan and Landscaping Scheme dated June 2014. Also in regards to the Bug Hotel, bird baths and bee hotel this was a National Grid competition which sought voluntary submissions from National Grid sites.

Following a site discussion it was agreed that Sellindge would enter with the interaction with site operatives.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

A woodland management plan was created with an aim to ensure that any potential adverse ecology and landscape impacts associated with the proposed works are minimised, and that opportunities to retain and enhance valuable habitats are maximised.

The woodland to be retained on site will be enhanced through tree thinning to increase light levels on the woodland floor. The gaps created will then be planted with understorey shrubs and ground flora species to give the woodland a more layered structure, ideal for maximising biodiversity.

Habitat creation and improvements will leave the site with more suitable habitat for breeding birds, bats and dormice than is currently present (the site contains only poor quality habitat for these groups), despite the overall loss.

The new grassland and improved woodland habitats will provide increased nesting and foraging



Photo: Peachy Perch

opportunities for birds. Bats will benefit from improved foraging and commuting opportunities and, as the trees mature in the longer term, potential roost sites.

Once the woodland habitat improvements have established, this area will also be suitable for dormice.

As part of the planning consents 5 years maintenance must be

undertaken following completion of landscaping works. These works are to begin in September 2015. Community engagement was involved at planning stage with National Grid and the local council.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

Landscaping – all drawings and specification are complete and a licenced contractor has been established to begin works in September. A landscape architect will visit site on a monthly basis to oversee that specification and drawing requirements are met.

The 5 years maintenance with the responsibility of the current landowner with the same landscape contractor carrying out landscape maintenance visits. The remaining woodland area will be thinned and planted with understorey species and ground flora to improve its long-term suitability as habitat for a range of wildlife species.

This will increase the biodiversity and nature conservation importance of the site. This will also create a dense native woodland screen, in keeping with the surrounding hedgerows and woodland blocks. This will effectively screen the tallest element of the proposed new substation.

The aim will be to create a sward similar to the MG5 *Cynosurus cristatus*-*Centaurea nigraplant* community in the National Vegetation Classification (Rodwell et al., 1992). The most abundant and/or



Photo: Honeymoon Hotel

frequent species in the MG5 plant community. Seeding will be undertaken in late August or September, using a species mix of British origin and local provenance, which will comprise native species only.

The seed mix will comprise approximately 70% grass and 30% broad-leaved species and will reflect the species composition of the existing semi-natural neutral grasslands in the wider area.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

As an Environmental Advisor involvement began in the planning and design phase, and the interest grew from there.