19th June 2025

Technical Report

Planning Design and Access Statement

Stokes Lane Solar Farm

Stokes Lane Solar Farm Limited

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Document Prepared For

Harry Whittaker
Stokes Lane Solar Farm Limited
22 Grosvenor Gardens,
London,
SW12 0DH

Document Prepared By

Freena Garcia
Assistant Project Manager
planning@atmosconsulting.com

Document Approved By

Anna Bloor
Principal Consultant
planning@atmosconsulting.com

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1. Introduction

This Planning, Design and Access Statement supports an application for planning permission for Stokes Lane Solar Farm (the 'Proposed Development') centred on National Grid Reference (NGR): SU 60781 55757 (the 'Site'). The planning application also includes the grid connection cable route beyond the main solar farm site as shown on Figure 1-1. The Proposed Development lies wholly within the planning authority area of the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (BDBC).

The Proposed Development comprises the installation and operation of a ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and associated infrastructure with a generating capacity of up to 28MW. On site infrastructure includes 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 Site would occupy an area of approximately 87.5 hectares (ha). The layout of the Proposed Development is shown on Figure 1-2.

The underground grid connection route runs from approximately NGR: SU 61404 55834, north of Monk Sherborne Road and then follows this road east, until it adjoins the A340, heading north on Aldermaston Road. At Morgaston Road, the grid connection route terminates at a power pole, tee'd into an overhead line within the Pollards End Copse at approximate NGR: SU 61974 56940.

The operational lifetime of the Proposed Development is 40 years.

This statement presents an overview of the Proposed Development, the site selection criteria and design process and an assessment of the Proposed Development against the applicable planning policies, as well as its potential impacts and benefits.

This statement has been prepared in accordance with the instructions of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment) Order 2013 (UK Government, 2013), which states that:

> *"An application for planning permission to which this article applies shall be accompanied by a statement ("a design and access statement") about—*
>
> *(a)the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development; and*
>
> *(b)how issues relating to access to the development have been dealt with.*
>
> *(3) A design and access statement shall—*
>
> *(a)explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development;*
>
> *(b)demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how the design of the development takes that context into account;*
>
> *(c)explain the policy adopted as to access, and how policies relating to access in relevant local development documents have been taken into account;*
>
> *(d)state what, if any, consultation has been undertaken on issues relating to access to the development and what account has been taken of the outcome of any such consultation; and*
>
> *(e)explain how any specific issues which might affect access to the development have been addressed."*

2. Site Description and Context

2.1.1 The Site

The Site comprises lower lying sections of up to five large arable fields, dispersed into two parcels, located to the north and south of Rookery Farm Lane, south of the village of Monk Sherborne, North of Basingstoke. Rookery Farm Lane which runs approximately southwest to northeast connects to the A339 to the south. The fields are joined by common access tracks, and consist of a series of interlinked agricultural fields, enclosed by typical field boundary hedgerows which contain occasional trees.

In general, the Site parcels lie on sloping, north to northeast facing land to the north of the A339 between Weybrook Park golf course and the villages of Sherborne St John and Monk Sherborne. It is c. 0.7km northwest of the built-up fringes of Basingstoke.

The Site context embraces an area of open, large-scale, gently undulating, arable farmland to the northwest of Basingstoke. It is slightly elevated between c. 125m above ordnance datum (AOD) and c. 95m AOD, with varying degrees of intervisibility but with a general fall of terrain and focus to the north and east to face Basingstoke, from the higher points to the south.

The Site is predominantly used for agricultural purposes with an Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) of 3a (good quality agricultural land) for the majority (>90%) of the four parcels of land to the east of the Site. An elongated area of land running approximately southwest to north east is Grade 2 land (very good quality agricultural land). The most north-westerly parcel of land, to the north of Rookery Farm Lane, is classified as 76% Grade 2 land, 23% as Grade 3b land and 1% as non-agricultural woodland.

2.2 Surrounding Area

Areas surrounding the Site to the south embrace expansive, large scale open, arable farmland and major road corridors, while to the north it embraces a lower lying, heavily wooded, settled landscape. At other points to the east, it includes a variety of contrasting land uses including for leisure in the form of a golf course development, woodland, settlement expansion and the urban edges of Basingstoke. The Site is located immediately adjacent to the Monk Sherborne Conservation Area (CA), and close to the Sherborne St John CA.

The context of the surrounding area around the Site is shown on Figure 1.3: Site Context Plan.

2.2.1 Landscape Designations and Visual Receptors

The Site is not covered by any national or local landscape designations.

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), now National Landscape (NL), is located c. 280m southwest of the Site. The designation is separated from the Site by the A339.

A number of public rights of way (PRoW) run adjacent to the eastern and western Site boundaries and between the eastern parcels at Stokes Lane including the long-distance route the St James Way along the eastern Site boundary.

These PRoW then continue to connect with a wider network of PRoW, connecting the two nearest settlements of Monk Sherborne and Sherborne St John to further recreational routes and long-distance paths to the south. However, to the south side of the Site some PRoW stop and are severed by the road network and the A339, limiting wider connections in the direction.

Please refer to Figure 1-3: Site Constraints which shows the AONB and PRoW network.

2.2.2 Heritage Designations

There is one designated heritage asset within the Site, the grid connection route terminates within the western boundary of the Vyne Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG). There are no World Heritage Sites or Registered Battlefields within 2km of the Site.

The National Heritage List for England (NHLE) and the Historic Environment Records (HER) have identified the following designated assets within 2km of the Site:

- Three Scheduled Monuments;
- Two Grade I Listed Buildings, two Grade II* Listed Building and 47 Grade II Listed Buildings;
- Six locally Listed Buildings; and
- Three Conservation Areas.

Please refer to Figure 1-3: Site Constraints which shows the location of heritage designations in relation to the Proposed Development.

2.2.3 Ecology Designations

There are five statutory designated sites identified within 5km of the Site. These are:

- Pamber Forest and Silchester Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserve (LNR);
- Ron Ward's Meadow with Tadley Pastures SSSI;
- Popley Ponds LNR;
- Cineham Woods (incl. Great Sorrells, Tollhouse, Guinea and Long Copses) LNR; and
- Daneshill Park Woods LNR.

3. Site Selection and Design Evolution

Careful site selection has been undertaken in order to ensure that an efficient, technically and economically viable solar farm can be developed without causing significant adverse environmental impacts. The site selection process consisted of an evaluation of the following:

- Electricity grid connection feasibility including identification of areas with available grid capacity and potential sites with proximity overhead line (132kV);
- Site suitability including identification of sites of a suitable size, orientation and topography with suitable insolation levels. The site must also be accessible for construction and operational purposes;
- Site availability, i.e., landowners willing to offer land for solar development;
- Identification of potential planning issues including national and local level designations (landscape, ecology, heritage);
- Identification of potential environmental constraints including the presence of heritage assets, flood risk and visual receptors; and
- Assessment of access routes and potential constraints were also investigated as well as ground truthing of visibility and presence of habitats.

3.1 Design Principles, Layout and Scale

The design principles of the Proposed Development carry forward the principles applied to site selection through establishing a design that maximises the output of the solar farm, whilst minimising the impact on the environment. Wherever possible, enhancement measures (particularly habitat and biodiversity measures) have been incorporated into the scheme with the design adapted to maximise the benefits.

These factors include establishing buffers between the infrastructure and potential wildlife habitats (such as hedges). A Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) has been undertaken to identify the habitats present and potential species present (refer to: 58759 R1 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Preliminary Ecological Assessment).

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been undertaken to assess the likely effects on landscape character and visual receptors arising from the Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Environmental Statement (ES) Volume 2 Chapter 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment).

A Heritage and Archaeological Impact Assessment (HIA) has been undertaken in order to assess the Proposed Development in relation to designated and non-designated cultural heritage assets (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage).

A Geophysical Survey Report was undertaken in 2023 to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence of potentially significant archaeological anomalies and the character and extent of those anomalies within the survey area (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 3 Technical Appendix 3-3: Geophysical Report).

A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) (refer to: 58759 R3 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Flood Risk Assessment) and Surface Water Drainage Impact Assessment (refer to: 58759 R4 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Drainage Assessment) have been carried out to ensure that the Proposed Development does not result in an increase in flood risk.

A Transport Statement and Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been compiled which takes into consideration the potential construction and operational effects of the

Proposed Development in relation to traffic and access (refer to: 58759 R6 Stokes Lane Solar Farm - Transport Statement and Outline CTMP).

A Glint and Glare Appraisal (GGA) assessing the potential effects from the Proposed Development on road safety, residential amenity and aviation activity has been undertaken. This determined that the potential effects of the design can be operationally accommodated without alteration or mitigation (refer to: 58759 R5 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Glint and Glare Study).

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) was undertaken to evaluate the Proposed Development in relation to existing trees onsite (refer to: 58759 R8 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Arboricultural Impact Assessment).

A Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) was undertaken in support of the planning application to establish the noise impacts on the surrounding area of the Site (refer to: 58759 R9 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Noise Impact Assessment).

Consultation which has been undertaken with the local community has yielded feedback which has been considered as part of the design. This is presented within the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (refer to: Stokes Lane Solar Farm Statement of Community Engagement Report), which provides more information with regards to how the design has taken into account the public's feedback.

3.2 Design Evolution

In response to feedback provided and following initial meetings and contact with the Parish Councils, the design of the Proposed Development was amended as follows:

- Feedback regarding landscape and visual impacts led to the movement of proposed solar PV panels away from Rookery Farm Road;
- The land adjacent to the A339 (Kingsclere Road) was originally considered but then removed on the grounds of its proximity to the North Wessex NL;
- The most northerly part of the north eastern field was removed due to proximity to All Saints Church; and
- The Proposed Development originally extended to the Queens Cottages, but after feedback from Monk Sherborne Parish Council, a 100m buffer between the Site and the cottages, plus additional proposed screening, has been incorporated into the design.

Further measures have been incorporated into the design of the Proposed Development to reduce potential impacts and improve the layout of the Proposed Development, comprising (field numbering is presented on Figure 1-2: Site Layout Plan):

- Removal of panels from higher central Site areas and field sections along both sides of Stokes Lane, which are more visible from the surrounding landscape. At these points panels are set back from the road on both the east and west sides by c. 60m at the narrowest point to the south adjacent to field 1 and up to c.150m to the north adjacent to field 2;
- These set back areas would be retained as farmland with new environmental enhancement buffers to the development edges and adjacent to sensitive receptors such as residents along Stokes Lane. This would also include a new permissive footpath to link and provide better connections within the PRoW network;
- Removal of panels from the northern field sections to the north of field 5 to reduce visibility from adjacent points to the north and west, including the edges of settlement, PRoW and the edges of the Monk Sherborne CA;

- Management of existing field boundaries which are intermittent scrubby and overmature, with new understory and infill planting to gap up and maximize screening potential of these boundaries;
- Screening elements of the Proposed Development from key receptor locations, e.g., users of the PRoW and residential properties adjacent to the Site boundaries;
- The Proposed Development layout was redesigned in order to avoid direct impacts upon potential archaeological finds or features (in particular Assets 106 and 108-109 and the majority of Asset 113 which mark the location of possible prehistoric and Roman features); and
- Proposed solar panels have been set back from the road between Monk Sherborne and Wooton St Lawrence to limit impacts upon the setting and character of the landscape on approach to Monk Sherborne, which is designated as a CA.

Landscape mitigation proposals are incorporated into the Proposed Development design and are illustrated on the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 4 Figure 2-5: LEMP).

4. The Proposed Development

The Proposed Development would comprise the installation and operation of a ground-mounted solar PV farm and associated infrastructure with a generating capacity of up to approximately 28MW. The layout of the Proposed Development is presented in Figure 1.2: Site Layout Plan.

The Proposed Development would comprise:

- A series of linear rows (also known as arrays) of PV solar modules;
- Four power stations;
- Internal access roads;
- Cabling;
- Customer and DNO substations;
- Spare parts containers;
- Security fencing and CCTV;
- A temporary construction compound; and
- Enhanced landscaping.

In a solar energy generation system, the solar module comprises multiple PV cells. The PV cells are composed of semiconducting materials and when daylight hits the module, a voltage develops between the semiconductor materials and a direct current is generated.

As the current generated by this process is Direct Current (DC) and the distribution system is designed for Alternating Current (AC), solar generation facilities require the use of inverters to convert DC to a useable AC.

The inverters convert the DC to AC immediately after generation. The AC is then fed through the transformer, where the voltage is stepped up and transmitted to the distribution network. The modules would be fixed to a dual-axis solar tracker system able to take advantage of the most optimum angle for solar panels for renewable energy generation.

The proposed solar farm would include principal components described below.

4.1.1 PV Solar Modules

The solar farm would use state-of-the-art polycrystalline PV modules. The modules ensure optimal use of solar irradiation and perform very efficiently at different angles to the sun. The PV modules would generate electricity with no air emissions, no waste production and no water use. The modules are fixed to a simple galvanised steel supporting frame with a -60 to 60 degree inclination during operation hours (refer to: Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 1: Bifacial Panel Elevations).

4.1.2 PV Arrays

Each array of modules is approximately 12m wide. Typically, there are 30 modules per array.

In order to avoid shading by adjacent rows and to ensure optimum energy yield in the winter months the rows would be spaced approximately 3.5m apart, depending on local variations in topography. The rows would be aligned east to west and south facing. There would be a stand-off around the end of each array to allow for facility maintenance, access and ecological and landscape enhancements.

The supporting structure is pile driven vertically into the ground to a depth of approximately 1.5m. When the modules are fixed to the supporting frame, the modules would reach a maximum height

of 3.1m above the ground level. The lowest point of the modules is approximately 1.0m above ground and designed to allow sheep to graze underneath the arrays.

4.1.3 Site Access

Primary access to the Proposed Development would be taken from two new priority junctions from Rookery Farm Lane.

Site access point 1 is an existing field access, to access the area of the Site west of Rookery Farm Lane and is on the outside of a bend so visibility splays are maximised in each direction from the access point.

Site access point 2 is located on the east side of Rookery Farm Lane and would see the formation of a new access junction to serve the development.

Plans of the proposed access junctions and the associated visibility splays are contained within Appendix B of '58759 R6 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Transport Statement and Outline CTMP'.

A designated construction route has been identified for this development, which is via the A339 from the east, before a right turn on to Rookery Farm Lane where the Site would be accessed from. No construction traffic would arrive from the west of the A339. The construction route would be identified within the CTMP and measures would be put in place to prevent traffic from using other routes which are prohibited.

A Framework CTMP has been produced and presented within the TS (refer to: 58759 R6 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Transport Statement and Outline CTMP) to demonstrate that adequate arrangements can be put in place to minimise and control the construction traffic impacts from the 12 month construction phase of the Proposed Development along with any associated environmental impacts.

4.1.4 Proposed Access Tracks

Approximately 1.9km of new internal access track is proposed and would be approximately 3.5m wide. The tracks would be designed to have sufficient radii for turning of the construction vehicles and plant. The access tracks have been designed to avoid sensitive features and are constructed, where possible, along the path of existing farm tracks and utilising existing gates.

The locations of the proposed internal tracks are shown on Figure 1.2: Site Layout Plan.

The access track and internal tracks would be constructed using compacted graded crushed aggregate from the Site. At the end of the construction works a main track would be built through the interior of the plant mode of ballast to a minimum depth of 30cm (refer to: Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 9: Road Cross Section). No puddles or ponds should form at the sides of the track.

4.1.5 Power Stations

The solar farm requires four power station in total. An indicative power station and elevation is shown on 'Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 2: Power Station Elevation'.

The power stations comprise an intelligent inverter system and a small transformer. The power station is a power conversion device which changes the DC electricity generated by the PV modules into grid-compliant AC electricity and feeds this into the local electricity distribution network.

The transformer is an electrical device that alters the ratio of current and voltage in power to meet the requirements of transmission grids and devices. The power stations are 12.2m long, 2.4m wide and 2.9m high.

4.1.6 Customer Cabin

One customer cabin is required for the Proposed Development and to contain electrical safety switchgear, used to control, protect and isolate electrical equipment at the solar farm (refer to: Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 4: Customer Station Elevation). The customer cabin would be 12.72m long, 4.03m wide and 3.0m high. It would be coloured dark green to ensure it blends into the existing environment.

4.1.7 Spare Parts Container

There would be one container onsite to store spare parts (refer to: Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 5: Spare Parts Container Elevation).

The container would be 13.7m long, 2.4m wide and 2.6m high.

4.1.8 Security Fence and Gates

For security and safety purposes the solar farm would be closed to the general public throughout the construction and operation phases via security fencing and a locked access gate.

A 2.6m high security fence would be installed around the perimeter of the solar farm (refer to 'Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 6: Fence and Gates Elevation'). The fence would be placed around the solar farm at the start of the construction programme and would remain for the duration of the operation of the Proposed Development.

A main steel gate would also be erected, approximately 2m high, and 6m wide.

The fence would be designed to allow small animals to pass through the solar farm and would be placed behind existing and proposed hedges to ensure it blends into the natural setting and existing environment.

4.1.9 Security Cameras and Lighting

CCTV cameras pointing into the solar farm would be installed within the fencing for security purposes (refer to: Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 7: CCTV Elevation). The CCTV cameras would be mounted on poles up to 2.4m high. There would be no external artificial lighting during operation of the Proposed Development.

4.1.10 Temporary Construction Compound

To ensure the efficient management of the construction phase, two temporary construction compounds would be set up for the duration of the estimated 12 month construction phase. An indicative temporary construction compound layout is provided in Stokes Lane Solar Farm Technical Drawing 10: Indicative Temporary Construction Compound.

The two construction compounds would be located within the Site boundary to facilitate the construction of the Proposed Development. The compounds would provide sufficient space for:

- Site offices;
- Storage of site vehicles and materials;
- The safe loading and unloading of materials; and

- Staff vehicle parking.

The construction compound would require the laying of a temporary roadway and walkway system on the existing ground surface. The construction compound would be removed at the end of the construction period and the area restored to its original condition.

4.1.11 Electrical Layout and Grid Connection

The solar farm would connect into the SSEN distribution network via a new 33 kilovolt (kV) dual circuit. The dual circuit would be laid underground from a new 33kV metering substation at the solar farm site, to a point of connection (POC) at the existing SSEN overhead line, where it crosses Morgaston Road. The new 33kV cables would exit the ground at the base of two SSEN wood poles, connect to the poles and terminate onto the overhead lines.

The underground grid connection route would run from approximately NGR: SU 61404 55834, north to Monk Sherborne Road. The grid connection route would then follow the road east, until it adjoins the A340, heading north on Aldermaston Road. At Morgaston Road, the grid connection route terminates at the power pole at approximate NGR: SU 61974 56940.

4.1.12 Development Phases

Construction

The construction of the Proposed Development is anticipated to take approximately 12 months. Construction would be controlled through a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), which would implement specific measures to ensure good practice and set out control measures and mitigation as required during construction.

Operation and Decommissioning

The operational period of the Proposed Development is anticipated to be 40 years. After which the panels and associated infrastructure would be decommissioned and removed, and the Site restored to its original condition.

At the end of the Proposed Development's lifespan, the predicted effects are reversible as the land would be returned to its former agricultural use, similar in form to its current state and land use. The timescales for the decommissioning and site restoration is anticipated to be six months.

5. Potential Effects

5.1 Landscape and Visual

An ES LVIA Chapter has been undertaken in support of the planning application for the Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Chapter 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment).

The Proposed Development would introduce a new vertically low, medium-scale renewable energy feature into large scale arable farmland, at a transitional point which is surrounded by a mix of natural and built features and land uses, between the northwestern edges of Basingstoke, north of the A339 infrastructure and the North Wessex Downs NL and south of a more wooded settlement landscape.

At this point, the landscape is defined by gently sloping landform to the north and northwest / northeast towards Basingstoke and by a mix of landcover enclosures with more wooded boundaries and areas to the north and larger scale, open arable fields to the south. This setting is reasonably typical of the defined character within the landscape character of the area in Local Character Area (LCA) 16: Basingstoke Down in the immediate site setting.

The overall design of the Proposed Development has considered landscape and visual effects within the confines of the five arable fields to ensure the effects upon the landscape and visual receptors are limited.

To this end, the development has been reduced in scale and extent through an iterative design process. This has included removal of panels from significant set back areas from the higher more open slopes to the south and also at separate points from the nearest sloping field sections closer to settlement to the north. The solar array has also included various other set backs from field boundaries and PRoW where more open views are available from longer stretches such as the west side of Stokes Lane to retain and enhance the amenity of adjacent residential properties. The development has also been pulled back from key boundaries of the Site including eastern boundaries of Field 1 with mitigation planting and new biodiversity enhancement areas at these locations.

The proposed mitigation and enhancement landscape measures along the Site boundaries and set back areas combined with management of other existing field boundaries would also assist in reducing the duration of effects and aid in retaining and improving the field boundaries in line with local strategies in the published character assessments for LCA 16.

Direct landscape effects would include changing the prevailing arable land use to a dual use, renewable energy generation with potential for grazing and with landscape character and biodiversity enhancements. The solar PV panel layout has been designed to retain existing vegetation within the Site as far as possible and no notable tree or hedgerow sections would be removed.

The overall field scale that is characteristic of the Site and the surrounding landscape would remain but within an improved field boundary structure and views to surrounding features including hedgerows and ridgelines and to wider skylines would be retained.

LVIA effects are considered to be relatively localised to points within or adjacent to the Site and to a small isolated section of the nearest settlement edges at Sherborne St John, with intermittent partial visibility likely. Most other views would be limited and heavily filtered to small sections of the Site.

Clear and open views where larger sections of the Site are visible, are likely to be restricted. This is particularly so from more values landscapes including the North Wessex Downs NL and its immediate setting to the south of the A339 which provides a physical and perceptual barrier from points around the Site context to the north.

Where visible, the solar PV panels would sit at mid-points of the large scale arable sloping farmland but importantly below more distant skylines when seen from most lower points to the north and mostly in views interspersed by a series of undulating ridges with increased wooded enclosures to the north. This would allow views to the landscape beyond the Site. In the medium to long term the proposed mitigation would mature, screening views towards the Proposed Development.

The Site is not located within any landscape designations or any areas or features of high landscape or scenic value. While it does lie close to the southernmost tip of a NL, due to intervening topography and road infrastructure and proposed landscape mitigation, impacts are likely to be limited to the Site itself and the immediate setting within the eastern sections of the LCA 16 facing towards Basingstoke.

In the medium to long-term, the proposed landscape mitigation planting along the boundaries and set back areas would help to screen the large majority of the Proposed Development in views, as well as integrating the Proposed Development into the surrounding landscape.

The only significant residual effects established through the LVIA relates to receptors located close to the Site, and landscape effects on the host Landscape Character Area, Basingstoke Down, during the Construction Phase and one year into the operation of the Proposed Development. Once mitigation planting has matured, medium to long-term effects to these areas would reduce and would be Not Significant.

At the end of the Proposed Development's lifespan, the predicted effects are reversible as the land would be returned to its former agricultural use, similar in form to its current state.

5.2 Ecology

A PEA and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Plan has been undertaken in support of the planning application for the Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 R1 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Preliminary Ecological Assessment, and 58759 R2 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Biodiversity Net Gain report, respectively).

Habitats

The habitats on the Site are generally of limited ecological value and are typically widespread in the wider area. Hedgerows are considered a Habitat of Principal Importance in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (UK Government, 2006).

Hedgerows should be retained and incorporated into the design, or replaced to ensure there is no net loss of the boundary feature. If any hedgerow is to be lost, these should be replaced with more valuable native species-rich intact hedgerows, which may be shorter in total length than existing species-poor hedgerows, to still retain ecological value. It should be ensured that ecological connectivity across the Site via these linear features is retained.

Amphibians and Reptiles

The common toad is listed as a priority species under the NERC Act 2006 (UK Government, 2006). The Site is sub-optimal for the common toad, with the intensively farmed arable fields providing little cover at ground level, and there being numerous areas of bare ground. There are no recent records of amphibians close to the Site, and due to the lack of breeding habitat within the Site and the limited extent of suitable terrestrial habitat, it is considered unlikely that amphibian species would be impacted by the development proposals.

All native reptile species are afforded partial protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (UK Government, 1981). The Site is limited in its suitability for reptiles, due to the disturbance caused by arable farming, lack of connecting vegetation cover and limited hibernation habitat. The hedgerows and adjacent field margins are potentially more suitable for reptiles, but are fairly isolated in the landscape. On the basis that these habitats are not likely to be affected by the proposed development, no impacts on reptiles are anticipated.

Habitat creation includes the creation of modified grassland under the solar panel array. The planting of species rich grassland around the edge of the Site, patches of scrub planting, new hedgerow planting, infilling of current hedgerows and trees belt planting are proposed to be planted throughout the Site. These habitats offer more suitable terrestrial habitat for commuting, foraging and for both amphibians and reptiles than the current arable habitat dominating the Site. The hibernation potential for amphibians and reptiles would also increase through the creation of four herptile hibernacula within the Site.

Badgers

There were limited recent records of badger in close proximity to the Site. Two outlier setts used by rabbits at the time of the surveys are located along the north western field margin of the northern field and there was also evidence of badger moving through the Site; a latrine was found at the south of the Site and along areas of the grid connection. Badgers are a widespread and mobile species and it is likely that if badgers are present in the wider area, they may range onto the Site and create new setts within the Site. It is therefore recommended that a pre-commencement badger check be undertaken prior to any works.

A number of enhancements are being put in place as a result of the Proposed Development. The planting of grassland throughout the Site would result in an increase in foraging and commuting habitat for badger. A number of new hedgerows and line of trees are proposed to be planted within the Site this would increase the suitable habitat for both badger sett creation and commuting.

Bats

All native bat species and their roosts are protected as UK and European protected species, and are listed as priority species under the Hampshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). Nine such species being identified by records within 2 km of the Site.

Hedgerows onsite may provide some foraging opportunities for bats and likely provide commuting pathways across the landscape. Large scale heavy construction is not a feature of solar farms, however, it is recommended that if any nocturnal lighting is to be used in the development then it does not directly illuminate any of these habitat features and that any lighting scheme is designed to minimise impacts on commuting or foraging bats, such as the use of lighting cowls to limit upwards and horizontal light spill.

The Proposed Development avoids hedgerows and trees, and existing access points are used wherever possible. Using existing access points would avoid any loss or fragmentation of potential flightline habitat, and thus the need for bat surveys. The current hedgerows onsite are being improved through infilling and new hedgerows and line of trees are proposed to be planted which would result in an increase of commuting habitat for bats within the Site and wider area.

Other enhancements within the Site for bats include the creation of wildflower rich grassland mix species within the Site would enhance the habitat for bat foraging by enhancing the habitat for invertebrates resulting in an increased food source. Bat roosting habitat would also be increased within the Site with six bat boxes proposed to be installed.

Birds

The habitats onsite provide nesting space for a range of bird species during the breeding season. The hedgerows and trees onsite support a range of nesting farmland birds including linnet, white throat and yellowhammer and other confirmed breeding species utilizing the boundary features or within the buffer include species such as dunnock, moorhen, chiffchaff and black cap.

The arable habitat within the Site supported a total of 34 breeding skylark territories. The construction phase has the potential to temporarily disturb breeding ground nesting birds if present, and may cause them to abandon their nest. However, it is possible that the current baseline agricultural practices could also have this effect if they were timed in the breeding season. It is likely that the cessation of agricultural practices post-development and appropriate habitat management would improve the suitability of the Site for nesting birds.

Whilst barn owls were not recorded in the surveys, records were returned from the record search from Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC). The field margins and rougher areas on the golf course could provide suitable foraging habitat, and this would be retained.

It is therefore important that any vegetation clearance works, or any other works that could potentially disturb nesting birds, avoids the bird breeding season (typically March to August inclusive). If this is not possible, then a nesting bird check should be carried out prior to the work commencing within an area.

It is not considered there would be impacts to passerine birds or non-ground nesting birds as the hedgerows and boundary features would be retained, with only the arable fields being lost to the development. There would be an increase in nesting opportunities within the Site with the planting of new hedgerows, gapping of existing hedgerows, line of tree planting, native woodland planting and the installation of six bird boxes throughout the Site.

Two skylark mitigation plots are proposed to be provided as part of the development to offer mitigation for the loss of confirmed skylark breeding territory. It is also recommended that the hedgerows are enhanced through the planting of trees which would provide additional nesting bird habitats.

Invertebrates

The dominant arable habitats on the Site are common and widespread and unlikely to support a wide range of invertebrate species of importance. HBIC returned numerous records of notable invertebrate species within 2 km of the Site.

Hedgerow habitats are likely to be of comparatively greater value than the arable habitats, although this would depend on crop type and farming regime. The arable habitats are to be lost as part of the proposed development, and with the move away from more intensive farming techniques it is unlikely that there would be long-term negative impacts on invertebrate species.

The planting of wildflower rich grassland mix around the field margins and grassland under the solar panel array would further enhance the Site for these species groups.

Other Mammals

Free movement to/from the Site for protected mammal species should be maintained via the inclusion of small gaps at the base of any surrounding security fencing.

The Proposed Development would provide more opportunities for other mammals within the Site through the planting of wildflower grassland around the field margins and grassland under the solar

panel array. The enhancement of the current hedgerows through in filling and creation of new hedgerows would increase suitable habitats for harvest mouse.

Non-Native Invasive Species

The data search returned three records of Japanese knotweed from 2015, including one record located adjacent to the north west of the Site, however, no non-native invasive species were identified onsite during the survey. If this species is found to have encroached onto the Site then appropriate biosecurity measures should be put in place to prevent its spread.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

It has been demonstrated that the Proposed Development would achieve the minimum statutory requirement for BNG with the overall biodiversity net gain for area habitats of **64.23%** and overall biodiversity net gain for linear habitat of **34.56%.**

This overall biodiversity net gain for the area based habitats is achieved through the creation of other neutral grassland, modified grassland, mixed scrub and the retention of higher distinctness habitats such as other woodland broadleaved. The overall biodiversity net gain for the linear based habitats is achieved through the retention of most linear features, the enhancement of hedgerows to be species rich native hedgerows and creation of new species rich native hedgerows.

The implementation of habitat enhancement and creation measures would likely result in a BNG and calculations indicate that this net gain would be well in excess of the 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

A supporting LEMP (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 4 Figure 2-5: LEMP) is provided to outline the proposed habitat creation and enhancements from the Proposed Development.

5.3 Heritage and Archaeology

A Cultural Heritage ES Chapter has been produced in support of the planning application for the Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage).

The Chapter identifies the archaeological and cultural heritage value of the Site and assesses the potential for direct physical and setting effects on heritage assets resulting from the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development. The Chapter also identifies measures that should be taken to mitigate predicted adverse effects.

National planning policies and planning guidance as well as local planning policies require that account is taken of potential effects upon heritage assets by proposed developments and that where possible such effects are avoided. Where avoidance is not possible these policies require that any significant effects on remains be minimised or offset.

Impacts upon the settings of designated assets such as World Heritage Sites, Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Conservation Areas, Registered Battlefields and Registered Gardens are a material consideration in the planning process.

It is predicted that there would be a neutral level of direct effect on the Grade II Registered Park and Garden The Vyne (Asset 48).

It is predicted that there would be direct effects on the non-designated heritage Assets 105, 107-113, 116, 162, 173 and 174). Significant effects have been assessed on Assets 116 &174. It is envisaged that a detailed piling plan could be produced for these areas post-determination which

would minimise impacts upon these assets by ensuring that piles were placed sensitively. Where this does not prove feasible, archaeological excavation of these assets, via a suitably worded planning condition, would be undertaken to preserve them by record. The level of effect on Asset 113 is Minor adverse and Not Significant. However an archaeological excavation, via a suitably worded planning condition, would be undertaken on aspects of Asset 113 subject to impact by the Proposed Development.

Asset 162 is an example of medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow. Surviving ridge and furrow remains form a low but noticeable percentage of farmland across the UK. Therefore they can be considered to be of Negligible importance. Therefore it is recommended that the area of Asset 162 is subject to a watching brief during any excavated groundworks which would impact these remains.

It is also recommended that a watching brief should be undertaken on any excavated groundbreaking works which would cross Stokes Lane (Asset 173).

A watching brief would be maintained on groundbreaking works which would comprise excavation near or within a 50m buffer of known non-designated heritage assets within the Site.

The purpose of the watching brief would be to identify archaeological remains threatened by the Proposed Development, to assess their significance and to mitigate any impact upon them either through avoidance or, if preservation in situ is not warranted, through preservation by record.

If significant archaeological remains are identified during the watching brief, there is the potential that further works, such as excavation and post-excavation analyses, could be required. Details of mitigation would be agreed with County Archaeological Services in consultation with Basingstoke and Deane District Council through a WSI.

Where avoidance and minimisation is not possible, the proposed mitigation would not remove the impact but it would ensure that the impact is offset by ensuring preservation by record. As such there would be minimal loss of information content.

Potential operational effects on the settings of designated heritage assets within 2km of the Site have been considered as part of this assessment. No significant setting effect have been identified. At most effects would be minor adverse and not significant and any harm would be less than substantial.

The possibility of cumulative effects has also been assessed. No significant cumulative effects have been identified.

5.4 Flood Risk and Drainage

A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and a Drainage Assessment (DA) have been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development.

Flood Risk Assessment

The FRA (refer to: 58759 R3 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Flood Risk Assessment) investigated the mechanisms for flooding at the Site. The Environment Agency (EA) Flood Map for Planning indicates the Site and the proposed cable route to be located in Flood Zone 1: Low Probability.

An assessment of flood risk from all identified potential sources of flooding has been undertaken using best available information. The risk of flooding to the Proposed Development is assessed to be negligible/low, with the exception of some small areas of low to high pluvial surface water risk due to a shallow overland flow pathway and ponding within localised depressions in the Site topography.

Surface water flooding is indicated along the proposed cable route. However, the grid connection comprises an underground cable. As such, the cable would not be affected by flooding, nor increase flood risk. During installation, the cable would be laid along trenches with relatively small extents of trenches being excavated and re-instatement generally occurring on the same day. No spoil would be stored within the surface water flood extents indicated. As such, the construction works would not increase flood risk elsewhere.

The assessment presented in the FRA demonstrates that the Proposed Development may be completed in accordance with the requirements of planning policy subject to the following:

- Flood pathways associated with surface water runoff and runoff associated with existing drainage ditches not to be obstructed by the substation or PV power stations; and
- Ground under the PV solar panel drip line to be seeded with a suitable grass mix to prevent rilling and an increase in surface water runoff rates.

The proposals would not be expected to have an adverse impact on flood risk elsewhere in accordance with the NPPF.

Drainage Assessment

The DA (refer to: 58759 R4 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Drainage Assessment) undertaken for the Proposed Development, presents a preliminary scheme for the management of surface water from the Proposed Development. A summary of the principal findings is provided below:

- The site comprises greenfield land with no formal drainage. Runoff is expected to infiltrate where conditions allow and flow overland in a direction determined by topography;
- Surface water runoff is proposed to discharge into the ground via infiltration swales located adjacent to access tracks, and two infiltration basins;
- An infiltration rate of 1 x 10^{-5} m/s (0.036 m/hr) has been utilised for the purposes of this assessment;
- The proposed swales and basins will provide attenuation storage and include a total volume of 1,368.2 m³ across the site.;
- Any exceedance flows will follow the natural topography, mimicking the current arrangement;
- The use of infiltration swales and basins will provide the necessary pollution mitigation measures to ensure satisfactory water quality treatment is provided; and
- The site operator or their appointed management company will be responsible for maintenance.

In conclusion, this report demonstrates that the Proposed Development will be completed in accordance with the requirements of national and local planning policy.

5.5 Glint and Glare

A GGA (refer to: 58759 R5 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Glint and Glare Assessment) has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development. This assessment considered the potential impacts on ground-based receptors such as road users and residential dwellings as well as aviation assets.

A 1km survey area around the Site was considered for the assessment of ground-based receptors, whilst a 10km study area was considered for aviation receptors. The GGA assesses the potential effects of glint and glare concerning aviation activity at Walkeridge Farm airfield and Shear Down Farm airfield.

Solar reflections are not geometrically possible towards sections of the A339 and the A3940.

Screening in the form of existing vegetation and/or existing buildings is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels such that solar reflections would not be experienced by road users along the A3940 and a total of 800m of the A339. No impact is predicted along these sections, mitigation is not required.

For the remaining 300m of the A339, screening in the form of existing vegetation and intervening terrain is predicted to partially obstruct view of reflecting panels, resulting in fleeting views of reflecting panels. The remaining views of reflecting panels do not occur directly in front of the driver and coincide with direct sunlight. A low impact is predicted along these sections, mitigation is not recommended.

Solar reflections are geometrically possible towards 50 of the 91 assessed dwellings.

For 45 of the dwellings, screening in the form of existing vegetation and/or intervening terrain is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels such that solar reflections would not be experienced by residents. No impact is predicted, and mitigation is not required.

For five of the dwellings, existing vegetation or intervening terrain is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels for an observer on the ground floor with marginal views from observers above the ground floor considered possible. A low impact is predicted, and mitigation is not recommended.

For aviation activity associated with Walkeridge Farm Airfield, any solar reflections are predicted to be acceptable in accordance with the associated guidance due to the following two factors:

- Glare intensities towards pilots where the proposed development is within their primary field-of-view are predicted to be ‘low potential for temporary after-image’;
- Solar reflections would be outside the pilot’s primary field-of-view.

Therefore, no significant impacts are predicted upon aviation activity Walkeridge Farm Airfield and detailed modelling is not recommended.

For aviation activity associated with Shear Down Farm Airfield, solar reflections with ‘potential for temporary after-image’ (‘yellow’ glare) are predicted towards the final section of the visual circuit for runway 22 at Shear Down Farm Airfield. This glare scenario has been considered in the context of the aerodrome’s operations and due to the reflections coinciding with the sun, a much more significant source of light, and the low volume of air traffic expected at the private airfield, a low impact is predicted.

Solar reflections towards pilots on the 1-mile splayed approach paths for runway threshold 22 would occur outside the pilot’s primary field of view (50 degrees either side of direction of travel). This is not considered significant in accordance with the associated guidance and industry best practice. A low impact is predicted, and mitigation is not required.

Solar reflections with ‘low potential for temporary after-image’ (‘green’ glare) are predicted towards the visual circuit and splayed approaches for runway threshold 04. This level of glare intensity is considered acceptable in accordance with the associated guidance and industry best practice. A low impact is predicted, and mitigation is not required. It is recommended that the GGA report is shared with the safeguarding team of Shear Down Farm Airfield to determine their position on the proposed development.

Overall, a low impact is predicted upon road safety, residential amenity and aviation activity. Mitigation is not recommended.

5.6 Traffic and Transport

A Transport Statement (refer to: 58759 R6 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Transport Statement and Framework CTMP) has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development.

The Site is considered to be well-located for a development of this nature, with good connections to the wider road network. The route to the Site is from the A339 arriving from the east, then north on Rookery Farm Lane.

Access to the Site would be taken by means of two new priority junctions from Rookery Farm Lane.

Site access point 1 is an existing field access and is on the outside of a bend so visibility splays are maximised in each direction from the access point. Access point 2 is located on the east side of Rookery Farm Lane and will see the formation of a new access junction to serve the development

The vehicle trip generation of the Proposed Development would be negligible at the operational stage, and as such, it is considered that it can be accommodated without detriment to the local road network over the longer term.

The construction period is expected to last for 12 months and there are estimated to be a total of 651 two-way HGV trips. These trips would be relatively well spaced and are not likely to occur during peak periods. The impact of these trips is not considered to be significant in terms of capacity of the road network. There would also be up to 15 car / LGV trips per day associated with construction staff movements.

Staff would be expected to arrive onsite by 08:00 and would typically depart between 15:00 and 18:00. Given the expected level of traffic generation, it is not anticipated that the development would create additional congestion or delay on the strategic or local road network.

Once operational, only maintenance visits would be required. The TS concludes that the development proposals can be accommodated without detriment to the local road network at both the construction and operational stages.

There would be some localised delay in relation to the grid connection works along the public road. The vehicle numbers associated with such works are not expected to be significant but the works may require some temporary traffic control measures in order to deliver. It is noted that these works would not be delivered by the applicant but would instead be delivered by a utility provider under statutory powers.

A framework Construction Stage Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been produced and presented within this TS to demonstrate that adequate arrangements can be put in place to minimise and control the construction traffic impacts from the construction phase of the Proposed Development along with any associated environmental impacts.

Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development can be accommodated without detriment to the local road network at both the construction and operational stages.

5.7 Arboriculture

An AIA has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 R8 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Arboricultural Impact Assessment).

The AIA evaluates the Proposed Development in relation to existing trees onsite. This assessment has been carried out in accordance with the principles and guidance set out in British Standard 5837:2012 ‘Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations’.

All trees within influencing distance of the proposed works both onsite and on adjacent land have been surveyed. These trees are detailed within the Tree Survey Schedule (Appendix 1 of the AIA) and are plotted on all relevant accompanying plans.

Eighteen individual tree, twenty-seven groups and five hedgerows were surveyed and mapped on a Preliminary Tree Constraints & Impact Assessment Plan Ref: 25/AIA/BDBC/01, Drawing No. 1 & 2 at Appendix 2 of the AIA. All arboricultural information recorded during the survey is presented within a schedule at Appendix 1 of the AIA.

Following onsite consultation with Tree Solutions and a detailed review of the survey findings and constraints plan, the Proposed Development layout has been carefully developed to ensure no adverse impacts on trees and hedgerows. The design reflects a responsible and informed approach to tree retention and protection.

No trees or hedgerows are proposed for removal to facilitate the development. Furthermore, no adverse construction impacts are anticipated, as all proposed works are located well outside of designated Construction Exclusion Zones.

Detailed tree protection measures would be set out within an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) and Tree Protection Plan (TPP), which would be submitted to discharge any related planning conditions.

The proposal demonstrates full compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2025), policies EM1 & EM4 of the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (BDBC) adopted Local Plan 2011 (BDBC, 2016). It also adheres to the principles outlined in BS 5837:2012 (BSI, 2012), particularly with respect to the retention and protection of existing trees throughout the design and construction phases.

Considering the above, it is considered there to be no valid arboricultural grounds for refusal of the application.

5.8 Agricultural Land

Two Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys and reports have been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 R7A and R7B Stokes Lane Solar Farm Agricultural Land Classification).

The *58759 R7A Stokes Lane Solar Farm Agricultural Land Classification* report was undertaken in October 2022 by Soil Environmental Services Ltd based on an older iteration of the Proposed Development layout.

The *58759 R7B Stokes Lane Solar Farm Agricultural Land Classification* report was undertaken in April 2025 by Ceres Rural LLP to survey the additional parcel of land to the northwest of the Proposed Development (24ha) which was not covered by the 2022 report.

The two ALC surveys covered a total of 75ha of land at the Site, and classified:

- 22.24ha (29.65%) as ALC Grade 2 (very good quality agricultural land);
- 47ha (62.66%) as ALC Grade 3a (good quality agricultural land);
- 5.59ha (7.45%) as ALC Grade 3b (moderate quality agricultural land); and
- 0.22ha (0.29%) as Non-Agricultural Land (woodland).

5.9 Noise

A NIA has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 R9 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Noise Impact Assessment).

A noise model has been used to determine predicted noise levels resulting from the operation of the Site at the surrounding receptors.

The assessment shows that unmitigated noise levels do not exceed the assigned background noise level of 35 dBA at the 21 closest identified sensitive receptors.

BS4142:2014 states that the lower the rating level is relative to the measured background sound level, the less likely it is that the specific sound source will have an adverse impact. Where the rating level does not exceed the background, this is an indication of the specific sound source having a low impact, depending on the context.

In accordance with BS4142:2014+A1:2019, this assessment shows that the Proposed Development noise emissions are likely to have a low impact.

The Proposed Development complies with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council's Noise Guidance Note, as the Proposed Development is not predicted to exceed background sound levels.

6. Planning Policy Assessment

6.1 Development Plan

Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act and Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 together require that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of this application, the Development Plan comprises:

- Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011 to 2029) (BDBC, 2016);
- Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan (Hampshire County Council, 2013); and
- Sherborne St John Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2029 (BDBC, 2024).

In May 2016, BDBC adopted the Local Plan 2011 to 2029. The adopted Local Plan forms part of the statutory development plan for the borough. It sets out the Council's vision and strategy for the area until 2029 and will provide the basis for decisions on planning applications.

The following sections identify the Development Plan policies and material considerations relevant to this application. An assessment is also provided of the Proposed Development against the relevant policies.

Additional material policy considerations for the Proposed Development are derived from global and national energy and planning policy as set out in the National Policy Statement, the National Planning Policy Framework (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), 2024), and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) on renewable and low carbon energy.

6.2 Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011 to 2029)

This Local Plan has been prepared to provide a strategic evidence base for Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders, including Community Right to Build Orders.

Policies which are considered relevant to this application within the Local Plan include:

- Policy SD1: Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development;
- Policy EM1: Landscape;
- Policy EM2: Strategic Gaps;
- Policy EM4: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Conservation;
- Policy EM5: Green Infrastructure;
- Policy EM6: Water Quality;
- Policy EM7: Managing Flood Risk;
- Policy EM8: Commercial Renewable/Low Carbon Energy Generation;
- Policy EM11: The Historic Environment;
- Policy EM12: Pollution; and
- Policy EP4: Rural Economy.

Policy SD1 - Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development

This policy states that:

> *"When considering development proposals the council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. It will always work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.*
>
> *Planning applications that accord with the policies in this Local Plan (and, where relevant, with polices in neighbourhood plans) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.*
>
> *Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:*
>
> - *Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole; or*
> - *Specific policies in that Framework indicate that development should be restricted."*

The Proposed Development has undergone an extensive site assessment process to ensure that the proposed solar farm complies with local planning policy and NPPF, and is considered to be situated in an appropriate location. The application is supported by a number of studies including noise, landscape and ecology that demonstrate that the Proposed Development will not have a long term adverse impact upon the surrounding area and its environs.

The Proposed Development would contribute to the UK Government's renewable energy goals and will displace fossil fuel-based generation of electricity through the generation of approximately 31,935MWh of electricity per annum; enough renewable electricity to meet the needs of approximately 9,390 homes per annum.

Regarding improving the economic conditions in the area, there are likely to be work opportunities generated for local contractors during the construction and on-going operation of the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development will also provide social benefits by increasing PRoW connectivity, through inclusion of a new permissive footpath to link and provide better connections within the PRoW network. The proposed permissive path is illustrated on *58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 4 Figure 2-5: LEMP*.

Further to this, the Proposed Development has been demonstrated that it will improve BNG well over the statutory 10% set out in the NPPF.

Therefore, it is considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy SD1 and that any short term harms are demonstrably outweighed by the proposed benefits of Project Development.

Policy EM1: Landscape

This policy states that:

> *"Development will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated, through an appropriate assessment, that the proposals are sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area concerned. Development proposals must respect, enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the landscape likely to be affected, paying particular regard to:*

a) *The particular qualities identified within the council's landscape character assessment and any subsequent updates or relevant guidance;*
b) *The visual amenity and scenic quality;*
c) *The setting of a settlement, including important views to, across, within and out of settlements;*
d) *The local character of buildings and settlements, including important open areas;*
e) *Trees, ancient woodland, hedgerows, water features such as rivers and other landscape features and their function as ecological networks;*
f) *Intrinsically dark landscapes;*
g) *Historic landscapes, parks and gardens and features; and*
h) *The character of the borough's rivers and tributaries, including the River Loddon and Test, which should be safeguarded. Development proposals must also respect the sense of place, sense of tranquillity or remoteness, and the quiet enjoyment of the landscape from public rights of way. Development proposals will not be accepted unless they maintain the integrity of existing settlements and prevent their coalescence.*

Where appropriate, proposals will be required to include a comprehensive landscaping scheme to ensure that the development would successfully integrate with the landscape and surroundings. The assessment of character and visual quality and the provision of a landscaping scheme should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed."

The Proposed Development is considered to comply with this policy. The LVIA (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) for this application includes the assessment of the likely effects of the Proposed Development in respect of landscape and visual matters, including Landscape Character Types and Areas.

The Proposed Development would introduce a new vertically low, medium-scale renewable energy feature into large scale arable farmland, at a transitional point which is surrounded by a mix of natural and built features and land uses, between the northwestern edges of Basingstoke, north of the A339 infrastructure and the NWD NL and south of a more wooded settlement landscape.

The overall design of the Proposed Development has considered landscape and visual effects within the confines of the five arable fields to ensure the effects upon the landscape and visual receptors are limited.

The proposed mitigation and enhancement landscape measures along the Site boundaries and set back areas combined with management of other existing field boundaries would also assist in reducing the duration of effects and aid in retaining and improving the field boundaries in line with local strategies in the published character assessments for LCA 16.

The conclusions of the assessment are consistent with the landscape related policy context and objectives for the area where the findings of this LVIA demonstrate that for the Proposed Development:

- The Proposed Development is *"…sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area concerned"*;
- The Proposed Development with its designed set backs and site reductions, maintains *"…the integrity of existing settlements*"; and

- The siting and design integrates with the landscape with a "*…comprehensive landscaping scheme to ensure that the development would successfully integrate with the landscape and surroundings*".

The Proposed Development has been designed in a sensitive and appropriate manner and is considered to be in accordance with local and national planning policy. Where adverse effects arise, mitigation has been used to reduce the degree of harm and to provide a characteristic scheme that assimilates into the landscape. Therefore, the Proposed Development accords with Policy EM1 of the Development Plan.

Policy EM2: Strategic Gaps

This policy states that:

> *"In order to prevent coalescence of built-up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected:*
> *Basingstoke -Sherborne St John*
> *Development in gaps will only be permitted where:*
> *a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and*
> *b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or*
> *c) it is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders."*

It is understood that the north of Basingstoke, up to the edges of Sherborne St John and including the Weybrook Park Golf Club and its landscape to the east of the Site, is covered by a Strategic Gap, as defined by Policy EM2. As the ZTVs indicate, there is some potential for visibility of the Proposed Development across the western sections of the gap, including parts of the golf course. It also shows that these would be at the lower end of visibility.

The LVIA (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) has concluded that all relevant and notable direct and indirect effects as a result of the Proposed Development would arise within the northeastern sections of LCA 16 where they are more influenced by a mix of other surrounding landscape and urban influences.

The remaining western and southern sections of the LCA and its key sensitivities where they overlap with and form the fringe landscapes and clearer setting to the NL would remain unaffected. As noted in the baseline, no adjacent LCAs or LCTs would be affected to any notable extent given the levels of enclosure and intervening tiers of screening.

This would also be the case for other local designations including the Strategic Gap to the east. Although there would be some potential for views from the western extents of this area, across other modified landscapes including the golf course, the Site is located to the rear of notable wooded field boundaries to the west of this area which would help to reduce the overall influence across this area.

Therefore, the Proposed Development is considered to comply with Policy EM2.

Policy EM4: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Conservation

This policy states that:

> 1. *"Development proposals will only be permitted if significant harm to biodiversity and/ or geodiversity resulting from a development can be avoided or, if that is not possible, adequately mitigated and where it can be clearly demonstrated that:*

a) *There will be no adverse impact on the conservation status of key species; and*
b) *There will be no adverse impact on the integrity of designated and proposed European designated sites; and*
c) *There will be no harm to nationally designated sites; and*
d) *There will be no harm to locally designated sites including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs); and*
e) *There will be no loss or deterioration of a key habitat type, including irreplaceable habitats; and*
f) *There will be no harm to the integrity of linkages between designated sites and key habitats.*

The weight given to the protection of nature conservation interests will depend on the national or local significance and any designation or protection applying to the site, habitat or species concerned.

2. *Where development proposals do not comply with the above they will only be permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that there is an overriding public need for the proposal which outweighs the need to safeguard biodiversity and/ or geodiversity and there is no satisfactory alternative with less or no harmful impacts. In such cases, as a last resort, compensatory measures will be secured to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and, where possible, provide a net gain.*
3. *Applications for development must include adequate and proportionate information to enable a proper assessment of the implications for biodiversity and geodiversity.*
4. *In order to secure opportunities for biodiversity improvement, relevant development proposals will be required to include proportionate measures to contribute, where possible, to a net gain in biodiversity, through creation, restoration, enhancement and management of habitats and features including measures that help to link key habitats.*

   Approaches to secure improvements could be achieved through:

   a) *A focus on identified Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Biodiversity Priority Areas as identified in the councils Green Infrastructure Strategy (and subsequent updates) where appropriate; and through*
   b) *On-site and/ or off-site provision linked to new development in accordance with the council's adopted green space standards."*

A landscaping plan has been provided in support of the application (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 4 Figure 2-5: LEMP), which supports the PEA (refer to: 58759 R1 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Preliminary Ecological Assessment). The PEA and LEMP outline the proposed habitat creation and enhancements from the Proposed Development.

Habitat creation includes the creation of modified grassland under the solar panel array. The planting of species rich grassland around the field boundary and to the south of the Site within the 'additional areas of environmental enhancement and BNG' and the planting of other broadleaved woodland. Further details on habitat conditions are detailed within the BNG report. Hedgerows would be enhanced by the infilling of any gaps with local native species and additional species rich hedgerows with trees planted throughout the Site. If any area of hedgerow needs to be removed as part of the works, a further hedgerow survey would be required.

It has been demonstrated in the BNG report (58759 R2 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Biodiversity Net Gain Plan) that the Proposed Development would achieve the minimum statutory requirement for BNG. The report demonstrates that:

- The overall BNG for area habitats is 64.23%; and

- The overall BNG for linear habitats is 34.56%; and

This well exceeds the 10% statutory minimum requirement for BNG. The enhancements to the existing habitats, coupled with reduction of farming activities would ensure that the Proposed Development has the potential to provide an improvement to Basingstoke and Deane's biodiversity. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy EM4.

Policy EM5: Green Infrastructure

This policy states that:

> *"Development proposals will only be permitted where they do not:*
> *a) Prejudice the delivery of the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy (and subsequent updates);*
> *b) Result in the fragmentation of the green infrastructure network by severing important corridors/links; or*
> *c) Result in undue pressure on the network which cannot be fully mitigated.*
> *d) The council will support proposals which seek to improve links and remedy identified deficiencies in the green infrastructure network in accordance with the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy.*
> *The council will seek to protect and enhance the quality and extent of public open space and public rights of way (…)*
> *Development proposals will be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that green infrastructure can be provided and phased to support the requirements of proposed development and be in accordance with the council's adopted green space standards."*

It is considered that the Proposed Development constitutes green infrastructure, would actively assist in mitigation of impacts of climate change and would seek to actively enhance habitats and biodiversity (refer to: 58759 R1 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Preliminary Ecological Assessment and 58759 R2 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Biodiversity Net Gain report). The Proposed Development seeks to improve green infrastructure through the provision of improved hedgerows and tree planting within the Site. The design also incorporates new permissive footpath connections which "*seek to improve links*" in accordance with the BDBC Green Infrastructure Strategy. This is demonstrated in *58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 4 Figure 2-5: LEMP.*

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy EM5.

Policy EM6: Water Quality

This policy states:

> *"In the interests of positively managing the water quality of the borough, new development should incorporate sustainable drainage systems…*
>
> *In order to protect and improve water quality, potentially contaminating development proposals on principal aquifers or within Source Protection Zones will need to demonstrate that groundwater and surface water is adequately protected to prevent a deterioration of water quality and pollution of the water source. Development proposals adjacent to a watercourse will incorporate measures to protect the watercourse in accordance with the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the actions of the River Basin Management Plans."*

A DA (refer to: refer to: 58759 R4 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Drainage Assessment) has been undertaken in support of the application and shows that the bedrock at the Site is classified as a principal aquifer. The southern boundary of the Site is shown to be located at the extremity of a designated Zone III - Total Catchment Groundwater Source Protection Zone (GSPZ).

The Site comprises greenfield land with no formal drainage. Runoff is expected to infiltrate where conditions allow and flow overland in a direction determined by topography. Surface water runoff is proposed to discharge into the ground via infiltration swales located adjacent to access tracks, and two infiltration basins. The DA shows that the use of infiltration swales and basins will provide the necessary pollution mitigation measures to ensure satisfactory water quality treatment is provided.

Therefore, the DA demonstrates that the Proposed Development will be completed in accordance with the requirements of planning Policy EM6.

Policy EM7: Managing Flood Risk

This policy states:

> *The sequential approach to development, as set out in national guidance, will be applied across the borough, taking into account all other sources of flooding as contained within the council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). Development within areas of flood risk from any source of flooding, will only be acceptable if it is clearly demonstrated that it is appropriate at that location, and that there are no suitable available alternative sites at a lower flood risk. Development proposed in an area at risk of flooding will be required:*
>
> *a) To be supported by a Flood Risk Assessment25 (FRA) (subject to the triggers set out below);*
> *b) To clearly demonstrate that the benefits of the development to the community, outweigh the risk of flooding when applying the sequential test and exception test (where required);*
> *c) When applying the sequential test, to clearly demonstrate that the impacts of climate change are taken into account as identified in the SFRA;*
> *d) To provide a safe access and egress route up to a 1 in 100 year event plus climate change; and*
> *e) To attenuate surface water run-off so that the run-off rate is no greater than the run-off prior to development taking place or, if the site is previously developed, development actively reduces run-off rates and volumes.*
>
> *(…)*
>
> *All planning applications for major development are required to ensure that sustainable drainage systems are used for the management of surface water unless demonstrated to be inappropriate. All new developments in areas at risk of flooding must give priority to the use of sustainable drainage systems.*

The FRA (refer to: 58759 R3 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Flood Risk Assessment) has been undertaken in support of this application. The risk of flooding to the Proposed Development is assessed to be negligible/low, with the exception of some small areas of low to high pluvial surface water risk due to a shallow overland flow pathway and ponding within localised depressions in the Site topography.

The DA (refer to: 58759 R4 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Drainage Assessment) has been undertaken in support of this application. The DA demonstrates that the proposed drainage system would incorporate adequate water quality treatment as per the CIRIA sustainable drainage system (SuDS) manual. An indicative maintenance schedule is presented in the DA.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development would not be expected to have an adverse impact on flood risk and is consistent with Policy EM7.

Policy EM8: Commercial Renewable/Low Carbon Energy Generation

This policy states that:

> *"Development proposals for the commercial generation of energy from renewable and low carbon resources (excluding wind turbines) will be permitted unless there are adverse environmental, economic or social impacts, including any long-term and cumulative adverse impacts which are not outweighed by the benefits. This includes development and the use of renewable/low carbon energy which will contribute towards the delivery of the Energy Opportunities Plan (and any subsequent updates).*
>
> *Impacts include air quality and emissions, biodiversity and geological conservation, high grade agricultural land, flood risk, the historic environment including heritage assets, the landscape and visual appearance, traffic generation, the local highway network and water quality. Impacts also take into account the use of Greenfield land versus previously developed land.*
>
> *The council will take a strategic view of applications, to avoid clusters where inappropriate.*
>
> *Proposals will need to demonstrate their links to the existing infrastructure, such as the road network or national grid."*

As a clean form of electricity generation the Proposed Development would result in the reduction of potentially harmful emissions from conventional fossil fuel generation. The proposed solar farm would generate up to 28MW of electricity generation, therefore contributing to energy production from renewable sources.

The need to decarbonise the electricity grid in response to the climate crisis is ongoing as reflected in National Energy Policy, as set out in Section 6.2 of this Statement.

The potential impacts on the residential amenity (people), the natural environment, biodiversity and historic assets has been assessed through the technical assessments undertaken in support of this application. These demonstrate that the Proposed Development would not result in significant, demonstrable harm. The ES has also concluded that there would be no unacceptable adverse impact cumulatively with other developments.

The Proposed Development includes provision of the grid connection and therefore demonstrates its link to an agreed point of connection to the national grid.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy EM8.

Policy EM11: The Historic Environment

This policy states that:

> *"All development must conserve or enhance the quality of the borough's heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.*
>
> *Development proposals which would affect designated or non-designated heritage assets will be permitted where they:*
>
> *a) Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting, how this has informed the proposed development, and how the proposal would impact on the asset's significance. This will be proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset and the potential impact of the proposal;*
> *b) Ensure that extensions and/or alterations respect the historic form, setting, fabric and any other aspects that contribute to the significance of the host building;*

c) *Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the significance, character and setting of conservation areas and how this has informed proposals, to achieve high quality new design which is respectful of historic interest and local character;*
d) *Conserve or enhance the quality, distinctiveness and character of heritage assets by ensuring the use of appropriate materials, design and detailing; and*
e) *Retain the significance and character of historic buildings when considering alternative uses and make sensitive use of redundant historic assets."*

The HIA (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage) demonstrates that the Proposed Development would result in less than substantial harm to the settings of nearby designated heritage assets (up to 2km).

It is predicted that there would be a neutral level of direct effect on the Grade II Registered Park and Garden The Vyne (Asset 48).

It is predicted that there would be direct effects on the non-designated heritage Assets 105, 107-113, 116, 162, 173 and 174). Significant effects have been assessed on Assets 116 and 174. It is envisaged that a detailed piling plan could be produced for these areas post-determination which would minimise impacts upon these assets by ensuring that piles were placed sensitively. Where this does not prove feasible, archaeological excavation of these assets, via a suitably worded planning condition, would be undertaken to preserve them by record. The level of effect on Asset 113 is Minor adverse and Not Significant. However an archaeological excavation, via a suitably worded planning condition, would be undertaken on aspects of Asset 113 subject to impact by the Proposed Development.

Asset 162 is an example of medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow. Surviving ridge and furrow remains form a low but noticeable percentage of farmland across the UK. Therefore they can be considered to be of Negligible importance. Therefore it is recommended that the area of Asset 162 is subject to a watching brief during any excavated groundworks which would impact these remains.

It is also recommended that a watching brief would be undertaken on any excavated groundbreaking works which would cross Stokes Lane (Asset 173).

The implementation of appropriate mitigation measures as set out above, would minimise the direct impacts resulting from the Proposed Development. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy EM11.

Policy EM12: Pollution

This policy states that:

> *"Development will be permitted provided that it does not result in pollution which is detrimental to quality of life, or poses unacceptable risks to health or the natural environment."*

An NIA (refer to: 58759 R9 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Noise Impact Assessment) has been produced in support of the application. The NIA demonstrates that the Proposed Development would not generate high levels of noise with the NIA concluding noise impacts would be below the 35db daytime limit. The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy EM12.

Policy EP4: Rural Economy

This policy states that:

> *"To support the rural economy, development proposals for economic uses in the countryside will be permitted where they:*

a) *Are on previously developed land; or*
b) *Are for a change of use or conversion of a suitable permanent building; or*
c) *Are for a replacement building that is not temporary in nature or for an extension to an existing building, provided that the proposal should not require substantial rebuilding, extension or alteration, and should not result in the requirement for another building to fulfil the function of the building being converted or replaced; or*
d) *Enable the continuing sustainability or expansion of a business or enterprise, including development where it supports a farm diversification scheme and the main agricultural enterprise; or*
e) *Are for a small-scale new business, provided it is not in an isolated location.*

All development proposals must be well designed and of a use and scale that is appropriate to the site and location when considering:

f) *landscape, heritage and environmental impacts;*
g) *the accessibility of the site;*
h) *the impacts on the local highway network including the type of traffic generated, the appropriateness for the rural roads and the impact on their character; and*
i) *the need for residential accommodation on site.*

Development proposals that result in an increase in HGVs on C and U class roads, or a significant increase in other traffic on C and U class roads will generally not be permitted."

The Proposed Development would contribute towards the low carbon economy and provide socio-economic benefits to the locality. The Proposed Development would support farm diversification including changing the prevailing arable land use to a dual use, renewable energy generation with potential for grazing and with landscape character and biodiversity enhancements. This change in use will ensure the long term viability of the farm holding, in accordance with section d) of Policy EP4.

The potential impacts on landscape, heritage and environmental impacts, accessibility and traffic has been assessed through the technical assessments undertaken in support of this application. These demonstrate that the Proposed Development would not result in significant, demonstrable harm.

The Proposed Development has been designed in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Where adverse effects arise, mitigation has been used to reduce the degree of harm and to provide a characteristic scheme that assimilates into the landscape.

Therefore, the Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy EP4.

6.2.1 Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan

There are no policies in the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan that are relevant to the consideration of this application.

6.2.2 Sherborne St John Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2029

The Proposed Development is located in an area covered by the Sherborne St John Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2029 (BDBC, 2024). The Plan was originally published in 2017 and has since been modified; the updated version of the Plan was made by Full Council on 16 May 2024. The Plan forms part of the Development Plan and will be used to guide planning decisions in the Parish.

As an overview, the plan notes that the settlement of Sherborne St John:

> *"is recorded in the Domesday Book and has been closely linked with the influence derived from the inhabitants of The Vyne (a Grade II listed Tudor mansion, and its Registered Park and Garden – now belonging to the National Trust) since the 16th Century."*

The Plan notes further reference to the Strategic Gap above and notes that:

> *"The avoidance of coalescence is of utmost importance and proposals for a gap were firmly supported by the Parish. It is one of this Plan's objectives that the closing of the gap between Sherborne St John village and Basingstoke town should be avoided. Policy EM2 seeks to ensure that this erosion is avoided."*

The Plan also noted two constraints of particular importance, when considering the delivery of development. They are:

> *"…an extensive conservation area that covers both the northeastern and northwestern extremities of the village and the area of countryside to the south of the village edge which maintains the vital separation between Sherborne St John and Basingstoke."*

Regarding *"landscape*" matters, the Plan confirms (inter alia) that:

> *"The village of Sherborne St John itself is generally well contained by the surrounding landform. It rests within a hollow on the spring line, where the upper chalk to the south abuts the mottled clay to the north. The centre of the village is low-lying and contains areas prone to flooding, while the area to the north and south is generally on higher land. The rural area of the Parish does not contain any areas of significant sensitivity, although the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lies around two miles to the east of Sherborne village."*

The potential effects of the Proposed Development on the designated and non-designated heritage assets within the Site have been assessed in *58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage.*

The proposed grid connection route would directly impact a small area of the Grade II Registered Park and Garden of the Vyne (Asset 48). This impact would be restricted to the west to east aligned Morgaston Road that heads into the Vyne from its junction with the south to north aligned A340. Furthermore the impact would be restricted to the width required to lay a power grid connection. The Vyne as a Grade II Registered Park and Garden can be considered to have an importance of Medium. The level of impact is considered to be Negligible at worse and would result in a level of effect of Neutral and Not Significant.

The ES Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage provides a thorough assessment of the Monk Sherborne Conservation Area (Asset 1) and Sherborne St. John Conservation Area (Asset 2). One further Conservation Area, Park Prewett (Asset 3) is also located within 2km of the Site.

Regarding Assets 1 and 2, the ES Chapter concludes that that given the Medium relative sensitivity of the Monk Sherborne Conservation Area and Sherborne St John Conservation Area to changes beyond the boundary of the villages of Monk Sherborne and Sherborne St John, it is considered that the resulting effect would be Neutral adverse and Not Significant. This would result in no harm in terms of the NPPF.

Concerning the Strategic Gap, the Proposed Development will not result in closure of the gap between Sherborne St John village and Basingstoke town.

The potential effects of the Proposed Development on landscape effects has been assessed in *58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.*

With regards to visual amenity and views, the Sherborne St John Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2029 notes key views within and around the Parish. Of relevance to the Proposed Development is 'Key View 15: View looking south from public footpath heading west from Dixon's Corner'. This key view is focussed on the rising farmland to the south of the settlement but on fields primarily to the east of the Site. This view is represented by VP 5 in the VP assessment (see Figure 2-10 in Volume 4 of this ES).

Therefore, the Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with the Sherborne St John Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2029 (BDBC, 2024).

6.2.3 National Planning Policy Framework (February 2025)

The NPPF (MHCLG), 2025) was last updated on 7 February 2025, and replaces the last revision of the NPPF in December 2023 (originally published in March 2012).

The central theme of the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as detailed in Paragraph 11 which for Local Planning Authorities decision-taking means:

> *"…c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
>
> *d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date , granting permission unless:*
>
> *i. The application of policies in this framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
>
> *ii. Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination ."*

Section 14 of the NPPF is of direct relevance to renewable energy generation. Paragraph 161 states that in order to increase the use of renewable and low carbon energy generation:

> *"The planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and take full account of all climate impacts including overheating, water scarcity, storm and flood risks and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure."*

Paragraph 168 states that when LPAs determine planning applications for renewable and low-carbon development, they should;

> *"not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the proposal's contribution to a net zero future"; and*

Paragraph 169 states that:

> *"Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas."*

Other sections of the NPPF are also relevant to the development of a solar farm in the countryside, these include:

Paragraph 88, which states that in supporting the rural economy, Planning policies and decisions should enable; *"the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses".*

Solar farm development can be seen as a form of farm diversification, to provide additional income to support agricultural production on the rest of the farm unit.

Paragraph 187 states that decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by; *"…minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity…"* This is demonstrated in the findings of the Ecological Assessment and the incorporation of biodiversity enhancement measures into the overall design.

Paragraph 187b) states that planning decision should "*[recognise the] wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland*".

The footnote to Paragraph 65 states that; *"Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality should be preferred to those of a higher quality."*

Two Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys and reports have been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development (refer to: 58759 R7A and R7B Stokes Lane Solar Farm Agricultural Land Classification). The two ALC surveys covered a total of 75ha of land at the Site, and classified:

- 22.24ha (29.65%) as ALC Grade 2 (Very good quality agricultural land);
- 47ha (62.66%) as ALC Grade 3a (good quality agricultural land);
- 5.59ha (7.45%) as ALC Grade 3b (moderate quality agricultural land); and
- 0.22ha (0.29%) as Non-Agricultural Land (woodland).

The best and most versatile (BMV) land is defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the ALC.

The policies in NPFF (notably Paragraph 187b) and the footnote to Paragraph 65), indicate that careful consideration needs to be given to the use of BMV land but whilst the use of poorer quality land is preferred, there is no prohibition on the use of BMV land.

In reference to the recent appeal decision *Burcot Solar Farm Limited Vs South Oxfordshire District Council*, which was allowed on 4 March 2025, the Inspector concluded that due to the nature of solar farm development, allowing dual-use of solar PV and continued grazing beneath the panels, the proposed solar farm "*would not result in either temporary or permanent loss of BMV land for agriculture".* Furthermore, it was accepted that *"the construction of the solar farm involves limited disturbance to soils"* (Planning Inspectorate, 2025). The appeal was allowed despite the Site comprising 100% BMV agricultural land. Please refer to the Appeal Decision appended to this Statement.

The Proposed Development land will be continued to be used for agricultural purposes, changing to dual use, with potential for sheep grazing, return fully to agricultural use at the end of the 40 year lifetime of the development. Therefore, the Proposed Development would not result in the permanent loss of this BMV land.

The resting of the land from intensive arable farming would also improve soil health as demonstrated in a recent publication by Lancaster University which shows that techniques like rotational grazing

where livestock are regularly moved between different pastures can give the land time to recover, boost plant growth and diversity and increase the soil's capacity to capture carbon (Carvalho et al., 2024).Paragraph 207 states that when determining planning applications local authorities should require an applicant to describe local heritage assets, and prepare a desk-based assessment, and where necessary, a field evaluation, where the Site has or has the potential to include heritage assets. Accordingly, an assessment of the potential impacts on cultural heritage assets is provided with the planning application (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage), which concludes that there will be no significant adverse impact as a result of the Proposed Development.

The Proposed Development therefore complies with the requirements of NPPF and is supported in principle.

6.2.4 Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) and National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)

NPPF Paragraph 5 states that National Policy Statements (NPS) (EN-1):

"form part of the overall framework of national planning policy, and may be a material consideration in preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications."

As such, EN-1 (and EN-3 (see below)) are part of national planning policy and are material considerations in the determination of this application.

The Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ, 2023a and updated in 2024)) and the Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (DESNZ, 2025) state that:

> *"In England, this NPS, in combination with any relevant technology specific NPSs, may be a material consideration in decision making on applications that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)."* (DESNZ, 2023a – paragraph 1.2.1)

EN-1 sets out the Government's overall commitment to increasing renewable energy capacity (paragraph 2.3.6):

> *"We need to transform the energy system, tackling emissions while continuing to ensure secure and reliable supply, and affordable bills for households and businesses. This includes increasing our supply of clean energy from renewables, nuclear and hydrogen manufactured using low carbon processes…"*

EN-3 goes on to clarify in paragraph 2.1.7 that there is an assumed need for renewable energy projects:

> *"As stated in Section 4.2 of EN-1, to support the urgent need for new low carbon infrastructure, all onshore and offshore electricity generation covered in this NPS that does not involve fossil fuel combustion (that is, renewable generation, including anaerobic digestion and other plants that convert residual waste into energy, including combustion, provided they meet existing definitions of low carbon) are considered to be Critical National Priority (CNP) infrastructure."*

The principle of the Proposed Development is therefore supported by current UK Government Policy.

6.2.5 Planning Policy Guidance

The UK Government's Planning Practice Guidance website includes a section for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (MHCLG et al., 2015), the key theme of which builds upon the wording of part 14 of the NPPF.

This highlights the importance of renewable energy generation to the UK's security of electricity supply and greenhouse gas reduction targets but makes clear that planning permission would only be granted where the impacts at the specific site are, or can be made, acceptable.

With respect to large scale ground mounted solar farm developments the Planning Practice Guidance provides the following relevant factors for local authorities to consider:

> *"Where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays."*

The majority of the Site is sited on Grade 2 very good quality agricultural land with poor ecological value. Measures proposed to enhance the biodiversity value of the Site are presented in the Preliminary Ecological Assessment and outlined in Section 5.2.

> *"The proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety."*

The proposal's visual impact is analysed in the LVIA (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) while the impacts of the Site on aviation and glint and glare are also assessed in the Glint and Glare Assessment (refer to: 58759 R5 Stokes Lane Solar Farm Glint and Glare Assessment).

The glint and glare assessment concludes a low impact is predicted upon road safety, residential amenity and aviation activity and that no mitigation is recommended.

With respect to lighting and security measures the Planning Practice Guidance provides the following:

> *"The need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing."*

The security measures proposed include a 2.6m high fence and CCTV cameras. No perimeter lighting or permanent site illumination is required. The proposed fence has been selected to be appropriate for an agricultural setting.

With respect to Cultural Heritage, the Planning Practice Guidance provides the following:

> *"Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are considered in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset."*

An assessment of the potential effects on cultural heritage assets has been conducted (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 2 Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage).

Significant effects have been assessed on Assets 116 and 174. A detailed piling plan, which outlines the locations of the proposed piling locations within the Site would be produced for these Assets post-consent, secured through a condition to the planning permission, which would aim to minimise impacts upon these assets by ensuring that piles were placed sensitively. Where this does not prove feasible, archaeological excavation of these assets would be undertaken to preserve them by record.

A watching brief would be maintained on groundbreaking works which would comprise excavation near or within a 50m buffer of known non-designated heritage assets within the Site. Archaeological

monitoring and recording, otherwise known as a watching brief is a formal programme of observation, investigation and recording conducted during works carried out for non-archaeological reasons, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed.

The purpose of the watching brief would be to identify archaeological remains which would be subject to direct impacts by the Proposed Development. The watching brief would also assess their significance and to mitigate any impact upon them either through avoidance or, if preservation in situ is not warranted, through preservation by record.

If significant archaeological remains are identified during the watching brief there is the potential that further works, such as excavation and post-excavation analyses, could be required. Details of mitigation would be agreed with County Archaeological Services in consultation with Basingstoke and Deane District Council through a Written Scheme of Investigation.

Where avoidance and minimisation is not possible, the proposed mitigation would not remove the impact but it would ensure that the impact is offset by ensuring preservation by record. As such there would be minimal loss of information content.

Impacts upon the settings of designated assets such as World Heritage Sites, Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Conservation Areas, Registered Battlefields and Registered Parks and Gardens are a material consideration in the planning process.

Potential operational effects on the settings of designated heritage assets within 2km of the Site have been considered as part of this assessment. No significant setting effects have been identified.

The possibility of cumulative effects has also been assessed. No significant cumulative effects have been identified.

6.2.6 UK Solar PV Strategy Part 1: Roadmap to a Brighter Future

The UK Government is committed to meeting our renewable energy targets, which are set out in national policy through the Climate Change Act of 2008. Section 13 of this Act states that there is a duty for the Secretary of State to prepare proposals and policies for meeting carbon reduction targets. These obligations fall to Local Planning Authorities.

In 2011 the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) published the UK Renewable Energy Roadmap, which was updated in 2012 and 2013 (DECC, 2013a). This presents the framework for the delivery of renewable energy deployment in the UK; it reiterates the Government's commitment to meeting our renewable energy targets.

2013 also saw the publication of the UK Solar PV Strategy Roadmap (DECC, 2013b) which states that: *"Solar photovoltaic (PV) technology is a mature, proven technology and is a reliable source of renewable energy with an important role to play in the UK energy generation mix."*

Paragraph 13 of this Strategy notes that presently solar PV accounts for 12% of renewable electricity capacity in the UK.

6.2.7 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change: The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015) is a legally binding agreement signed by 196 parties in 2015 at COP21 in Paris with an overarching goal to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

It required signatories to submit climate action plans (termed Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)) on a five-year cycle with the next submission due in 2025.

The Paris Agreement forms the basis of the UK's climate policies with the targets associated with the rollout of renewable energy and the reduction in carbon emissions aligned to the UK's obligations in relation to the Paris Agreement.

6.2.8 The Clean Growth Strategy: Leading the way to a low carbon future

The Clean Growth Strategy (UK Government, 2017) sets out the UK Government's proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy through the 2020s. It explains how the whole country can benefit from low carbon opportunities, while meeting national and international commitments to tackle climate change.

6.2.9 A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment

The policy paper 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' (UK Government, 2018) sets out the UK Government's goals for improving the environment, within a generation. It details how government will work with communities and businesses to do this.

The Environmental Improvement Plan (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2023) for England is the first revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan. It builds on the 25YEP vision to set out how the UK Government will deliver each of their environmental goals.

6.2.10 National Grid Future Energy Scenarios

The Future Energy Scenarios: Pathways to Net Zero (NESO, 2025) methodology document sets out the purpose of Future Energy Scenarios (FES), considering how the National Energy System Operator (NESO) assesses and develops credible routes to net zero through extensive analysis, research and stakeholder engagement.

6.2.11 Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (IPCC, 2018) outlines in detail that limiting warming to 1.5°C would require unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society. The report stresses the huge benefits to human welfare, ecosystems and sustainable economic development in keeping warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C, or higher.

The report underlines that we are already seeing the consequences of 1°C of global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice, among other changes.

Limiting warming to 1.5°C is technically possible but this would entail global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) declining by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 to zero by 2050. At the current rate of emissions, the world will reach 1.5°C warming by between 2030 and 2052 and is on track for more than 3°C to 4°C warming by 2100.

6.2.12 UK Climate Change Risk Assessment

The third UK Government Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3) (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2022) report outlines the UK Government and devolved administrations' position on the key climate change risks and opportunities that the UK faces.

The Technical Report for the CCRA3 identified 61 UK-wide climate risks and opportunities across multiple sectors such as energy; agriculture; people; transport and biodiversity if there is a 2- and 4-degree global warming scenario (Betts and Brown, 2021).

Of the 61 climate risks and opportunities, 34 risks are assessed as 'more action needed' at a UK-wide level. This means that new, stronger, or different government action is required in the next five years over and above those already planned.

Some of the risks include:

- Risk to soils from changing climatic conditions, including seasonal aridity and wetness;
- Risks and opportunities for natural carbon stores, carbon sequestration and GHG emissions from changing climatic conditions, including temperature change and water scarcity;
- Risks to and opportunities for agricultural productivity from extreme events and changing climatic conditions (including temperature change, water scarcity, wildfire, flooding, coastal erosion, wind and saline intrusion);
- Risks to infrastructure services from river, surface water and groundwater flooding;
- Risks to public water supplies from reduced water availability;
- Risks to health and wellbeing from high temperatures;
- Risks to people, communities and buildings from river and surface flooding; and
- Risks to UK food availability, safety, and quality from climate change overseas.

6.2.13 Committee on Climate Change: 2024 Report to Parliament – Reducing UK emissions

In July 2024 the CCC produced a report to the UK Parliament on the progress made towards meeting the UK's Climate goals (CCC, 2024).

The report is clear that;

> *"…the country is not on track to hit this target despite a significant reduction in emissions in 2023. Much of the progress to date has come from phasing out coal generated electricity, with the last coal-fired power station closing later this year. We now need to rapidly reduce oil and gas use as well."*

It identifies that;

> *"…almost all our indicators for low-carbon technology roll-out are off track, with rates needing to significantly ramp up"*

Identifying that installation rates for both offshore and onshore wind are slightly off track, the report states that:

> *"solar installations must increase by five times"*

The report assesses

> "*progress on 28 key indicators of demand, technology uptake and underlying enablers. Of the 22 that have a benchmark or target to compare against, only five are assessed as being on track….. This slow progress in uptake is occurring despite the fact that key technologies, such as electric vehicles, batteries and solar panels, have fallen quickly.*"

The report identifies that:

> *"Total operational capacity for solar was 16 GW in 2023. Achieving the Government's ambition of 70 GW by 2035 will require more than 4 GW to be installed each year on average. This is more than five times the average amount added over the past three years but is not*

much higher (around 10% higher) than the highest annual installations seen to date, which occurred in 2015."

6.2.14 Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability – Summary for Policymakers

The Sixth Assessment report (IPCC, 2022) assesses the impacts of climate change, looking at ecosystems, biodiversity, and human communities at global and regional levels.

The report recognises the interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies and integrates knowledge more strongly across the natural, ecological, social and economic sciences than earlier IPCC assessments. The assessment of climate change impacts and risks as well as adaptation is set against concurrently unfolding non-climatic global trends e.g., biodiversity loss, overall unsustainable consumption of natural resources, land and ecosystem degradation, rapid urbanisation, human demographic shifts, social and economic inequalities and a pandemic.

6.2.15 Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener

In October 2021, the UK Government's (2021) Net Zero Strategy was presented to the UK Parliament In accordance with Section 14 of the Climate Change Act 2008 (UK Government, 2008). It acknowledges the devastating impact that the increase of global temperatures has already had on the UK through flooding and disruption to major services.

In line with the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015), reference is made to potentially catastrophic events that will unfold should global warming increase above 1.5 degrees. It is recognised that in order to meet the Paris Agreement, urgent global action is needed hence why the UK called for ending coal fired power generation, retiring petrol and diesel engines from all cars, and halting deforestation at COP26.

The strategy sets out clear policies and proposals for keeping the UK on track for forthcoming carbon budgets, ambitious NDC, and the UK Government's vision for a decarbonised economy in 2050.

The strategy has a number of commitments for reducing emissions across the economy in relation to power generation. For instance, the target that the UK government will take action so that by 2035, all electricity will come from low carbon sources, bringing forward the government's commitment to a fully decarbonised power system by 15 years.

In 2019, net UK GHG emissions from the power sector totalled 58 tonnes of CO_2 and accounted for 11% of total net UK GHG emissions. This is a reduction of 72% between 1990 and 2019. In 1990, the power sector accounted for 23% of UK GHG emissions. This has largely been achieved through renewables and natural gas generation displacing coal.

The UK Government's vision is that low carbon forms of energy generation will be the paradigm shift away from the use of unabated oil and gas. Low carbon energy is expected to account for a 50% or higher share of final energy consumption. This shift to low carbon energy is expected to account for up to 76% reduction in emissions by 2030; up to 85% by 2035 and 98% by 2050, when compared with 2019 emissions.

In delivering this strategy of decarbonising the power sector, significant public and private investment is needed and will see new employment opportunities across the UK. The UK Government estimate that policies and proposals to reduce emissions in the sector could support up to 59,000 jobs by 2024 and up to 120,000 jobs by 2030.

The recently published Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (UK Government, 2024) states that one of the key benefits of the plan is the creation of new job opportunities, with an estimated £40 billion on average per year between 2025-2030, spreading the economic benefits of clean energy investment throughout the UK. The huge investment in the development of wind, solar, and other renewable energy projects, will see a surge in demand for skilled workers in these industries and the industries and services that support their deployment.

6.2.16 British Energy Security Strategy

The British Energy Security Strategy (DEZNZ et al., 2022), focuses on how the Government plans to provide the UK with energy security and increased independence from a volatile international market.

The policy paper sets out ambition of a five-fold increase in overall solar capacity by 2035:

> *"For ground-mounted solar, we will consult on amending planning rules to strengthen policy in favour of development on non-protected land, while ensuring communities continue to have a say and environmental protections remain in place.*
>
> *We will continue supporting the effective use of land by encouraging large scale projects to locate on previously developed, or lower value land, where possible, and ensure projects are designed to avoid, mitigate, and where necessary, compensate for the impacts of using greenfield sites.*
>
> *We will also support solar that is co-located with other functions (for example, agriculture, onshore wind generation, or storage) to maximise the efficiency of land use. We have also included solar in the latest Contracts for Difference auction round and will include it in future rounds."*

6.2.17 Seventh Carbon Budget – Advice for the UK Government

In February 2025, the CCC published its advice to the UK Government for the seventh Carbon Budget covering the years 2038 to 2045. This is recommending an emissions cap of 535 $MtCO_2e$.

Under the CCC's Balanced Pathway to Net Zero, electricity generation is identified as a key route to reaching the budget. According to the CCC, a projected increase in demand due to the electrification of the economy (possibly doubling by 2050 from 2023 levels), a significant increase in renewable energy generation will be needed.

The CCC's Balanced Pathway therefore requires solar capacity to increase to 82GW by 2040, compared to 16GW in 2023. This will require recent annual installation rates:

> *"…to almost quadruple this decade, reaching similar levels to the historical peak seen in 2015. The cost of solar has fallen significantly in recent years, and is expected to fall further in our pathway, from £52/MWh to £29/MWh by 2040.* "
>
> *"For solar, an average deployment rate of 3.4 GW per year is needed. This requires build rates to grow to around the historical peak (4.1 GW in 2015) this decade."*

This increase in deployment of solar by 2050, is estimated to:

> *"require around 1% of UK land for solar"*

6.2.18 Clean Power 2030

Clean Power 2030 (DESNZ, 2024 and updated 2025) was published in December 2024 with the UK government confirming that delivering clean power by 2030 is at the heart of one of its five missions and Plan for Change. Stating:

> *"…all routes to a Clean Power system will require mass deployment of offshore wind, onshore wind and solar"*

The secretary of state immediately set up a new mission control to drive progress towards the target. In addition to mission control NESO were engaged to provide advice on how to reach the goal. The NESO clean Power Plan stated:

> *"There is no path to clean power without mass deployment of offshore wind, together with onshore wind and solar".*

The NESO advice covers all technologies and looks at options for reaching the targets including acknowledging that flexibility may be required:

> *"For example, onshore wind and solar could substitute for offshore wind",*

The advice also notes the size of the challenge:

> *"Key supply-side technologies (e.g. offshore wind, onshore wind, solar, batteries) will all need to deploy more on average each year to 2030 than they have ever done in a single year before".*

The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan also notes that:

> *"There is greater potential to bring new onshore wind and solar projects forward and deliver additional capacity beyond what is already planned by 2030",*

> *"…clean [electricity] sources produce at least as much power as Great Britain consumes in total over the whole year, and at least 95% of Great Britain's generation…"*

The report is clear that this requires a deployment of 45-47GW of solar power by 2030 exceeding CCC's recommendation for the Seventh Carbon Budget.

Additionally, the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan emphasises that:

> *"it is important that government looks at a clean power system beyond 2030, where demand is expected to increase"*

6.3 Community Engagement

Pre-application community consultation and engagement have been undertaken in accordance with requirements of the NPPF (MHCLG, 2025):

> *"Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community." (Paragraph 40)*

The community engagement approach has also followed the consultation principles established within the Localism Act 2011 (Section 122) (UK Government, 2011) for consulting the public:

- 61W (2) *"The person must publicise the proposed application in such manner as the person reasonably considers is likely to bring the proposed application to the attention of a majority of the persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land*
- 61W (4) (a) *"Set out how the person may be contacted by persons wishing to comment on, or collaborate with P on the design of, the proposed development, and"*
- 61W (4) (b) *"Give such information about the proposed timetable for the consultation as is sufficient to ensure that persons wishing to comment on the proposed development may do so in good time."*
- 61X (2) *"The person must, when deciding whether the application that the person is actually to make should be in the same terms as the proposed application, have regard to any responses to the consultation that the person has received."*

It also considered the advice for applicants as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement prepared by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (adopted November 2023), namely:

- Applicants or developers are expected to consult with the local community before submitting planning applications which are likely to generate public interest. Such consultation should be accessible and clear to the whole community (5.12); and
- The council encourages developers and applicants to undertake a level of public consultation prior to submitting a planning application, as advocated in the National Planning Policy Framework. Such consultation could be with the town or parish council, ward councillors, neighbouring properties or interest groups local to the development site and include methods such as a public exhibition or meeting/discussions with affected individuals (5.13)

Community engagement has been undertaken throughout the process of preparing this planning application through:

- Discussions with the landowners and nearby residents;
- Discussions with local Parish Councils;
- A public exhibition in March 2025 to engage with the local residents and stakeholders and address any concerns raised regarding the potential impacts of the Proposed Development; and
- The first public exhibition was followed by a further community meeting in response to requests from attendees at the consultation event.

Therefore, consultation for the Proposed Development has been undertaken in accordance with requirements of the NPPF and the SCI.

6.4 Summary

The planning policy sets out the matters that are to be addressed in the design and mitigation of a Proposed Development. It is concluded that, through the design evolution process and as demonstrated in the environmental assessments undertaken and this report, the design of the Proposed Development, along with the prescribed mitigation, which where appropriate would be secured by conditions, satisfactorily address the environmental impacts.

It is clear that the Proposed Development would make a valuable contribution to meeting the renewable energy targets for the UK. The environmental impacts of the Proposed Development have been considered, along with the appropriate mitigation and enhancement. It is concluded that the Proposed Development is in accordance with NPPF, the Local Plan and other material

considerations, when read as a whole and considering the planning balance of the minimised local environmental impacts identified.

7. The Benefits of the Development

7.1 Renewable Energy Generation

Climate change has been described as the greatest environmental challenge facing the world today. The burning of fossil fuels to produce electricity is a major contributor to climate change through the release of atmospheric CO_2) and other harmful gases known collectively as greenhouse gases.

As part of the response to climate change, the UK Government has entered into binding international agreements, committing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In 2019 the Climate Change Act was updated in include a target of net zero carbon emissions in 30 years, supported by more stringent, legally binding five-yearly carbon budgets.

The generation of electricity from renewable energy sources is one of the principal ways in which the Government targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to increase energy security within the current policy framework.

The Proposed Development would contribute to this by displacing fossil fuel-based generation of electricity through the generation of approximately 31,935MWh of electricity per annum, enough renewable electricity to meet the needs of approximately 9,390 homes per annum.

7.2 Biodiversity Enhancement

The ‘State of Nature’ (State of Nature Partnership, 2023) report found that approximately 60% of British wildlife is in decline, much as a result of agricultural intensification and subsequent habitat loss.

A number of national conservation bodies have identified the opportunity that solar farm development presents for providing substantial wildlife gains, due to the extent of the unutilised area between panel rows and bordering the installation, combined with the low levels of disturbance from humans or machinery.

This has been backed up by a number of case studies (Solar Trade Association, 2019) illustrating the benefits that existing solar farms are having in improving biodiversity and supporting wildlife.

The proposed habitat creation and enhancement measures would be set out in a LEMP (refer to: 58759 Stokes Lane Solar Farm ES Volume 4 Figure 2-5: LEMP).

The measures outlined in the LEMP would result in a BNG well over 10% in accordance with national statutory requirements. The BNG calculations for the Proposed Development show an increase in BNG for area habitats of 64.23%, and an overall BNG for linear habitat of 34.56%.

The full assessment of BNG for the Proposed Development is documented in the accompanying technical report (refer to 58759 R2 Stokes Lane Solar Farm – Biodiversity Net Gain report).

7.3 Farm Diversification

Around half of all UK farms undertake some form of activity that is outside of the core business of farming in order to support farm operations – this is farm diversification.

Diversification can result in a more productive use of part of the farm estate and can provide a constant form of income to the farm as a balance to the traditional fluctuations in farm incomes; this can then be reinvested in farming activities.

Diversification into renewable energy would increase farm income security, reducing the farm owner’s vulnerability to agricultural subsidy cuts and commodity price changes. Moreover, it can

serve to protect the farming tradition by removing the incentive to sell parcels of land to maintain income for the benefit of the remainder of the holding.

Not only does the Proposed Development represent an opportunity for farm diversification, the modules have been designed to allow sheep to graze underneath the arrays. As such, agricultural processes can continue in conjunction with the Proposed Development in its operational phase.

In addition, solar farms do not result in permanent land use change with agriculture easily able to be reinstated following decommissioning of the development.

7.4 Social and Economic Benefits

There are likely to be work opportunities generated for local contractors during the construction and on-going operation of the solar farm. The specialist Engineering, Procurement and Construction firms engaged undertake detailed design and construction typically employ local contractors as part of their work force during the construction period.

Local contractors are likely to be engaged to undertake general maintenance activities onsite.

The Proposed Development would also generate income for BDBC as a result of the business rates.

8. Conclusion

The Proposed Development represents an increase in renewable energy generation with the potential to displace fossil fuel generation and provide enough clean energy to power 9,390 homes per annum.

Careful site selection and design has produced a scheme that maximises the potential to capture solar energy whilst minimising impacts on the environment and local landscape. The Applicant strongly views the Site as an appropriate site for a solar farm within the BDBC area, in proximity to a secured and available grid connection.

The Proposed Development is considered to provide substantial benefits to the area through the generation of clean renewable energy, biodiversity and landscape enhancement, and the creation of jobs in the local community in accordance with local and national planning policy. The Proposed Development would also improve social conditions in the area by increasing PRoW connectivity, through inclusion of a new permissive footpath to link and provide better connections within the PRoW network.

As a result of the survey work, consultation and the need to maximise the output of the Proposed Development, the design has evolved since first inception. Following engagement with local stakeholders, landscape mitigation measures have been incorporated into the final design.

In accordance with the Environment Act 2021, the proposed solar farm is required to achieve the minimum 10% BNG statutory. BNG calculations indicate that the 10% threshold would be well exceeded for habitats and hedgerows, at 64.23% and 34.56%, respectively.

The assessments, including an ES covering LVIA and Cultural Heritage, have identified that where the recommended mitigation measures are implemented, the only adverse significant residual effects that would remain relate to a small number of Landscape and Visual effects on receptors located close to the Site, and landscape effects on the host Landscape Character Area, Basingstoke Down, during the Construction Phase and one year into the operation of the Proposed Development. Once mitigation planting has matured, medium to long-term effects to these areas would reduce and would not be significant.

It is acknowledged in paragraph 1.7.2 of the National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) that the development of new energy infrastructure, at the scale and speed required to meet the current and future need, is likely to have some negative effects on landscape / visual amenity. However, in general it should be possible to mitigate satisfactorily the most significant potential negative effects and in this case the harm can be mitigated to an acceptable level.

In conclusion, given the economic, social and environmental benefits outlined in this Statement and the limited impact of the Proposed Development, when considered as a whole, the benefits of the Proposed Development are demonstrably outweigh any potential impacts.

On the basis of the information provided with this application, and the demonstrated compliance with both the Development Plan and national policy, the Applicant politely requests that Basingstoke and Deane Council grant planning permission for the Proposed Development, subject to planning conditions.

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Appendix A: Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision: *Burcot Solar Farm Limited Vs South Oxfordshire District Council*

Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Inquiry held 11 – 14 February 2025

Site visits made on 10 and 13 February 2025

by Alison Partington BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4th March 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/24/3350890
Burcot Farm, Burcot, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 3GW

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Burcot Solar Farm Limited against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
- The application Ref is P23/S4132/FUL.
- The development proposed is the installation of a ground mounted solar photovoltaic array, co-located battery energy storage scheme (BES) together with associated infrastructure; security fencing; CCTV; access gate; on-site Biodiversity Net Gain.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the installation of a ground mounted solar photovoltaic array, co-located battery energy storage scheme together with associated infrastructure; security fencing; CCTV; access gate; and on-site Biodiversity Net Gain at Burcot Farm, Burcot, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3GW in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref P23/S4132/FUL, subject to the Schedule of Conditions set out in Annex A.

Procedural Matters

2. The Council confirmed (27 July 2021) that an Environmental Impact Assessment was not required. There is no reason to disagree.

3. The application had three reasons for refusal. The third reason for refusal related to ecology and biodiversity. The Council confirmed at the Case Management Conference and in the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) that in the light of the additional information that had been submitted by the appellant they would no longer be pursuing this reason for refusal. From the evidence before me I agree with this conclusion, and I have determined the appeal accordingly.

4. The first reason for refusal related to the proposed development being inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Subsequent to the application being determined, a revised version of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework) was published in December 2024. In the light of the changes in this document it was agreed in a supplementary SoCG that the appeal site falls under the definition of Grey Belt, that it would accord with the requirements in paragraph 155 of the Framework, and so would now not be inappropriate development. These are conclusions that I agree with. Given this, and having regard to

paragraph 153 of the Framework, and the Court of Appeal judgement[1], as the effect of the development on openness and the purposes of including land within the Green Belt are not expressly stated as determinative factors in gauging the inappropriateness of the development, there is no requirement for me to separately assess the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt, or the purposes of including land within it. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

5. On 27 February 2025, after the Inquiry was closed, the government published an update to the Green Belt section of the *Planning Practice Guidance* (PPG). This was reviewed by both main parties, and they provided an updated SoCG confirming that they consider the site still meets the definition of Grey Belt and that the proposal conforms with the latest guidance.

Main Issue

6. In the light of the above, the main issue in the appeal is the effect of the proposed development on, and the potential loss of, agricultural land.

Reasons

The site, the surrounding area and the proposal

7. The appeal site comprises three, relatively flat agricultural fields that total 56.7ha. External and internal field boundaries are defined by hedgerows with mature trees and tree belts. A small woodland area lies between part of the site and Oxford Road. The farm buildings, which are now used for a variety of non-agricultural uses, are located adjacent to the northeast corner of the site. No Public Rights of Way cross the site but there are a number in the area particularly to the south and west of the site.

8. The surrounding area is largely agricultural in character punctuated with areas of woodland and small settlements - the closest settlements being Burcot, Berinsfield and Clifton Hampden. The B4015 / Oxford Road is immediately adjacent to the western boundary of the site, whilst fields lie between the site and the A415 and A4074 to the south and northeast of the site respectively. To the northwest of the site lies Nuneham Park a Grade 1 Registered Park and Garden.

9. The proposal would comprise ground mounted solar arrays arranged in rows across the majority of the fields, a battery energy storage system (BESS) located on part of the site near the existing farm complex, along with essential electricity generation infrastructure, internal access tracks, an access to the A415, security fencing, CCTV cameras and landscaping.

Planning Policy Context

10. The development plan comprises the *South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2035 (adopted December 2020)* (LP) and the *Burcot and Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Plan 2011–2035 (made October 2024)* (NP). The main policies relevant to the appeal proposal are set out in the SoCG.

11. Leaving aside the two reasons for refusal which are not being contested, the remaining reason for refusal references LP Policy DES7. This requires “new

[1] Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, R (on the application of) v Epping Forest District Council & Anor (Rev 1) [2016] EWCA Civ 404

development to make provision for the effective use and protection of natural resources where applicable, including ….vii) avoiding the development of the best and most versatile agricultural land, unless it can be demonstrated to be the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives, by first using areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of higher quality".

12. Policy DES9 of the LP supports schemes for renewable and low carbon energy provided they do not cause a significant adverse effect to: i) the landscape, both designated AONB and locally valued, biodiversity, including protected habitats and species and Conservation Target Areas; ii) the historic environment, both designated and non-designated assets, including development within their settings; iii) openness of the Green Belt; iv) the safe movement of traffic and pedestrians; or v) residential amenity. It is not disputed that the proposal accords with this policy.

13. The Council have not indicated the proposal would be contrary to any of the policies in the NP.

14. The Council are currently in the process of producing a new Local Plan. This was submitted for examination in December 2024. It is agreed by the main parties that limited weight can be given to policies in the emerging plan and none are referenced in the reason for refusal. As a result, I have not considered the policies in the emerging plan.

15. Paragraph 187b) of the Framework, states that planning decisions should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Further guidance on the use of agricultural land is provided in footnote 65 of the Framework. This footnote is linked to paragraph 188 which relates to plan making, and specifically to the allocation of land within them, not decision taking. However, even if it is considered to be relevant to decision taking it simply indicates that where significant development is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of higher quality.

16. Paragraph 187a) of the Framework refers to the need to protect and enhance amongst other things soils in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan. However, agricultural land classification, of which Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land is a part, takes into account more than just soil and neither DES7 nor DES9, or any other LP policy I have been referred to, identify any soils of specific quality or with statutory status.

17. The *Planning Practice Guidance* (PPG), on renewable and low carbon energy, which dates from 2015, provides a list of planning considerations that relate to large scale ground mounted solar photovoltaic farms[2]. These include: encouraging the effective use of land by focussing such developments on previously developed and non-agricultural land provided it is not of high environmental value; and where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

[2] Paragraph ID:5-013-20150327

18. There are two Written Ministerial Statements (WMS) that are of relevance. One, dated 25 March 2015, indicates that "…any proposal involving the best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence". The other, dated 15 May 2024, sets out further detail on how balancing the competing priorities for energy security and food production is intended to be applied. It indicates "…that due weight needs to be given to the proposed use of Best and Most Versatile land when considering whether planning consent should be granted for solar developments" and that "…as the land grade increases, there is a greater onus on developers to show that the use of higher quality land is necessary."

19. The *National Policy Statement on Energy* (EN-1) states that proposals should seek to minimise impacts on BMV land and preferably use land of Grade 3b and below and that proposals should not be sited on BMV land without justification. The *National Policy Statement on Renewable Energy Infrastructure* (EN-3) indicates that "while land type should not be a pre-dominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location applicants should, where possible, utilise suitable previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land." Although these two documents primarily relate to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), EN-1 confirms they can be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, and that their materiality will need to be judged on a case-by case basis. In part, given that the proposal is so close to the threshold for a NSIP, I consider they are both material considerations in determining this appeal.

20. There are a large number of other relevant documents. These are listed in the SoCG and the Core Documents and include the National Infrastructure Strategy 2020, Energy White Paper 2020, Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener 2021, Environment Act 2021, British Energy Security Strategy (April 2022) and Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (December 2024).

21. Overall, the policies and guidance indicate that careful consideration needs to be given to the use of BMV land but whilst the use of poorer quality land is preferred there is no prohibition on the use of BMV land. The recent Mead Realisations judgement[3] sets out relevant factors that may be considered when deciding what weight to give to various policies and guidance. Being published in December 2024, having been subject to consultation, and representing the views of the current government, I give greatest weight to the Framework, particularly in comparison to the PPG that dates from 2015. Similarly, I find the need to give due weight to the use of BMV, as set out in the 2024 WMS to be more appropriate than the need to provide compelling evidence as required in the 2015 WMS.

Effect on, and potential loss of, agricultural land

22. An Agricultural Land Classification survey of the appeal site and surrounding land was carried out in May 2020. Of the 93ha surveyed it found 22ha were Grade 2 and 68ha were Grade 3a. The appeal site has sought to avoid the use of the majority of the Grade 2 land and comprises 4.1ha Grade 2 and 52.6ha Grade 3a. Nevertheless, it is all BMV land.

[3] Mead Realisations Limited v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and North Somerset Council [2025] EWCA Civ 32

23. The farm is now an arable farm growing wheat, barley, beans and oilseeds. At the inquiry it was indicated that the cereals are feed crops used to feed livestock rather than being used for human consumption. Whilst third parties have suggested that the land is very productive in terms of its yields, the Agricultural Appraisal Report indicates that the yields are average for this type of land.

24. The Provisional Agricultural Land Classification map show that the district has a higher proportion of BMV land (57%) compared to the rest of country (42%)[4]. The appeal site represents a very small proportion of the overall BMV land resource within the district (0.15%) and so even at a district level the impact of the loss of this amount of BMV land for arable production would be minimal.

25. The proposal would change the use of the land for a period of 40 years. Whilst this is a significant period of time it is not permanent. Moreover, although it would be taken out of arable production, it is proposed that the land would be used for both energy production and sheep grazing. This dual use can be secured by condition. Apart from the small areas of land used for fixed infrastructure, which amount to approximately 1.8ha, the majority of the land would still be used for some agricultural use.

26. It is not disputed that there are no national or local policies that require agricultural land of any grade to be farmed. Nor is there any planning control over the type of agricultural use taking place on land. Therefore, even if it may be unlikely on BMV land, there would be nothing in planning terms to prevent the use of the fields that form the appeal site for sheep grazing or even from leaving them fallow. In fact, the Sustainable Farming Incentive encourages farmers to convert arable land to grassland.

27. The appellant's evidence indicates that the maximum production from the highest yielding crop grown on the land is in the region of 536 tonnes of wheat per annum. Given nationally cereal production is in the region of 20 - 25 million tonnes per annum, the impact of the loss of this land for arable production would be negligible. Even if the crops were not used for livestock feed, this level of loss would not have an adverse impact on food security.

28. From the evidence before me I am satisfied that resting the land from intensive arable farming would improve soil health through increasing soil organic matter, soil carbon and soil moisture. It was suggested that the appellant's evidence in this regard did not consider the effects of combined solar farm and pasture on soil health. Nonetheless, the construction of the solar farm involves limited disturbance to soils and a soil management plan would be required by condition. Given this, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am not persuaded that the impact on soil health from a combined pasture and solar farm use would be materially different from that gained solely from pasture.

29. Although the site is 100% BMV land I note that there was no objection to the proposal from Natural England with their response highlighting that the proposal would be "unlikely to lead to significant permanent loss of BMV agricultural land, as a resource for future generations."

30. At the end of the 40 years, it is proposed that all the infrastructure and components of the scheme would be removed, and the entire site would be returned to

[4] Based on Grade 3 land being equally split between Grade 3a and 3b.

agricultural use. The Council suggested that as the Framework gives strong policy support to repowering and extending the life of existing renewable sites it could result in the use of the land as a solar farm beyond 40 years. However, I have to deal with the appeal on the basis which it was applied for. Any future use of the site at the end of the 40 year period would be taken on basis of the relevant policies extant at that time.

31. In support of their case the Council referred to a number of appeals which were, in part at least, dismissed due to the fact that the proposal used BMV land. However, the appellant equally provided many other appeals where the use of BMV land had not been an impediment to allowing the proposal. These included some which also used 100% BMV land, including a significantly greater amount of both BMV land and Grade 2 land specifically. As such, it is clear that the appropriateness of utilising BMV land is a matter of planning judgement on a case by case basis.

32. Overall, the proposal would not result in either the temporary or permanent loss of BMV land for agriculture as the land would continue to be used for some agricultural purposes whilst also being used to produce solar energy. As the proposal would not be detrimental to the soil quality, a return to arable production at a later date would still be possible.

Alternative sites

33. The Council have argued that LP Policy DES7 vii) requires a sequential approach to site selection and that the appellant has failed to undertake a robust assessment of alternative sites to show that the use of the BMV land is necessary. They highlighted that the need for such a robust assessment of sites was supported in an appeal at Lullington, South Derbyshire[5] and the subsequent high court judgement[6].

34. Policy DES7 seeks to make effective use of land and protect natural resources, with one of the objectives of the policy being to tackle climate change. In producing renewable energy, the proposal would clearly help to tackle climate change. In addition, the use of bifacial panels which minimise the amount of land needed and the dual use of the land for both agricultural and energy production makes efficient use of the land. As set out above, the proposal would also improve soil health. In these ways the proposal would accord with the overall thrust of the policy.

35. Whilst the wording of clause vii) of the policy requires that the use of BMV land needs to be demonstrated to be the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives it does not specifically require consideration of alternative sites. It goes on to say that areas of poorer quality land are to be used in preference to that of higher quality land. This wording is similar to that used in the PPG. A recent High Court judgement[7], subsequent to that at Lullington referred to above, concluded that this wording does not mandate the consideration of alternative sites and still less does it require a sequential test to be adopted.

36. The Council have suggested the circumstances of the Bramley case are different to this appeal as in Bramley the relevant local plan policy did not require a

[5] APP/F1040/W/22/3323316
[6] Lullington Solar Park Limited v Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and South Derbyshire District Council [2024] EWHC 295 (Admin)
[7] Bramley Solar Farm Residents Group v Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Bramley Solar Limited and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council [2023] EWHC 2842 (Admin)

sequential approach to site selection. But as set out above, DES7 requires the consideration of reasonable alternatives, not alternative sites, and I consider it does not require a sequential approach. As such the circumstances in this appeal are not different to that in the Bramley case.

37. Moreover, unlike the Framework which clearly identifies in which situations a sequential test is necessary and sets out a methodology for doing this, neither DES7 or its supporting text makes any reference to the need for a sequential approach or how to carry one out. In relation to the use of BMV land the Framework requires the economic and other benefits to be considered, not a sequential approach. Furthermore, neither EN-1 or EN-3 require a sequential approach.

38. It is not disputed by the Council that there is no previously developed or non-agricultural land in the district that could accommodate the proposal. As such, the proposal accords with the requirement in the PPG to show that the use of agricultural, as opposed to BMV, land is necessary.

39. In addition, the appellant argued that in terms of DES7 the proposal is the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives. The alternatives being: to not develop the site and not use the grid connection where starting again on a new site would require a new grid connection which currently involves a 10 year wait; to develop the wider 93ha site that would use more Grade 2 agricultural land; and the appeal scheme. Given the urgent need for Renewable Energy set out in various government publications they argue that the appeal scheme represents the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives. Moreover, in minimising the use of Grade 2 land within the appeal site, they consider they have used what in this case is the poorer quality land.

40. Nonetheless, should it be considered that to accord with Policy DES7 it is necessary to look at alternative sites the appellant argues that the site selection reports demonstrate a lack of alternative sites, (although I note the appellant's comment that these were not produced for this purpose but the to justify the weight given in their planning balance to the lack of alternative sites). I will therefore consider the report, and the criticisms made of it.

41. The Site Selection Report (SSR) highlights that any other suitable sites it found would be additional sites not alternative sites. This is due in part to the pressing need for Renewable Energy to meet the national target of clean power by 2030 – described within NESO's Clean Power 2030 as requiring "…a once in a generation shift in approach and in the pace of delivery…". But also, because none of the alternative sites would be able to utilise the grid connection available to the appeal scheme which is tied to this site.

42. The Council highlighted that the various comparative site reports all post date the incorporation of the appellant company in July 2021, as does the Agricultural Land Classification report. It is therefore suggested that this means that the site was selected before any meaningful analysis of alternatives took place.

43. However, the Site Selection Statement (February 2022) explains the site search process that was started in May 2019 following the identification of available grid capacity. This considered a wide range of factors including agricultural land quality. Furthermore, whilst the Agricultural Land Classification Report is dated August 2021, the introduction states that the survey work was done in May 2020,

which pre-dates the incorporation of the company. The findings of this could well have been provided in advance of the publication of the formal report.

44. As a result, I am satisfied that a meaningful analysis of sites did take place in advance of the incorporation of the company and the formal grid connection offer which is linked to this site.

45. Whilst the company behind the proposal may work all over the country, the key factor in considering alternatives is grid capacity and the ability to obtain a grid connection. EN-3 specifically highlights that, "The capacity of the local grid network to accept the likely output from a proposed solar farm is critical to the technical and commercial feasibility of a development." A grid connection offer has been secured at Cowley substation and will enable the proposal to be delivering energy within 2 years. As a result, it is reasonable for the site selection analysis to focus on Cowley sub-station where the connection has been offered.

46. The SSR uses an 8km search radius. This is the length of the cable connection from the appeal site to Cowley substation and is considered the furthest distance that is viable in this case. Whilst there may be another scheme in the area that is 13km from the point of connection, it was explained at the inquiry that development costs for a scheme and the cost of the grid connection can vary significantly. As such, the fact that that scheme can be viable at 13km does not mean this one can be. In my experience an 8km search area is much larger than other schemes have identified as being the limit of a viable connection. In addition, I agree that the provision of confidential viability information is not expected or reasonable.

47. Criticism was made that the SSR only considers Grade 4 land not Grade 3 land which could include areas of non-BMV Grade 3b land. However, given the only way it can be determined whether the land is Grade 3a or Grade 3b is through intrusive and time-consuming soil sampling and assessment, I consider carrying out this survey work on the 18,000ha of Grade 3 land in the search area would be unreasonable and disproportionate. Whilst the potential for sampling was suggested in the previously referenced Lullington judgement, the appellant has highlighted that neither the judgement nor the appeal decision mention the national guidelines[8] that set out that a definitive agricultural land grading is obtained by detailed surveying not sampling.

48. The Council also criticised the methodology because it did not give BMV land any special value or consideration. However, agricultural land quality is only one of many considerations that have to be taken into account in site selection. Other factors that have to be considered include heritage, ecology, landscape, amenity and whether landowners are willing to let their land be used in this way. Policy protection for BMV land is not as great as that for land in the Green Belt or National Landscape areas, or to heritage assets. Given this, I do not consider it is reasonable for BMV land to be the overriding consideration.

49. Whilst smaller areas of land may be available in some of the search area, there is no policy requirement for developers to seek smaller sites or to fragment their proposed operations. Moreover, smaller sites would result in a smaller scheme

[8] Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales, Revised Guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land 1988 and Natural England Technical Information Note 049: Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land.

with a lower capacity that would not make efficient use of the available grid connection.

50. The SSR analyses 10 potential areas and concludes that none of them are more preferable than the appeal site. The Council disputes this finding on areas 5-10. Within area 5 the Council a parcel of land they considered could be suitable. However, the northern part of this parcel has topographical constraints which not only effect the ability to site solar panels but would potentially increase the visual impact of any scheme. Other constrains such as the nearby SSSIs, listed buildings and the footpaths that cross this land mean I consider that this area is not preferable to the appeal site.

51. As well as the constraints of 2 SSSIs and a flood zone, area 6 is situated beyond the 8km maximum cable length. Whilst the appeal site is also slightly beyond the 8km cable point, the intervening land belongs to the same landowner enabling the additional cabling to be laid easily. The distance area 6 is beyond this 8km point is significantly greater than the appeal site, and I am satisfied that development in this area would not be viable.

52. The Council identified an area of around 92ha of Grade 4 land in Area 7 they considered could be developed. However, this area is adjacent to a residential area and has a footpath that crosses the middle of the area. In addition, the topography of some of the land makes it unsuitable for the siting of panels. The Council accepted that this would reduce the size of the site quite significantly. These constraints mean this area would not be capable of enabling the development of a 49.9MW solar farm.

53. Area 8 had been identified by the appellant as unsuitable for development but subsequently the Council stated that an application for a solar farm was made on a site within the area by the same agent as is acting on behalf of the appellant. However, given the lead in time for an application of this type, the unsuitability of the area could well have been due to the fact that it was known that the land was not available given it was being progressed for another scheme.

54. The land around Toot Baldon that comprises Area 9 is crossed by a number of Public Rights of Way and also contains a strategic housing allocation and another consented solar farm. Furthermore, the Site Selection Statement dated February 2022 shows that landowners in the area were contacted but did not respond. As such, the land would not appear to be available for a solar farm development.

55. For the same reason the southern parcel in Area 10 is also not available. Whilst the northern parcel of land is not mentioned in the SSR, the plan shows that it is crossed and abuts a number of public rights of way. Whilst public rights of way do not necessary preclude the development of a solar farm, the visual impact and effects of any such scheme are likely to be greater. In this case the appellant has highlighted that the site is also constrained by heritage assets and its proximity to a village, making it more constrained for development than the appeal site.

Conclusion on main issue

56. Bringing these points together, I consider that the proposal accords with the overall thrust of Policy DES7 as it makes efficient use of the land, protects natural resources and helps to address climate change. Moreover, I consider that it has adequately been demonstrated that the use of agricultural land is necessary for

the development and that it is the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives. However, even if it is considered that the policy requires a sequential approach to be taken, I consider that the SSR and the earlier site selection documents show a reasonable and proportionate assessment has been undertaken that adequately demonstrates the appeal site is a preferable location despite being BMV land.

57. Therefore, I consider that the proposal would not result in the loss of, or have an unacceptable impact on, BMV land. The land could continue to be used for agricultural purposes alongside the production of renewable energy and could return fully to agricultural use at the end of the lifetime of the development. Accordingly, there would be no conflict with Policy DES7 of the LP or the Framework.

Benefits arising from the proposal

Renewable Energy Generation and Energy Security

58. The proposal would have an installed capacity of 49.9MW, estimated to provide sufficient electricity to power 13,000 family homes per annum. The site benefits from an immediate connection to Cowley substation that means it could be generating electricity within 2 years.

59. In 2019 the Government declared an Environmental and Climate Change Emergency. Various recent government publications have highlighted the need to significantly increase generation from onshore wind and solar energy production, as it seeks to ensure that by 2035 all our electricity will come from low carbon sources. The most recent publication, the Clean Power Action Plan 2030 published in December 2024, reiterates this need for a rapid deployment of new clean energy setting an ambitious target of 45-47GW of solar power to be achieved by 2030. To achieve these targets, it is clear that considerable growth in large scale solar farms will be necessary and this cannot be achieved solely by the use of brownfield land or roof top installations. Whilst it has been suggested that the climate in the UK means solar energy is not appropriate, it is clear that the government considers otherwise.

60. The Council also declared a Climate Change Emergency in 2019 and seeks to be carbon neutral in its own operations by 2025 and a carbon neutral district by 2030.

61. The latest government statistics[9] show that to date the additional installed solar PV is falling significantly below the growth required to achieve the five-fold increase to 70GW by 2035. This re-emphasises the immediate pressing need for the deployment of new renewable energy generation schemes.

62. As well as helping to address climate change, the British Energy Security Strategy (April 2022) indicates that renewable energy has a key role to play in providing greater energy security for the country and reducing our need to import energy. This is also highlighted in EN-3.

63. The proposed development would make a valuable contribution to achieving these local and national targets. I therefore consider that the proposal's potential for a rapid contribution to renewable energy generation and addressing climate change,

[9] Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics July 2024

as well as towards improving energy security and resilience, are benefits that must be given substantial weight.

64. Moreover, given the well-documented issues with grid capacity, the ability of the site to make use of existing capacity at the Cowley substation, together with the fact that the grid connection available to the scheme will enable the energy produced to be exported without delay and so contribute to the target to be achieved by 2030 favour the scheme. I give this significant weight.

Battery storage

65. The Energy White Paper 2020 is one of a number of recent government publications that highlight the pressing need for battery storage to support the growth in renewable energy. EN-1 sets out that storage is needed to increase the reliability and security of the energy system by providing the ability to store surplus electricity in times of low demand and/or high production and releasing it when demand is high. Recognising the crucial role battery storage has in meeting the growth of electricity demand and maintaining a secure energy supply, the Clean Power Action Plan 2030 sets a target of achieving 23-27 GW of battery capacity by 2030.

66. In being co-located with the solar farm the proposed BESS would enable the energy produced to be used effectively as well as providing flexibility for the grid. I consider this is a separate element of the proposal and the benefit it provides should be given significant weight.

Use of best available technology

67. It is proposed that the development would use bifacial panels. This would deliver greater levels of solar efficiency and reduce the amount of land required to produce the same output. I give limited weight to this benefit.

Biodiversity Net Gain

68. The Council declared an Ecological Emergency in 2021. An Ecological Impact Assessment was submitted with the application and updated at appeal stage. These have taken into account the proposed deer proof fencing and conclude that the proposal would not result in any adverse significant impacts to species present within the site or area. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary I see no reason to disagree with this conclusion.

69. The proposal would include a variety of measures that would benefit biodiversity including new and improved native hedging, and new tree planting. The Biodiversity Metric indicates the proposal would deliver considerable gains in both habitat units and hedgerow units.

70. The improvements to existing tree and hedgerow planting and the reinstatement of historic hedgerows within the fields would be retained after decommissioning and so would be a permanent benefit of the proposal. Overall, I give significant weight to the biodiversity benefits of the proposal.

Economic Benefits

71. The proposed development would represent a significant financial investment and would give rise to short term construction jobs, albeit the economic benefits would

reduce significantly once the development was operational. It would also result in additional business rates over its 40 year lifespan. It was disputed whether or not the proposal would represent farm diversification or not. Be that as it may, it would be a benefit to the farm business that owns the land by generating a secure income from these fields and helping it to remain profitable. This would be beneficial to the rural economy in the area. I give these economic benefits moderate weight.

Other Matters

Heritage

72. The Grade I Nuneham Courtenay Registered Park and Garden and the Nuneham Courtenay Conservation Area, whose boundaries in the vicinity of the site are contiguous are located to the north-west of the site, on the opposite side of Oxford Road. Whilst there are a variety of other heritage assets in the wider area, it is agreed by the parties that these are the only ones impacted by the proposal. From the evidence before me, and my own observations, I agree with this conclusion.

73. The appellant's Archaeological and Heritage Assessment considered the impact of the proposal on the setting of the assets and the contribution this makes to their significance. As the appeal site does not form part of any significant / designated view out of the parkland and is a very small part of the surrounding farmland to the south, it makes a negligible contribution to the setting of the assets. The only impact would be in the heavily obscured glimpsed views possible along a limited part of the boundary of the assets.

74. Employing the terminology of the Framework, it is agreed with the Council that the harm caused would be less than substantial at the lower end of the scale. From the evidence before me, and what I saw at my site visits, I agree with this conclusion. Nonetheless, in accordance with the Framework and the statutory obligations imposed I give great weight to this harm. I shall weigh this against the public benefits later in my decision.

Landscape Impacts

75. Due to the local topography, and the existing mature hedgerows, tree belts and woodlands both around the site itself and in the surrounding area, the appeal site is visually well contained. Therefore, there would be little opportunity to see the proposed solar farm, and nowhere where the entirety of the scheme would be able to be seen.

76. The only public footpath in the vicinity from where the site can be readily seen is the one which crosses the field to the south of the site. In the short term there would be a major adverse effect on users of this footpath but the proposed hedgerow and tree planting along the southern boundary of the site would reduce this so that within 5 years I consider the effects would be minor adverse.

77. Oxford Road runs adjacent to much of the western boundary. The existing roadside vegetation limits views into the site and the views that are currently possible would be reduced by the proposed gapping up and reinforcing of the existing hedgerow together with the proposed increase to its height. In winter some views into the site through the hedge may be possible. However, given the lack of any footway along this road and the speed of traffic this is unlikely to be a

route frequented by pedestrians, and so such glimpsed views would be from moving vehicles and at an oblique angle. From other roads in the vicinity the existing roadside vegetation, the distance to the site and the planting proposed along the site boundaries means there will be little or no views of the proposal.

78. Part of the site can be seen in views from Wittenham Clumps within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. From the evidence before me and what I observed at my site visit, the development would occupy a small amount of an extensive panorama. The recessive colour of the panels and the fact that they would not break the skyline means the proposal would not draw the eye. As such I am satisfied that the impact on views from here would be minimal.

79. The proposal would inevitably change the character of the fields themselves, but it would retain the existing field layout, and the existing boundary hedgerows and trees, which are a characteristic feature of the local farmed landscape. The proposed improvements to these together with the reintroduction of historic hedgerows within the site would be beneficial to the landscape character. Furthermore, due to the high degree of visual containment of the site, the character of the landscape beyond the appeal site would be unaffected.

80. Overall, I consider that there would be a moderate adverse effect upon the landscape character of the appeal site and its immediate environs and that the visual impact of the proposed scheme would be limited and localised.

81. I note that within the wider area the local plan makes a number of strategic allocations including a garden village to the east of Berinsfield and for the growth of Culham Science Centre. However, the appeal scheme would be very different in nature and character to the development proposed in these allocations. Moreover, the proposal would remain separated from these allocations, and the nearby villages by intervening open fields. In addition, there would be no intervisibility between the appeal scheme and the consented solar farm around 3km to the north. The character of the area would continue to be of agricultural land and blocks and belts of woodland punctuated by settlements and other built form and traversed by roads.

Flooding

82. The appeal site lies in Flood Zone 1 which is the lowest risk of flooding. Nonetheless given the impact of recent flooding on nearby residents, concerns have been raised about the impact of the scheme in this regard. The application was accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment, which was updated at appeal stage after the recent flood event. A system of swales is proposed to manage the surface water run-off. The evidence indicates that the capacity of the swales would exceed the predicted run-off and so there would be no residual risk. The final design of the drainage system would be subject to a condition to ensure this remains the case.

Living Conditions and Noise

83. The application was accompanied by a noise assessment which was updated for the appeal submission. This concluded that subject to the provision of an acoustic fence the noise levels at the nearest property (Burcot Farmhouse) would not give rise to any noise related issues. This assessment was reviewed by Environmental Health who raised no objections to the methodology of the assessment or its

findings. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary I have no reason to doubt the conclusion of the study and so I am satisfied the proposal would not have any unacceptable impact in this regard. The provision of the acoustic fence can be controlled by condition.

84. Any noise and disruption during the construction period, which would be in the region of 6 months, would be short lived. The Construction Traffic Management Plan would control the hours of operation on, and deliveries to, the site as well as outlining other measures to mitigate the impact of the construction phase.

85. Very few houses overlook the site. The existing woodland would prevent views of the development from Burcot Farmhouse. The distance maintained to other residential properties in the vicinity, together with the existing and proposed vegetation would mean that the proposal would not have an unacceptable impact on the outlook from any of them.

86. In addition, the Glint and Glare study found that whilst solar reflections are possible to some dwellings, for all of them the existing and proposed vegetation would significantly obstruct views. As a result, no impact is predicted on any residential property. Whilst I note the concerns raised by third parties regarding this assessment, it confirms that views from upper floor windows have been considered where appropriate and that changes to the modelling height by a few metres is not expected to significantly change the results.

Fire Safety

87. Concerns have been raised regarding the fire risks associated with the BESS and the potential for pollution to enter the water courses in the event of a fire at the site. A Fire Risk Report and Outline Management Strategy was submitted with the application and was also updated at appeal stage. These have been assessed by the Fire Risk Manager at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and were considered satisfactory. The provision of a detailed management strategy would be required by a condition and would ensure the proposal accord with the latest safety codes and standards for BESSs. In addition, the plans show bunds to collect any water within the scheme preventing run-off into the wider area. In the light of this I consider that proper consideration will be given to the potential fire risks associated with the scheme.

Highway Safety

88. Access for construction and emergency vehicles would be from a new access created onto the A415. The scheme was accompanied by a Transport Statement and a Construction Traffic Management Plan. These confirm that adequate visibility splays can be achieved at the access. I note that the Highway Authority, has no objection to the proposal subject to conditions. These would ensure that the access is designed to maintain physical priority to pedestrians and cyclists using the shared footway/cycleway along the A415. In the light of this I am satisfied the proposal would not be detrimental to highway and pedestrian safety.

Community Consultation

89. Whilst the Framework encourages early consultation with the community, there is no requirement for developers of solar farms of this size to do so. The appellant has set out the consultation carried out for this and a previous application for a

similar development of the site, which was undertaken in addition to the Council's own consultation. This included an offer to reimburse people for the error made in the postage on a letter. In the light of this I am satisfied people have had adequate opportunity to comment and this is reflected in the responses made by local residents to both the application and the appeal.

Tourism

90. Whilst tourism can rely considerably on the quality of the countryside, I am not persuaded that the changes to the landscape in this case would lead to the loss of viability of any existing tourism related business or the likelihood of people visiting the area.

Heritage Balance

91. Paragraph 212 of the Framework indicates that when considering the impact of a development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to its conservation and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Paragraph 215 requires that where a proposal causes less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

92. I attribute great weight to the potential harm to Nuneham Courtenay Registered Park and Garden and the Nuneham Courtenay Conservation Area. However, I consider the contribution the scheme would make to the generation of clean and secure energy is a substantial public benefit, and together with the other benefits outlined above, would outweigh the less than substantial harm to the designated heritage assets.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

93. The proposal would utilise Grey Belt land and would accord with the provisions of paragraph 155 of the Framework. It would therefore not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Furthermore, I have found that the proposal would not result in the loss of, or have an unacceptable impact on, BMV land and would accord with both Policies DES7 and DES9 of the LP.

94. The Framework sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and renewable energy development is central to achieving a sustainable low carbon future. The appeal scheme would make a significant contribution to this, and I give substantial weight to the contribution the proposal makes to renewable energy generation, addressing climate change and to improving energy resilience and security.

95. In addition, I give significant weight to the provision of a BESS and to the proposals use of available grid connection and its ability to start delivering energy within a short period of time. I also give significant weight to the biodiversity enhancements the scheme would provide, moderate weight to the economic benefits and limited weight to the proposal's use of the best available technology.

96. Whilst limited weight needs to be given to both the heritage harm and landscape harm that the proposal would cause, I consider that these harms are clearly outweighed by the benefits of the proposal and so these do not represent material consideration that require the proposal to be determined other than in accordance with the development plan.

97. For the reasons set out above, I consider the appeal should be allowed.

Conditions

98. The main parties agreed a set of suggested conditions that were discussed at the inquiry. This discussion led to a number of them being revised. I have considered these in the light of paragraph 57 of the Framework. The conditions include a number of pre-commencement conditions that the appellant has confirmed in writing are acceptable.

99. In addition to the standard implementation condition (condition 1), to provide certainty it is necessary to define the plans with which the scheme should accord (condition 2). Conditions 3 and 26 are reasonable and necessary to limit the period of the permission and to ensure the site is decommissioned either at the end of the permission or when energy generation ceases.

100. In the interest of the character and appearance of the area and to accord with LP Policies ENV1, DES1 and DES2 conditions 4, 5 15 and 18 are necessary. The first three need to be pre-commencement conditions – conditions 4 and 5 because they relate to work that needs to be undertaken during the construction period and condition 15 to ensure adequate protection and consideration is given to existing trees before the construction commences.

101. Conditions 6, 22 and 23 are necessary for highway safety and to accord with LP Policy TRANS5. For the same reason and also to protect the living conditions of local residents, condition 19 is required. Conditions 6 needs to be a pre-commencement condition to ensure that a safe access is provided for construction traffic before construction work begins.

102. To protect and record any potential archaeological remains on the site and in accordance with section 16 of the Framework, conditions 7 and 8 are necessary. They need to be pre-commencement conditions as they relate to work that needs to be done before any construction work commences. To protect soil quality and to accord with LP Policy DES7 condition 9 is required. This needs to be a pre-commencement condition as it affects how the construction is undertaken.

103. In the interest of biodiversity and to accord with LP Policies ENV2 and ENV3 conditions 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 17 are necessary. These all need to be pre-commencement conditions as they either affect how construction is undertaken or relate to works that will form part of the construction phase. Condition 16 is required to ensure the site is properly drained and does not increase the risk of flooding and to accord with Policy EP4. This needs to be a pre-commencement condition as it relates to works that need to be undertaken during the construction period.

104. To protect the living conditions of nearby residents and in accordance with LP Policy DES6 conditions 20 and 24 are reasonable and necessary. For the same reason and in the interests of biodiversity as well as to accord with Policy ENV12 condition 21 is required. Condition 25 is needed to give effect to the intention of the proposal to retain an element of agricultural use.

Alison Partington

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Ms Odette Chalaby Counsel

She called:

Mr Andrew Cook BA (Hons) MLD CMLI MIEMA CEnv	Executive Director, Pegasus Group
Mr Alastair Field BA (Hons), MSc, FBIAC, PIEMA, MI Soil Sci	Director & Company Secretary – Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd
Mr Nigel Cussen BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI	Senior Planning Director Pegasus Group
Mr Henri Scanlon BSc (Hons) MSc*	Associate Planner, Pegasus Group

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Mr Rowan Clapp Counsel

He called:

Mr Mark Reynolds BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI	Managing Director Context Planning Ltd
Ms Nicola Smith BSc MSc*	Acting Team Leader (Major Applications Team) South Oxfordshire District Council

* In respect of the round table discussion on conditions only.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Mrs J Roseman	Local Resident
Cllr Christine McCulloch	Burcot and Clifton Hampden Parish Council
Cllr Nick Fielding	Burcot and Clifton Hampden Parish Council

INQUIRY DOCUMENTS

INQ1 Opening Statement by Council
INQ2 Opening Statement by Appellant
INQ3 Clifton Hampden & Burcot Flooding Leaflet submitted by a local resident
INQ4 Lullington Solar Park High Court Judgment [2024] EWHC 295 (Admin) submitted by the Council

INQ5 Mead Realisation Limited Court of Appeal Judgement [2025] EWCA Civ 32 submitted by the Council
INQ6 DEFRA Statistics: Agricultural land use in England at 1 June 2024 submitted by the Appellant
INQ7 Closing Statement by the Council
INQ8 Closing Statement by the Appellant

CORE DOCUMENTS
Can be accessed using the following link: Planning Application P23/S4132/FUL

Annex A – Schedule of Conditions

1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.

2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans.
   Location Plan (EPD-025-GA-LP-03 Rev.1)
   General Arrangement (EPD-025-GA-LA-08 Rev.0)
   BESS General Arrangement Layout (EPD-025-GA-LA-101 Rev.0)
   BESS Unit (EPD-025-GA-BESS-01 Rev.1)
   Smart Sub Station (EPD-025-GA-STS-01 Rev.1)
   Acoustic Fence (EPD-025-GA-AF-01 Rev.0 (Dated 27.08.24)
   Welfare & Storage Cabin (EPD-025-GA-CAB-01 Rev.1)
   Customer Substation (EPD-025-GA-ELV-CSS-01 Rev.1)
   DNO Sub Station (EPD-025-GA-DNO-01 Rev.0)
   Landscape Masterplan (P23-0074_EN_07H)
   Fence, Security & Site Road Details (EPD-025-GA-SC-01 Rev.0)
   PV Frame & Inverter (EPD-025-GA-MS-01 Rev.0)
   Access Arrangement (PLAN 7834/202 Rev D)

3) Planning permission is hereby granted for a temporary period of 40 years from the date of the first commercial export of energy (the First Export Date). No later than one month after the First Export Date the applicant shall supply written notice to the local planning authority.

4) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a scheme for the landscaping of the site, including the planting of live trees and shrubs, the treatment of the access road and hard standings, and the provision of boundary treatment shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. This shall include the landscaping screening identified in the Revised Landscape Masterplan [Dwg. P23-0074_EN07H]

   These details shall include schedules of new trees and shrubs to be planted (noting species, plant sizes and numbers/densities), the identification of the existing trees and shrubs on the site to be retained (noting species, location and spread), any earth moving operations and finished levels/contours, and an implementation programme.

   All new planting shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and implementation programme. In the event of any of the trees or shrubs so planted dying or being seriously damaged or destroyed within 5 years of the completion of the development, a new tree or shrub or equivalent number of trees or shrubs, as the case may be, of a species first approved in writing by the local planning authority shall be planted in the next available planting season and properly maintained in a position or positions first approved in writing by the local planning authority.

5) Concurrent with the submission of comprehensive details of the proposed landscape works, a maintenance schedule and a long term management plan (for the life of the development), for the soft landscaping works shall be

submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The Landscape Management Plan shall include:

a) Details of long term design principles and objectives;
b) Management responsibilities, maintenance schedules and replacement provisions for existing retained landscape features and any landscape to be implemented as part of the approved landscape scheme;
c) Details ensuring the establishment and thereafter the maintenance of hedgerows at a minimum height of 2.5m in accordance with the approved Landscape Masterplan P23-0074 EN 07H;
d) A plan detailing which areas of the site the Landscape Management Plan covers and also who is responsible for the maintenance of the other areas of the site; and
e) A summary plan detailing different management procedures for the types of landscape on site e.g. Wildflower meadows, native or ornamental hedgerows.

The schedule and plan shall be implemented in accordance with the agreed programme for the full duration of the development hereby permitted.

6) Prior to the commencement of the development, a detailed drawing showing the proposed means of access along the A415 which maintains physical priority for pedestrians and cyclists across the bell mouth as part of the existing shared footway/cycleway shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. Thereafter, the agreed means of access shall be provided prior to the construction of the development hereby approved and shall be retained as such for the lifetime of the development.

7) Prior to the commencement of the development a professional archaeological organisation shall prepare an Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), relating to the application site area, which shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority.

8) Following the approval of the WSI referred to in condition 7, and prior to the commencement of the development (other than in accordance with the agreed WSI), a phased programme of archaeological investigation shall be carried out in accordance with the approved WSI. The programme of work shall include all processing, research and analysis necessary to produce an accessible and useable archive and a report for publication, which shall be submitted to the local planning authority within two years of the completion of the archaeological fieldwork.

9) Prior to the commencement of the development a Soil Management Plan (SMP) shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The SMP shall include the following:

a) Measures to protect soils during development with reference to the guidance found in Defra's Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites;
b) A works programme showing how all soil handling and trafficking operations will be undertaken and which makes allowance for poor weather/ ground conditions stoppages;
c) Details of how construction activities will be managed across the site to minimise impact on soils; and

d) Details of appropriate equipment and methods for stockpiling, re-spreading and ameliorating of soil compaction in accordance with good practice techniques to minimise the risk of soil compaction.

The development shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved Soil Management Plan

10) Prior to the commencement of the development, including vegetation clearance or any ground works, a construction environmental management plan for Biodiversity (CEMP) shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The CEMP shall include the following:
a) Updated ecological surveys where previous surveys are out of date for relevant habitats and species, including an updated badger survey which is no older than 6 months. Updated surveys shall follow national good practice guidelines;
b) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities;
c) Identification of relevant biodiversity protection zones;
d) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid, reduce or mitigate the impacts on important habitats and protected species during construction;
e) The location and timing of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features;
f) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works;
g) Responsible persons and lines of communication;
h) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs; and
i) Protected species licencing requirements (if any).

The approved CEMP shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details.

11) Prior to the commencement of the development a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan (BEP) shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The BEP shall include details of all species enhancements including relevant scale plans and drawings showing the location, elevation and type of features as appropriate. All enhancements should be delivered prior to the First Export Date and retained thereafter in accordance with the approved details.

12) Prior to the commencement of the development a Skylark Mitigation Scheme shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The approved scheme shall be delivered prior to the First Export Date and retained thereafter in accordance with the approved scheme for the lifetime of the development hereby permitted.

13) Prior to the commencement of the development full details of the watercourse crossing shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. These shall provide a clear span of the watercourse allowing for the movement of species. The approved details shall be delivered prior to the First Export Date and retained thereafter in accordance with the approved details.

14) Prior to the commencement of the development full details of the fencing shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. These shall include mammal access points/squeezes. The approved details shall be delivered prior to the First Export Date and retained thereafter in accordance with the approved details.

15) Prior to the commencement of the development, including any site clearance, an Arboricultural Method Statement and accompanying Tree Protection Plan shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The Arboricultural Method Statement must include the following:
   a) A specification of any pruning or tree surgery works to any trees or hedgerows to be retained, to prevent accidental damage by construction or demolition activities;
   b) The specification and location of temporary tree protective fencing and any ground protection required to protect all retained trees and hedgerows in accordance with the current edition of BS 5837 ''Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction'', and details of the timing and duration of its erection;
   c) The designation of areas for the storage or stockpiling of materials, temporary on-site parking, site offices and huts, mixing of cement or concrete, and fuel storage;
   d) The route and method of installation of drainage or any underground services in the vicinity of retained trees; Consideration will need to be made to avoid siting of utilities and service runs within the Root Protection Area (RPA) of all trees to be retained. Only where it can be demonstrated that there is no alternative location for the laying of utilities, will encroachment into the RPA be considered. Methodology for any installation works within the RPA will need to be provided and must be in compliance with the current edition of NJUG 'Guidelines for the planning and installation and maintenance of utility apparatus in proximity to trees';
   e) The details and method of construction of any other structures such as boundary walls in the RPA of retained trees and how these relate to existing ground levels;
   f) The details of materials and method of construction of any roadway, driveway, parking, pathway or other surfacing within the RPA, which is to be of a 'No Dig' construction method, in accordance with the principles in Arboricultural Association Guidance Note 12 - The use of cellular confinement systems near trees and in accordance with current industry best practice and is appropriate for the type of roadway required in relation to its usage; and
   g) Provision for the supervision of any works within the RPA of retained trees, and for the monitoring of continuing compliance with the protective measures specified, by an appropriately qualified arboricultural consultant, to be appointed at the developer's expense and notified in writing to the local planning authority, prior to the commencement of development; and provision for the regular reporting of continued compliance or any departure there from to the local planning authority.

Thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and the agreed measures shall be kept in place during the entire course of the construction and decommissioning phases.

16) Prior to the commencement of the development a detailed sustainable drainage scheme sufficient for the development and any upstream catchments shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. This shall be based on the Flood Risk Assessment Incorporating Sustainable Drainage System (Document reference J-14196 September 2021), sustainable drainage principles and an assessment of eh hydrological and hydrogeological context of the development. The surface drainage works to serve the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the First Export Date. The scheme to be submitted shall include:
a) Drainage Catchment Plans and outline strategy for the entire development;
b) Information on proposed discharge rates with the overall discharge from the site restricted to the 1 in 1yr greenfield runoff rate for the worst case 1 in 1yr storm and the QBar greenfield runoff rate for the worst case 1:100yr + 40% storm;
c) A compliance report to demonstrate how the scheme complies with the "Local Standards and Guidance for Surface Water Drainage on Major Development in Oxfordshire";
d) Detailed hydraulic calculations including node references with consideration for the worst case 1:100 + 40% event based on using the latest FEH input data;
e) Fully detailed sustainable surface water drainage layouts;
f) Proposed site levels and an exceedance plan;
g) SuDS features and sections;
h) Landscape plans with sustainable drainage features integrated and co-ordinated as appropriate;
i) Drainage Construction Details; and
j) a Maintenance and Management Plan covering all surface water drainage and SuDS features.

17) Prior commencement of development, a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) for the whole site shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The content of the LEMP shall include the following:
a) A description and evaluation of features to be managed;
b) Ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management
c) Proposals for ecological enhancements for habitats and species as agreed in the BEP;
d) Aims and objectives of management;
e) Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives;
f) Prescriptions for management actions;
g) Preparation of a work schedule (including an annual work plan capable of being rolled forward over a five-year period);

h) Details of the body or organization responsible for implementation of the plan;
i) Ongoing monitoring and remedial measures; and
j) Details of the legal and funding mechanism by which the long-term implementation of the plan will be secured by the developer with the management bodies responsible for its delivery.

The Plan shall also set out (where the results from monitoring show that the conservation aims and objectives of the LEMP are not being met) how contingencies and/or other remedial action will be identified, agreed and implemented so that the development still delivers the fully functioning biodiversity objectives of the originally approved scheme.

The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and the management prescriptions shall be implemented across the site for a lifetime to be agreed within the LEMP.

18) Prior to their erection on site details of the proposed materials and finish including colour of all solar panels, frames, ancillary buildings, equipment, and enclosures shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and shall be maintained as such for the lifetime of the development hereby permitted.

19) All works to the site shall occur strictly in accordance with the Construction Traffic Management Plan produced by Cole Easdon (Doc Ref: QMF 09.20 Issue 4 dated November 2023.

20) The mitigation measures outlined in section 5 of the Noise Assessment dated 29 November 2023 shall be installed and operational prior to the First Export Date and shall be retained in situ thereafter for the duration of the operational phase.

21) No external artificial lighting or other security measures other than those agreed on the approved General Arrangement Plan EPD-025-GA-LA-08 Rev.0 and Fence, Security and Site Road Details EPD-0250GA-SC-01-R.0 plans.

22) The visibility splays shown on the approved Access Arrangement (PLAN 7834/202 Rev D) plan shall be implemented prior to the first use of the access, and shall be retained as such, unobstructed by any object, structure, planting or other material with a height exceeding or growing above 0.9m as measured from carriageway level, for the duration of the development.

23) All construction traffic serving the development shall enter and leave the site through the access shown on the approved Access Arrangement (PLAN 7834/202 Rev D) plan and not by any other access.

24) Notwithstanding the submitted information, works to form the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) shall not commence until a final Detailed Battery Safety Management Plan (DBSMP) has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The final DBSMP shall prescribe measures to facilitate safety during the construction, operation and

decommissioning of the BESS. The BESS shall be operated in accordance with the approved DBSMP at all times.

25) Prior to the First Export Date, a grazing management plan (GMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The GMP shall detail which parts of the site shall be used for the grazing of livestock, during which months of the year, and how the grazing is to be managed. Within three years of the First Export Date, the grazing of livestock shall be implemented on the site in accordance with the GMP. Any changes to the GMP during the lifetime of the permission shall first be submitted to the local planning authority for approval in writing prior to implementation on site and shall thereafter be provided in accordance with the approved revised GMP.

26) Within 6 months of the cessation of the export of electricity, or within 39 years following the First Export Date, a detailed Decommissioning Method Statement (DMS) shall be submitted to the local planning authority for its written approval. The DMS shall include:
   a) details of the removal of the panels, supports, inverters, cables, buildings and all associated structures and fencing from the site, and a timetable for their removal;
   b) a traffic management plan to address likely traffic impacts during the decommissioning period;
   c) an environmental management plan to include measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife and habitats;
   d) full details of the proposed restoration of the site including a site wide restoration and aftercare scheme which details how the land will be restored to its former agricultural grade; and
   e) Details of the recycling and disposal of the decommissioned elements.

   The Site shall be decommissioned in accordance with the approved DMS within 12 months of the expiry of the 40 year period of planning permission.