PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF SOLAR FARM | DESIGN, ACCESSIBILITY & PLANNING APPRAISAL

ADDRESS: FORD FARM, UPTON GREY, BASINGSTOKE, RG25 2RP

CLIENT: FLEET SOLAR LTD

DATE: NOVEMBER 2023

planning | architecture | landscape

CONTENTS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fleet Solar Limited (the Applicant) seeks planning permission for the proposed installation of a 47.5-megawatt (MW) (AC) capacity ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) farm and associated ancillary works (the Development) on land to the north and west of Long Sutton, Hampshire (the Site). The Development covers an area of approximately 105 hectares (ha), with a Developable Area (i.e., area covered by infrastructure) of approximately 66 ha.

The Development is temporary in nature with planning permission being sought for 40 years, after which the Site will be returned to its existing condition. The Development is effectively fully "reversible" upon decommissioning. During operation of the Development, agricultural activities will continue with the land being used for sheep grazing between and under the solar panels on newly planted native species grass and meadow mix.

In terms of consultation, a public event was held in Long Sutton in April 2023, acting as an informal drop-in session for any interested parties. In addition, a website and email address were set up in March 2023 to allow for updates and communication with interested parties. All feedback received to date is detailed within the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) submitted with this planning application.

This Design, Access and Planning Appraisal (DAPA) includes a Design and Access Statement (DAS). It should be read in conjunction with the detailed assessments which have been undertaken in relation to landscape, arboriculture, ecology, heritage (including archaeology), flood risk, noise, agricultural quality, and traffic. Although some adverse visual impacts are identified for visual receptors within close proximity to the Site, there are no significant issues of concern for any other considerations and where minor impacts have been identified, these can be suitably designed or mitigated.

The Site is not particularly environmentally sensitive, and the nature and complexity of the Development is such that impacts would be limited to the immediate locality. The Development is underpinned by considerable landscape and ecological mitigation which includes the retention and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows; infilling gaps in existing hedgerows with native species; and native species grass and wildflower mix around and under the solar panels. Existing vegetation will be retained as far as possible and only three individual trees (Moderate quality), two stems from one group of trees (High quality) and two sections of hedgerow (Moderate quality) will be removed to accommodate new entrances into the fields where an existing access cannot be utilised. This will result in an overall Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of 61%.

The Development is required in response to both national and local renewable energy targets which aim to combat the effects of climate change. The UK Government has set ambitious targets for renewable energy generation to ensure the country reaches net zero emissions by 2050 to help combat climate change. Locally, Hart District Council (the LPA) declared a Climate Emergency in April 2021, and have committed to becoming a carbon neutral authority by 2035, and a carbon neutral district by 2040.

The Development will result in the saving of approximately 29,000 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) per year and would produce clean energy which would be able to power approximately 18,600 UK households.

The Development is acceptable when assessed against development plan policy contained and all other relevant material considerations including national guidance and advice, supplementary planning guidance and emerging local policies.

The Development, along with the mitigation strategies proposed, would not materially conflict with the policy objectives of the Local Plan in relation to the principle of the Development, heritage, amenity, biodiversity, ecology, landscape, flood risk, drainage, transport, and sustainability. The Application can also draw considerable support from NPPF in these respects.

The substantial environmental benefits of the Development should carry considerable weight in the decision-making process to indicate that the Application should be granted.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Background

This Design, Accessibility and Planning Appraisal (DAPA) has been prepared by Laurence Associates (the Agent) to accompany the planning application (the Application) submitted to Hart District Council (the LPA) by Fleet Solar Limited (the Applicant) for a solar photovoltaic (PV) array/ solar farm with an export capacity of up to 47.5 Megawatts (MW) with associated infrastructure, access, and landscaping (the Development).

The Development is proposed to be sited on land to the north and west of Long Sutton, Hampshire (the Site).

This DAPA explains the design principles and concepts which have been applied to the Development, demonstrates the steps taken to appraise the context of the Development, and how the design of the Development takes that context into account. This Statement therefore meets the requirements for Design and Access Statements (DAS) which are set out in the Planning Practice Guidance for Making and Application[1].

Planning Application Submission

This DAPA and the accompanying documents comprise the necessary submission documents to ensure that the Application can be registered, validated and determined positively by the LPA. In addition to this document, the Application comprises a number of technical documents, including:

- Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Report and Framework Soil Management Plan (FSMP);
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA);
- Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP);
- Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Surface Water Drainage Strategy (SWDP);
- Heritage Desk-Based Assessment (HDBA);
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA);
- Photomontages;
- Noise Impact Assessment (NIA);
- Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA);
- Barn Owl and Great Crested Newt (GCN) Survey Note;
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report;
- Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study;
- Statement of Community Involvement (SCI);
- Screening Opinion Request;
- Planning Application Forms;
- Planning Certificates;
- Screening Opinion Request; and
- Development Plans:
    - Site Location;
    - Site Layout;
    - Landscape and Ecological Mitigation Plan (LEMP);
    - Detailed Mounting;
    - Indicative Transformer;
    - Indicative Access Track;
    - Indicative Fence and Gate;
    - Indicative Security Camera;
    - Indicative Switchgear; and
    - Public Right of Way (PRoW) Cross Section.

[1] HM Government (2021) Planning Practice Guidance: Making an Application [Online] Available from: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-an-application (Accessed 30/08/2023).

The Applicant

Fleet Solar Limited is a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) wholly owned by BRE/GE Solar Developments Limited which is a joint venture between BayWa r.e. UK Limited and Grüne Energien Projekt UG (Haftungsbeschränkt).

Grüne Energien (GE) have over 12 years' experience in solar energy, developing approximately 50 ground-mounted solar projects in the UK since 2011. The Grüne Energien solar teams are based in Germany and the UK.

BayWa r.e UK is a leading, reputable, international renewable energy project developer and service provider with offices across the UK and Ireland. In the UK and Ireland, the business focus is the development of solar and onshore wind farms as well as commercial and technical asset management of wind and solar sites. BayWa r.e UK has over 100 staff working across three offices in the UK at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Milton Keynes, as well as an office in Cork. The company has delivered 625 solar and wind projects worldwide totalling approximately 1900 MW, including 31 projects in the UK totalling 536 MW. The internationally trained and qualified teams cover the entire range of activities required to produce renewable energy, from site development through turnkey construction and financing to sale.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

A review of the planning history in the vicinity of the Site has been carried out utilising the LPA's planning history search. The results were extensive and therefore, only the relevant history is noted below:

- **20/02632/EIA**: Request for screening Opinion for a proposed ground mounted solar farm with associated ancillary works and buildings (up to 105.11 ha) – Decided EIA required on 25th January 2021.

The above Screening Opinion relates to the Development which this full planning application also relates. The LPA registered the Screening Opinion request on 27th October 2020 (Hart District Council Reference: 20/02632/EIA). As the LPA did not issue a Screening Opinion within statutory timeframes, under the provisions of Regulation 7 of the Regulations, the Applicant requested a Screening Direction of the Secretary of State (SoS) (SoS Reference: PCU/EIA/N1730/3267106).

The SoS concluded that the nature and characteristics of the Development, in this location, was not likely to result in significant effects on sensitive designated ecological and historic sites and features in the vicinity. The SoS concluded that although there would be some likely impact on the footpaths, wider area designations and sensitive areas, as well as potential impacts on the function of RAF Odiham, none would result in significant impacts on the environment that would require EIA.

The SoS released a Screening Direction on the 24th February 2021 (hereafter referred to as the 'previous Screening Direction') confirming an EIA is not required.

Since the previous request for a Screening Opinion there has been a change to the boundary of the Site and as such, a further Screening Opinion Request has been submitted to the LPA with this Application. Further detail is provided at Section 5.

4.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Pre-Application Consultation

Consultation with the LPA

Laurence Associates attempted to engage with LPA prior to the submission of this Application with the intention of agreeing on the viewpoints for the submitted LVIA. The LPA were unable to engage with Laurence Associates as a formal planning application had not been submitted to the LPA at the time of contact.

In addition, attempts were made to contact Hampshire County Council (HCC) to confirm the status of the PRoW which run through the Site. Unfortunately, HCC were also unable to engage in discussions with Laurence Associates. As such, the layout of the Site follows the OS map, as per standard practice which reflect the trodden paths/routes in the ground.

Public Consultation Events

Although not a statutory requirement under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the EIA Regulations[1]), the Applicant sought to engage with the local community and to inform stakeholders about the Development. The Applicant was keen to invite feedback and questions about the Development.

An in-person public event was held on Thursday 20th April 2023 at Long Sutton Village Hall. The event was advertised through Long Sutton Parish Council who published details locally, invitation to Local Ward Members and the local Member of Parliament (MPs). To advertise the event more widely, it was advertised in the Basingstoke Gazette, which also published the advert on digital platforms.

The event presented details of the Development and allowed interested parties to ask questions and enter discussions with representatives of the Applicant and the consultants preparing the Application.

A website dedicated to the Development was set up and welcomed comments from the local community. The website provides details of the Development as well as ways in which people could give feedback to the Applicant. An email address was set up and is monitored for communications.

The Applicant remains committed to engaging with the local community throughout the planning process, and during construction, operation and decommissioning of the Development.

Further detail on community engagement is provided in the SCI which accompanies the Application.

Community Benefit Fund (CBF)

The Applicant intends to commence discussions with the Parish Council in agreeing terms for a legal agreement to direct funds to local projects, should planning permission be granted for the Development. Depending on the local preference, the CBF would either be an annual payment or a front-loaded amount. The details of the agreement would be discussed with the Parish Council when planning permission for the Development is granted.

[1] The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/571/contents/made [Accessed: 20th October 2023].

5.0 THE EIA REGULATIONS (2017)

A Screening Opinion Request in accordance with the EIA Regulation is submitted to the LPA as part of this Application.

A Screening Opinion for the Development was previously sought by the Applicant in 2020. The LPA registered the Screening Opinion Request on 27th October 2020 (Hart District Council Reference: 20/02632/EIA) (hereafter referred to as the 'previous Screening Opinion Request'). As the LPA did not issue a Screening Opinion within statutory timeframes, under the provisions of Regulation 7 of the EIA Regulations, the Applicant requested a Screening Direction of the Secretary of State (SoS) (SoS Reference: PCU/EIA/N1730/3267106).

The SoS released a Screening Direction on the 24th February 2021 (hereafter referred to as the 'previous Screening Direction') confirming an EIA is not required.

As the boundary of the Site has changed and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) is no longer proposed as part of the Development, a further Screening Opinion has been requested to comply with the EIA Regulations. As a full suite of environmental studies have been undertaken since the Previous Screening Direction, it can be evidenced that the Development will not result in significant effects and therefore, an EIA is not required to support the Application.

Changes to the Site and the Development since the previous Screening Opinion Request are set out within the current Screening Opinion Request, which is submitted to the LPA at the same time as this application.

6.0 EXISTING SITE

The Site

The Site comprises an area of approximately 105 ha of land at Long Sutton, Hampshire (Section 8.1 – Site Location). The total area within the Site which will be covered by infrastructure (i.e., the Developable Area) is approximately 66 ha. The Site comprises four parcels of agricultural land between Long Sutton to the south and Odiham Airfield to the north, B3349 (Alton Road) to the west and Long Lane to the east (Section 8.2 – Site Layout).

The Site sits below RAF Odiham Airfield and generally slopes from north to south. The topography and vegetation allow limited views into the Site, including from the public roads and footpaths (footpaths 148/8/1; 148/8/2; and 148/8/3) that pass adjacent to, and through, the area proposed for development. The fields, which are currently used for arable farming and grazing, are typical for the area, being large and separated by hedgerows and mature trees.

As per the Environment Agency Flood Map, the Site is located within Flood Zone 1[1], which is an area at the lowest risk of flooding.

In terms of Agricultural Land Classification (ALC), the Site is located within Grade 2 – Very Good (21.6 ha), Grade 3a – Good (70 ha) and Grade 3b – Moderate (8.4ha). Although approximately 21% of the Site is covered by Grade 2 agricultural land, only only 3.5 ha of the Developable Area covers Grade 2 agricultural land (please refer to Figure 2 in the ALC).

The Site does not lie within any statutory landscape, heritage or ecological designations. There is one locally designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) – Hayley's Copse on-site. Hayley's Copse is also designated as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW). This small, wooded parcel will be retained throughout construction and operation of the Development and provide valuable visual screening. Areas of ASNW and Ancient Re-Planted Woodland (ARW) are located immediately to the west and east of the Site.

All existing vegetation will be retained (and enhanced) except for three individual trees (Moderate quality), two stems from one group of trees (High quality) and two sections of hedgerow (Moderate quality) will be removed to accommodate new entrances into the fields where an existing access cannot be utilised.

There are no statutory ecology or landscape designations within 2 km of the Site (e.g., Ramsar, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Areas of Protection (SPA), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)).

Surrounding Area

In terms of the immediate context, the Site is surrounded by farmland used for a combination of arable farming and livestock grazing. The field boundaries are characterised by dense hedgerows and established tree planting. As noted above, existing hedgerows and trees surrounding the Site will be retained wherever possible and enhanced through ecological and landscape mitigation.

There are a number of Listed Buildings, and Conservation Areas within close proximity of the Site, including:

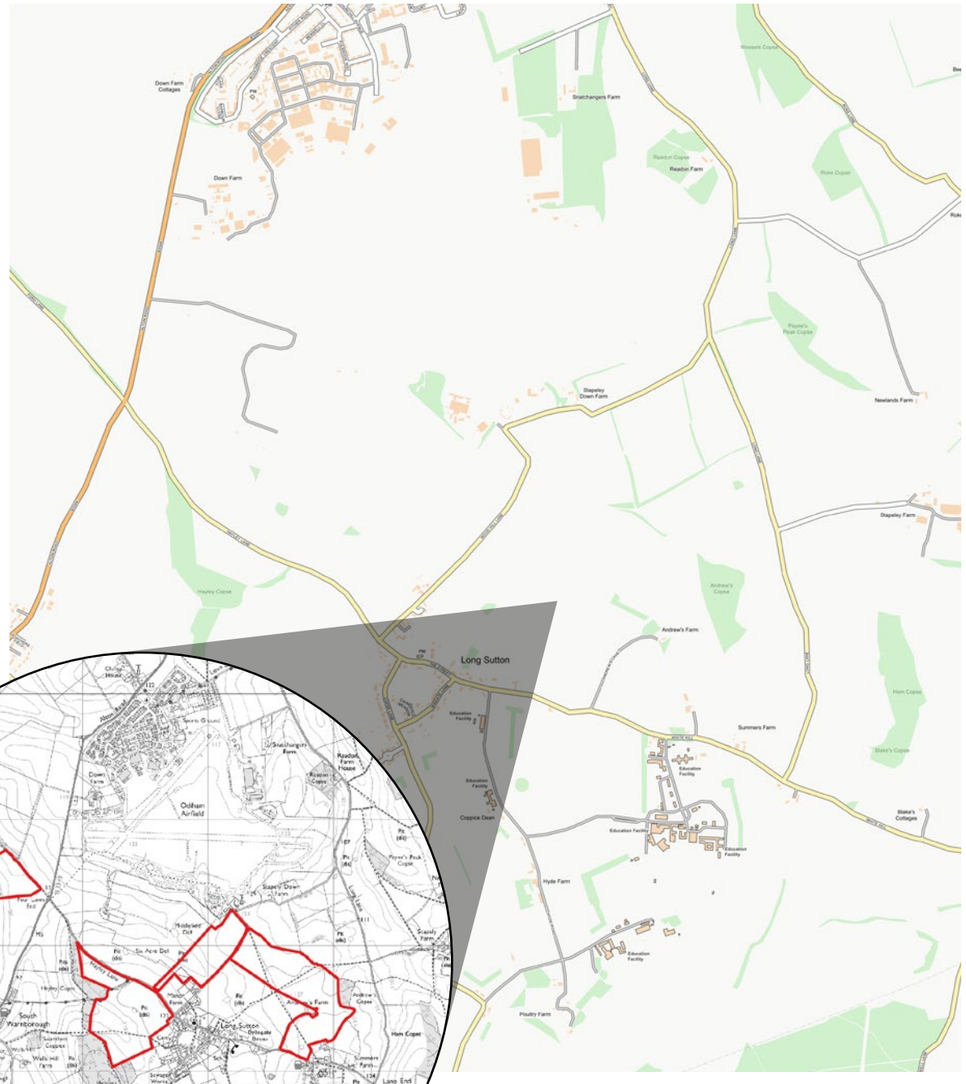
- Long Sutton Conservation Area - immediately south and southeast of the Site;
- South Warnborough Conservation Area – 750 m south and west of the Site;
- Grade II Listed Andrew's Farmhouse - immediately adjacent to the Site;
- Grade II* Listed Long Sutton Manor – 100 m east of the Site;
- Grade II* Listed Church of All Saints and The Old Parsonage – 180-220 m east of the Site;
- Grade II Listed Lodge House and Main North Gate at Lord Wandsworth College – 60 m south of the Site;
- Three Grade II Listed Buildings at Ford Farm – 910 m north of the Site;
- Three Grade II Listed Buildings at Down Farm – 830 m northeast of the Site; and
- Grade II Listed Little Deane Farm – 910 m west of the Site.

[1] The Environment Agency. 2023. EA Flood Mapping. Available here:

In terms of local designations, there are two further SINCs immediately adjacent to the Site boundary – Andrew's Copse and Hester's Copse. These are designated for ASNW /re-planted habitat and will not be physically impacted by the Development. The road verges along Hayley's Lane and Ford Lane are locally designated as Road Verges of Ecological Importance (RVEI) for priority moth species.

The 49.9 MW Chosley Solar Farm is located approximately 1 km north-west of the Site. This was approved by the LPA in late 2021 (Hart District Council Reference: 20/03185/FUL). The cumulative impact with Chosley Solar Farm, and others, is detailed within the submitted LVIA however, due to limited visibility, no adverse impacts are anticipated.

6.1 SITE LOCATION



7.0 DESIGN EVOLUTION

Site Selection

The Development aims harness solar power to generate electricity (at a suitable energy yield) while avoiding, reducing, or mitigating potential environmental effect.

A thorough feasibility exercise has been undertaken to assess the suitability of the Site and alternatives. Technical and environmental aspects have been considered to determine the most appropriate location, scale and proposed infrastructure layout.

The key criteria which have resulted in the Site being selected for the Development include:

- Solar irradiance level;
- Proximity to an available grid connection at the existing Fleet 400 kV Substation;
- Relatively flat topography;
- Lack of statutory environmental constraints on-site (e.g., heritage, ecology, ornithology, hydrology and landscape);
- Separation from residential properties;
- Existing mature vegetation along field boundaries and surrounding the Site;
- Lack of planning designations (e.g., Green Belt);
- Landscape capacity to accommodate the Development;
- Largely based on Grade 3 ALC (78.4 % of the Site) and within the LPA area where this grade of agricultural land is plentiful. Whilst 78.4% of the Site is within Grade 3 ALC, this equates to 95% of the Developable Area on Grade 3 ALC (i.e., infrastructure avoids the majority of Grade 2 on-site, only 3.5 ha of the Developable Area is on Grade 2 land);
- Field size and lack of shading;
- Access to the Site can accommodate construction vehicles and existing field accesses would result in the need to remove minimal boundary vegetation; and
- Proximity to RAF Odiham Airfield which has introduced an industrial aspect to the area.

Given the above considerations, the Site was identified as having very good potential for solar development with limited likelihood for adverse environmental impacts. Environmental impacts are considered further in Section 10 of this DAPA.

Design Rationale

The design and layout of the Development has been an iterative process, informed by consideration of a variety of environmental and technical assessments, professional advice from consultants and feedback from consultees and members of the public.

Indicative layouts were developed based on initial site visits, desk-based information and known constraining factors. More detailed site assessment and investigations were then undertaken by obtaining baseline information relating to environmental effects including landscape, ecology, flood risk, and arboriculture, amongst others.

Following the collation of baseline information, the layout was amended to ensure that residential amenity, ecological assets, and other sensitive receptors would be protected through the minimisation of adverse impacts. The layout and location of all infrastructure was influenced by technical and environmental constraints.

The final design of the Development is a careful balance between addressing site constraints, minimising environmental impact, and addressing feedback from consultees including the local community. This iterative design approach helps minimise unnecessary environmental impacts at an early stage. Where environmental impacts are anticipated, such effects can be reduced through identification of mitigation measures that can be integrated early in the development process (i.e., landscape and ecology mitigation which has become an integral part of the Development).

The LEMP has been designed to ensure the Development is as visually unobtrusive as possible (visual impacts limited to the immediate locality of the Site) and to avoid incursions into more environmentally sensitive areas of the Site. The LEMP provides visual screening and general landscape improvements using native species which will integrate the Development with the wider landscape, enhance the existing landscape character and provide a substantial BNG (61%). The main design consideration which the layout of the Development has considered are summarised as follows:

- BESS removed due to environmental constraints;
- Area to be covered with infrastructure has been reduced to minimise development in the vicinity of residential receptors (e.g., field to the north of Long Sutton);
- Area to be covered by panels removed from Grade 2 ALC as far as possible (while maintaining a viable development, sufficient to meet the grid capacity of 47.5 MW). Only 3.5 ha of Grade 2 land will contain infrastructure;
- Reduced noise inverters surrounding nearest residential properties (e.g., Andrew's Farm);
- Temporary Construction Compound (TCC) and switchgear located to minimise visibility from publicly accessible areas;
- The existing patterns of hedgerow and trees to field boundaries are to be preserved and enhanced;
- Existing field accesses to be used as much as possible;
- Minimum 40 m buffer of overhead lines;
- Mitigation of visual impacts by setting the Development back from existing PRoW. A minimum distance of 18 m from the centre of the PRoW to the solar panels have been implemented, as shown in Section 8.10 – PRoW Cross Section (Drawing Title: Site_Section A-A). This buffer distance is larger at certain points;
- Planting native species hedgerows, trees and wildflower meadow to provide visual interest and screening;
- Minimise number of crossings of PRoW with access tracks and avoid the need to re-route PRoW;
- Enhanced visual screening to minimise the impact on residential amenity;
- The existing road network and the need to provide safe access to the Site and to prevent any significant impacts on the highway network;
- 30 m buffer from badger setts identified on-site; and
- Infrastructure avoids ASNW buffer and Root Protection Areas (RPA).

The final design of the Development is a careful balance between addressing site constraints, minimising environmental impact, and addressing feedback from consultees including the local community.

The layout of the Development is optimal for the Site which has in turn been identified given the lack of environmental constraints and proximity to the point of connection to the National Grid where capacity is available.

8.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Overview

The Development is for the construction and operation of a 47.5MW (AC) capacity solar farm, which would help to generate essential clean energy, thereby supporting climate change mitigation.

The Development would consist of solar PV panels together with inverters, transformers, switchgear, a TCC, access tracks, fencing, security cameras and ecological / landscape enhancements. The Development would have an operational period of 40 years, after which it will be decommissioned fully.

The Development has been carefully designed, acknowledging the environmental surveys undertaken and feedback from consultees and the community.

The Development will result in the saving of approximately 29,000 tonnes of CO_2 per year and would produce clean energy which would be able to power approximately 18,600 UK households.

Development Infrastructure

Solar Panels

The solar panels are to be arranged in south-facing rows of modular arrays and each module will be inclined at an angle of 10 – 20 degrees towards the sun.

The front, lower edge of the modules will be approximately 80 cm above ground level, with a maximum height of approximately 2.4 – 2.6 m on the rear, upper edge. Each module array is made up of two vertically stacked panels in portrait, with a total length of 4.6 m. Each row is spaced at a minimum of 2.5 m to prevent overshadowing of panels by other panels. The panels would be mounted on steel frames supported by upright poles which will be pile drive into the ground. No concrete foundations are required, and little excavation is therefore necessary.

An indicative elevation of a solar panel is shown in Section 8.4 – Detailed Mounting (Drawing Title: 02_detail_modul_mounting_1_100).

Inverters

There are approximately 200-300 small units mounted on the support structures under the solar panels at the end of each row of panels. These collect the Direct Current (DC) electricity from the solar panels and convert it into Alternating Current (AC) electricity. This electricity is then directed into the Transformers via underground cabling.

Transformers

Transformer units collect the AC electricity supplied from the inverters and increase the voltage to 33kV directing it towards the switchgear.

There will be 30 transformers across the Site, each comprising a metal box approximately 2.6 m high x 2.2 m wide x 3.4 m long. These will be located on a ramped-up concrete base, approximately 0.6 m above ground level.

As detailed in the NIA, to ensure compliance with noise limits, reduced noise inverters will be utilised in Fields A, B and C (see Figure 3 of the NIA).

During operation, the transformers are accessed via a network of unobstructed internal grass or gravel access tracks.

An indicative elevation of a transformer is shown in Section 8.5 – Indicative Transformer (Drawing Title: 04_detail_transformer_station 2000-3150kVA_slope 5-13).

Switchgear

A small enclosure will house the switchgear, which collects all the generated AC electricity from the transformers. The AC electricity will then connect to the electricity network at the existing Fleet 400 kV Substation (cable route will be subject to a separate planning application).

The switchgear will be approximately 10 m long x 2.6 m wide x 2.6 m high, as shown in Section 8.9 – Indicative Switchgear (Drawing Title: 04_detail_transfer switch station).

TCC

A TCC is located to the north of the main Site entrance, off Hayley's Lane. This will be approximately 50 m x 50 m and utilised during the construction of the Development. This would likely consist of metal plates to avoid damage to the ground and / or compacted gravel. The TCC would be utilised as the site office, staff parking and storage. It would likely consist of metal storage containers, approximately 3.3 m high x 2.5 m wide x 6 m long.

As construction will primarily take place during daytime, on-site lighting will be limited to emergency lights over the TCC, switchgear and transformers. These will likely be activated by motion only.

Following construction (approximately 7 months), the TCC will be removed, and the land returned to current condition.

Access Tracks

Access tracks are sensitively designed throughout the Site, typically along hedgerows and/ or between rows of panels. These typically consist of compacted surface or in some places unobstructed corridors of grass, linking the transformer units and providing access for maintenance.

Access tracks are typically a minimum of 3.5 m wide and will utilise existing field entrances, as far as possible. These would typically be constructed on compacted gravel.

An indicative cross section of an access track is shown in Section 8.6 – Indicative Access Track (Drawing Title: 04_detail_gravel road).

Security Fence

The Site will be secured by a galvanised mesh deer fence (approximately 2 m high), supported on galvanised metal poles (approximately 3 m spacing). This will surround the perimeter of the Site, around the panels. Double leaf gates (approximately 6 m wide) will allow access to the Site. The fence will also include mammal gates to allow the continued movement of species that currently utilise the Site.

A minimum 18 m buffer between PRoW and the solar panels will be maintained. This will allow sufficient distance for planting to provide visual screening of the Development. Moreover, design specifications require a minimum buffer of 5 m from the fence to the solar panels which provides a further buffer from the PRoW to the panels.

An indicative elevation of the security fence and gate is shown in Section 8.7 – Indicative Fence and Gate (Drawing Title: 10_detail_fence and gate).

Security Cameras

CCTV cameras will be located around the perimeter of the Site, at approximately 50 m intervals. These will be located on steel masts, approximately 3.5 m high. CCTV cameras will face inwards towards the Site and be remotely monitored.

An indicative elevation of a security camera pole is shown in Section 8.8 – Indicative Security Camera (Drawing Title: 10_detail_security camera).

Landscape Design

The landscape proposals for the Site have been designed to preserve and enhance the existing landscape features, to screen views of the Development and to enhance the biodiversity and habitat value of the Site.

The layout of infrastructure and access tracks has been designed to minimise impacts on the existing trees and hedgerows which will be retained and protected wherever possible. Existing field accesses have been used wherever possible. As noted in the AIA, only three individual trees (Moderate quality), two stems from one group of trees (High quality) and two sections of hedgerow (Moderate quality) will be removed to accommodate new entrances into the fields where an existing access cannot be utilised.

The Development includes extensive planting proposals and enhancements to create a net biodiversity gain (61%) which are detailed within the LVIA and the LEMP.

The primary mitigation elements detailed in the LEMP include:

- Retain and protect the ecological features of interest (trees, hedgerows) and provide opportunities for long-term enhancement through providing new habitats and appropriate management. There will be some small areas of hedgerow and tree removal to allow for new access routes. The new accesses will be no greater than normal field entrances provided for agricultural access requirements;
- Restoration of existing defunct, over mature or gappy hedgerows to enhance the screening potential of the existing hedges and enhance their biodiversity value of the Site;
- New hedgerow planting and landscape buffer planting to provide screening (full or partial) of the Development, with management proposals to ensure that they achieve optimum practical screening potential and contribute to the biodiversity of the Site. New hedgerow planting and landscape buffers will also allow wildlife corridors for movement across the Site and movement between the surrounding habitats;
- No removal of vegetation other than in the months of September-February to protect nesting birds;
- New and re-seeding with a species-diverse grassland mix and management through low intensity sheep grazing and/or hay production;
- Retention and management of hedgerow buffer strips to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the hedgerows and to ensure protection of the root protection zones for hedges and hedgerow trees;
- Creation of new hedgerow buffer strips to enhance the biodiversity of new hedgerows and planted tree and shrub buffers.

The landscape and ecological enhancements associated with the Development are shown in Section 8.3 – Proposed Planting Plan.

Public Right of Way (PRoW)

The Development has been designed to minimise impacts on the PRoW on-site (footpaths 148/8/1; 148/8/2; and 148/8/3), both during construction and operation of the Development.

As stated in Section 3 of this DAPA, the Applicant attempted to consult with the HCC's Countryside Access Officer to confirm the location of the PRoW due to discrepancies between the definitive map, OS mapping and the path shown on the ground during site visits. Regretfully, Laurence Associates did not receive a response from HCC on this matter.

Mitigation During Construction

The Applicant is committed to minimising the effects on users of the PRoW during construction of the Development. Footpaths 148/8/1; 148/8/2; and 148/8/3 may be subject to short-term temporary closures however, closures will be minimised and avoided where possible via effective management measures.

Where a PRoW will be impacted by the construction, appropriate signage will be erected which would provide details of closures including dates and hours affected. Signage will also include details of proposed diversions, if required. Signs would also inform PRoW users of the potential presence of construction activities.

It is intended that all PRoW which are outside the Site will remain open throughout construction. If required, the location and details of signage would be agreed with the LPA as part of a PRoW Management Plan prior to commencement of construction.

Mitigation During Operation

Once operational, access to the Development will be infrequent and restricted primarily to maintenance vehicles (approximately one van every 1 – 2 weeks). There should be no closures of PRoW during operation, however, if required, signage will be erected to notify users that there may be maintenance vehicles working in the vicinity. These signs would replace those erected during construction, with locations and detail of the signage agreed with the LPA prior to construction.

As detailed in the LEMP, considerable landscape and ecological enhancements are proposed along the PRoW within the Site. This includes proposed hedges and trees along the entire length on both sides of the PRoW, where not already present. A minimum 18 m buffer from the PRoW to the solar panels will be implemented on both sides of the PRoW, resulting a minimum corridor of 36 m along the PRoW. This large buffer has been implemented at the expense of additional generation capacity associated with the Development to ensure that visual impacts are minimised and that PRoW users can continue utilise them in a positive manner once the Development is operational.

A typical cross section of the PRoW is shown in Section 8.10 – PRoW Cross Section (Drawing Title: Site_Section A-A). As the fence line will be screened by existing and proposed planting, this will limit visual impact and allow enhancement of wildlife corridors. The Application is accompanied by photomontages which demonstrate how the proposed planting would look once establish, in Years 5 and 15 (i.e., 5 and 15 years after construction of the Development). The aim of this planting is to ensure that user experience of the PRoW remains positive.

Phases Of The Development

Construction

Construction would take approximately seven months. It is anticipated that there would be an average of four Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) movements per day during this period. As per the CTMP, this will vehicle movements will vary depending on the construction activities on-site.

Operation

Once operational, the Development will be unmanned (monitored remotely 24/7) and will require minimal maintenance. The modules are sufficiently cleaned by rainfall but occasionally require manual cleaning, approximately once a year, and the monitoring of performance is done remotely. Thus, requiring personnel to visit the Site is only necessary for repair or maintenance purposes. Once operational, traffic would be in the order of one van every 1-2 weeks.

On-site lighting during operation will be limited to emergency security lights over the switchgear and transformers. These will likely be activated by motion only.

During the operation of the Site, a native grassland seed mix will be grown around the panels to promote improved biodiversity and help support pollinating insects. It is likely there will be a planning condition which requires the monitoring and maintenance of planting to ensure it establishes. This grassland will likely be grazed so access will be required by the farmer. This allows the current agricultural use of the land to continue during operation of the Development.

Decommissioning

The operational phase of the Development will be limited to 40 years, and when the operational phase ends, the Development would be decommissioned. Decommissioning involves removing all solar panels, mounts, transformers, switchgear and inverters from the Site and recycling or disposing of them in accordance with best practice and market conditions at that time.

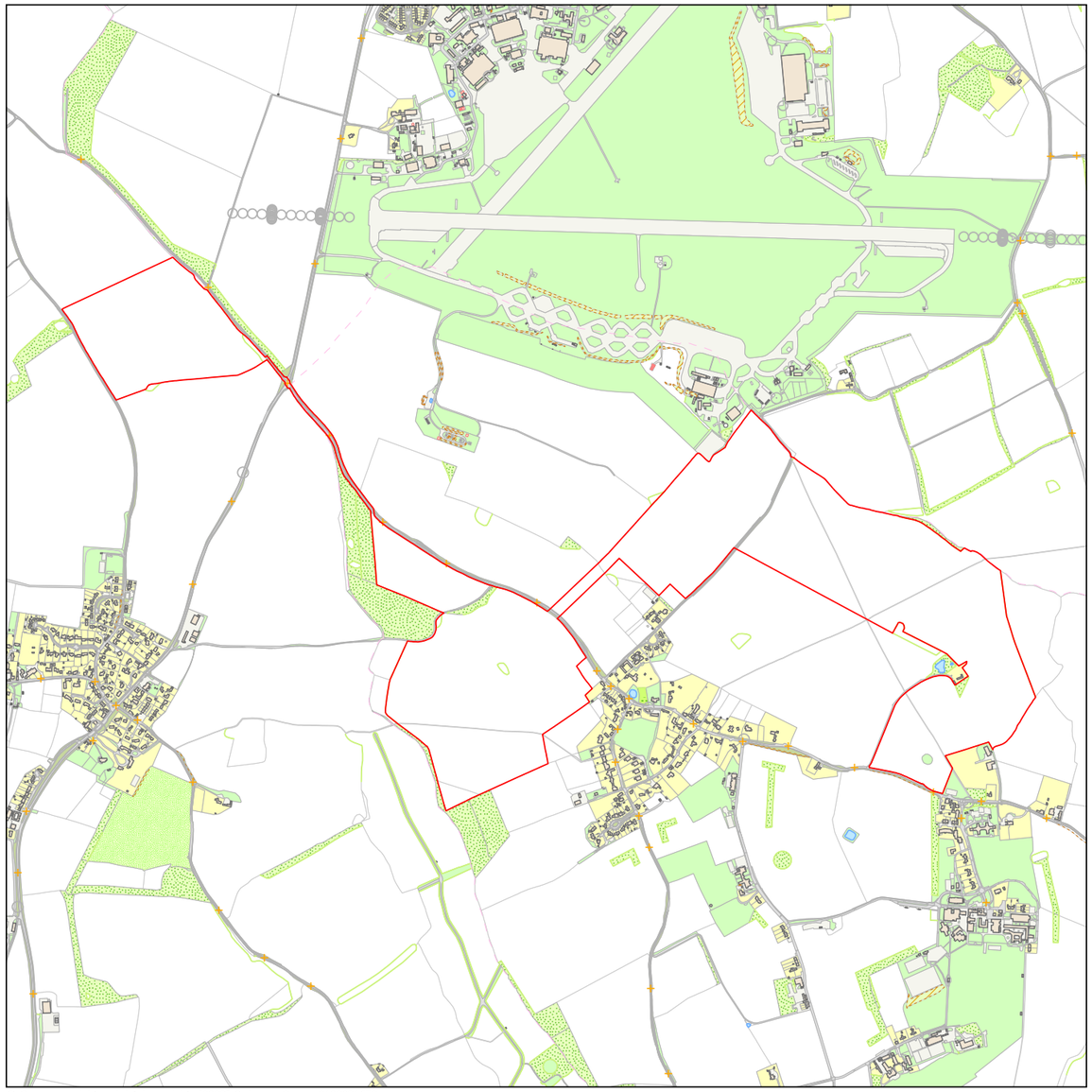
If appropriate, the land would then be restored to agricultural land use with a predicted improvement in soil quality and condition due to the 40-year break in arable agricultural practice.

A Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan (DEMP) and Decommissioning Traffic Management Plan (DTMP) would be prepared to ensure the process is undertaken effectively and in accordance with the relevant policy and recommended practices at the time.

Approximately 99% of the panel materials, used within the Development are recyclable[1] including non-reflective recyclable glass, copper, aluminium, steel and silicon in the semi-conductors.

1 Solar Energy UK Briefing (March 2022) Page 15, Everything Under the Sun

8.1 SITE LOCATION



Site Boundary

NOTES:	FIGURE REF: FLT8.v4	
	DATE OF ISSUE: 10/10/2023	
	1:12,000 @ A3	PRODUCED: MCE
		ISSUED TO: AGY

BayWa r.e.

FIGURE:
Figure 1 - Site Location

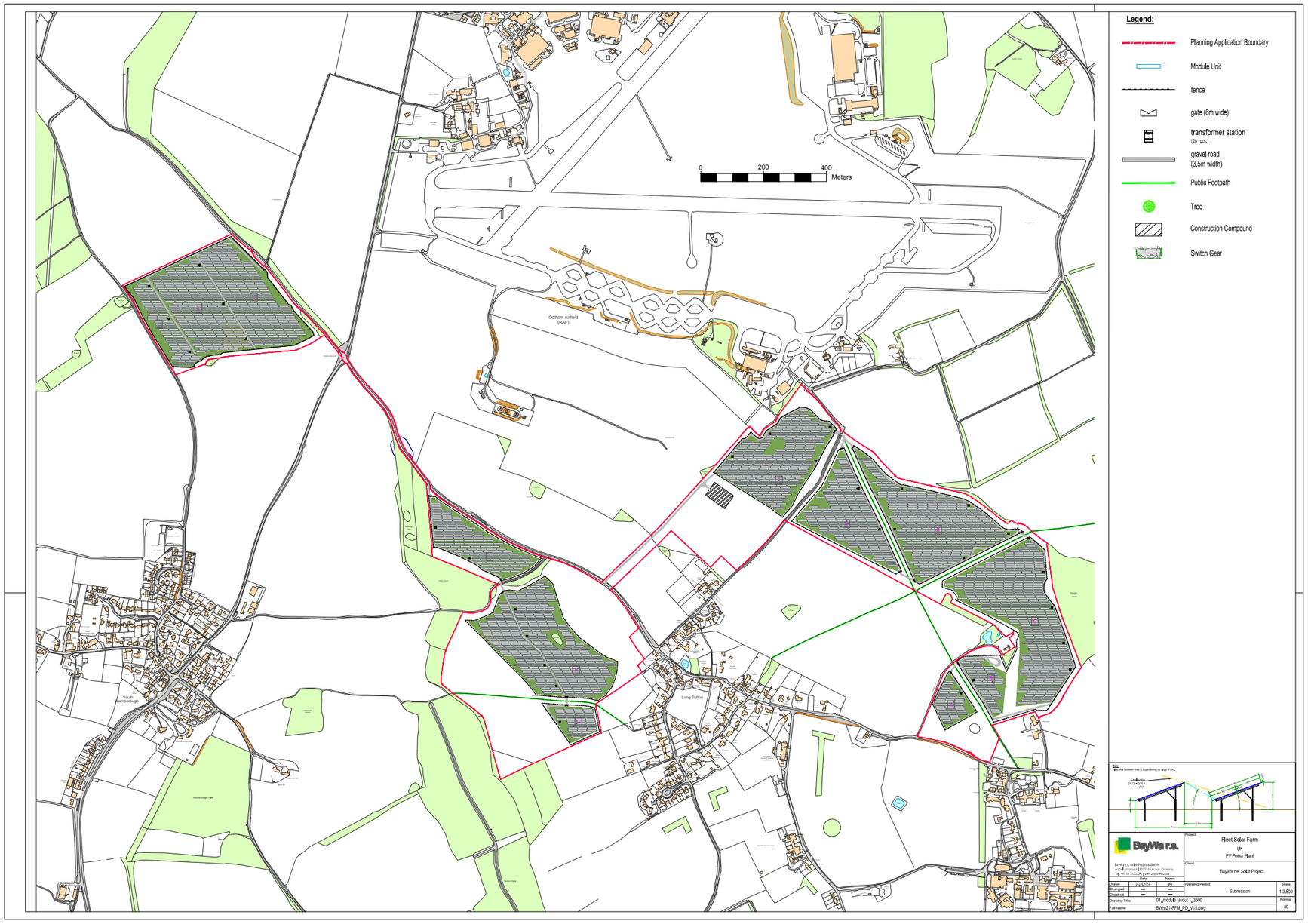
PROJECT:
Fleet

Spatial Reference:
Name: British National Grid
PCS: British National Grid
GCS: GCS OSGB 1936
Projection: Transverse Mercator

0 0.2 0.4 Kilometers
0 2 4 Kilometers

NOT TO SCALE

8.2 PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT



NOT TO SCALE

8.3 PROPOSED PLANTING PLAN

HEDGE MIX A

Notes: Plant at 5 plants/m (double staggered row: 33cm between plants & 50cm between rows).
Total new hedging length 5,278.95m.
Total infill hedging length 3,596.5m (allow for 50% replanting = 1,796.75m).

Code	Name	Size (cms) / Supply	%	Total Quantity	New Hedge (3,482.2m)	Infill Existing hedge (1,796.75m)
Ac	Acer campestre (field maple)	40-60 / BR	5	1,332	883	449
Bp	Betula pendula (silver birch)	60-80 / BR	1	268	178	90
Ca	Corylus avellana (hazel)	40-60 / BR	15	4,001	2,653	1,348
Cs	Cornus sanguinea (dogwood)	40-60 / BR	5	1,332	883	449
Cm	Crataegus monogyna (hawthorn)	40-60 / BR	15	4,001	2,653	1,348
Cys	Cytisus scoparius (broom)	40-60 / 2ltr container	2.5	666	442	224
Ee	Euonymus europaeus (spindle)	40-60 / BR	5	1,332	883	449
Ia	Ilex aquifolium (holly)	40-60 / 2ltr container	10	2,666	1,768	898
Ms	Malus sylvestris (crab apple)	90-120 / BR	1	267	177	90
Pd	Prunus domestica subsp. Insitia (bullace / wild plum)	60-80 / BR	7.5	2,002	1,327	675
Ps	Prunus spinosa (blackthorn)	40-60 / BR	10	2,666	1,768	898
Qr	Quercus robur (pedunculate oak)	80-100 / BR	1	267	177	90
Rc	Rosa canina (dog rose)	60-80 / BR	5	1,332	883	449
Sc	Salix caprea (goat willow)	60-80 / BR	5	1,332	883	449
Sn	Sambucus nigra (elder)	40-60 / BR	5	1,332	883	449
So	Sorbus aucuparia (rowan)	60-80 / BR	1	267	177	90
Tc	Tilia cordata (small-leaved lime)	60-80 / BR	1	267	177	90
Vo	Viburnum opulus (guelder rose)	40-60 / BR	5	1,332	883	449
	TOTALS			32,026	17,411	8,983

LANDSCAPE BLOCK PLANTING MIX B

Notes: Plant at 1 plants/m².
Total planting area 4,229m².

Code	Name	Size (cms) / Supply	%	Total Quantity
Ac	Acer campestre (field maple)	60-80 / BR	5	212
Bp	Betula pendula (silver birch)	100-125 / BR	5	212
Ca	Corylus avellana (hazel)	60-80 / BR	10	422
Cs	Cornus sanguinea (dogwood)	60-80 / BR	2.5	106
Cm	Crataegus monogyna (hawthorn)	60-80 / BR	10	422
Cys	Cytisus scoparius (broom)	40-60 / 2ltr container	2.5	106
Ee	Euonymus europaeus (spindle)	60-80 / BR	5	212
Fs	Fagus sylvatica (beech)	80-100 / BR	2.5	106
Fa	Frangula alnus (alder buckthorn)	60-80 / BR	5	212
Ia	Ilex aquifolium (holly)	40-60 / 2lt container	5	212
Pa	Prunus avium (wild cherry)	60-80 / BR	5	212
Pd	Prunus domestica subsp. Insitia (Bullace / Wild Plum)	60-80 / BR	7.5	313
Qr	Quercus robur (pedunculate oak)	150-175 / BR	2.5	106
Rc	Rosa canina (dog rose)	60-80 / BR	5	212
Sc	Salix caprea (goat willow)	60-80 / BR	10	422
Sn	Sambucus nigra (elder)	60-80 / BR	5	212
So	Sorbus aucuparia (rowan)	60-80 / BR	2.5	106
Tc	Tilia cordata (small-leaved lime)	60-80 / BR	5	212
Vo	Viburnum opulus (guelder rose)	60-80 / BR	5	212
	TOTAL			4,229

GENERAL PLANTING SPECIFICATION

Bare root stock is to be prevented from drying out after delivery. Plants should be planted as soon as practicable following delivery. Plants should be stored in a cool, frost-free place within breathable bags or plastic bags (ensuring that the plants are damp but not sitting in water). Alternatively, plants can be temporarily heeled in the ground awaiting planting. Bare root stock should not be exposed out of the ground for any longer than necessary when planting, to avoid the roots from drying out, therefore they should be kept in the packaging as planting progresses or heeled in plants lifted as required. Planting should be in excavated pits only, notch planting will not be acceptable for the size of stock specified.

Bare root stock planting between November and March, Cell-grown planting between September and June.

Container-grown plants are to be planted into pits of sufficient size to allow planting at their original planting depth, backfill and firm in stages, to ensure there are no air pockets. Break up the sides and base of pits to ensure good root penetration into the surrounding ground.

Thoroughly water containerised plants by thoroughly soaking the pots before planting and allow to drain.

Individual planting pits will be hand dug to break up the soil, with roots spread out to ensure good root distribution with the collar level with the finished soil level in the Cornish hedge, as grown in the nursery, before backfilling.

Minor pruning of damaged roots is to be undertaken at planting as required and prune dead and damaged shoots following planting and to the approval of the Appointed LA / CA.

Water each plant at planting to ensure thorough soaking of the plant station unless planting is taking place in a period of frequent rainfall and the soil appears to be sufficiently moist to the depth of the planting pit, repeat within 1-3 weeks if no rain within that period. Continue to water throughout the first year if required, i.e., during periods without rain for 2 weeks consecutively.

Any plants which die or become diseased, or fail to make satisfactory extension growth within the first three years after the completion of the development are to be replaced by the contractor. The failing plants will be removed, ground prepared for re-planting and new planting undertaken to the original specification of the plant, hedge or tree, unless it is considered that the species should be substituted for another, if it is assessed that conditions are not conducive to successful establishment of a particular species or there is potential for transference of disease. The Appointed Landscape Architect / CA will advise on this change before any changes are made. Plants which die due to disease will be identified for which disease prior to re-planting, to ensure that there is not a persistent disease affecting 1 or more particular species.

Bare-rooted plants are to be planted between late October and March. Containerised plants may be planted at any time of year.

Do not undertake planting when the soil is either frozen or waterlogged.

Plant shrubs and trees at the original soil level and gently firm in to prevent wind rock.

Protect each plant with a 60cm clear spiral rabbit guard supported with a single bamboo cane.

Notes:

Rev.	Description	Drawn	Date
1	Adjusting planting plan to a reviewed layout	ML	13.10.23

planning | architecture | landscape
t: +44 (0) 1872 225 259 Truro Office
t: +44 (0) 1579 340 900 Liskeard Office
e: hello@laurenceassociates.co.uk
w: www.laurenceassociates.co.uk

Project Title:
Construction of Solar Farm

Project Address:
Ford Farm
Upton Grey
Basingstoke
ST9 9LB

Client:
Energisto

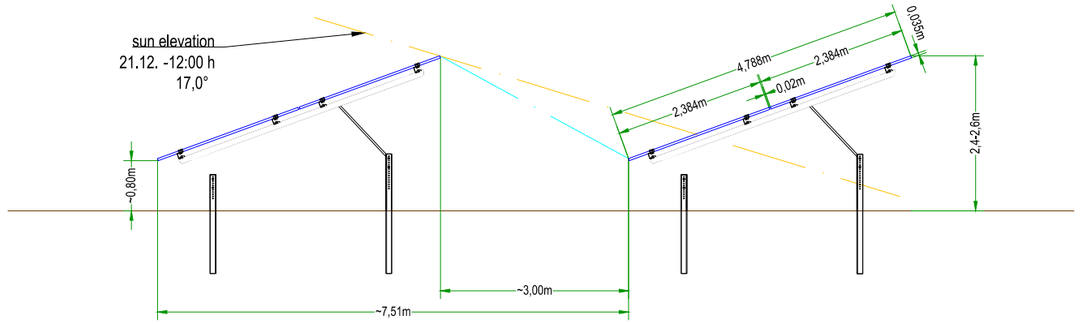
Drawing Title:
Planting Plan

Scale: 1:5000@A1 | Drawn: ML
Date: 30.10.23 | Checked: IM
Drawing No: 21161-PL-00-01 | Rev: 1

PLANNING

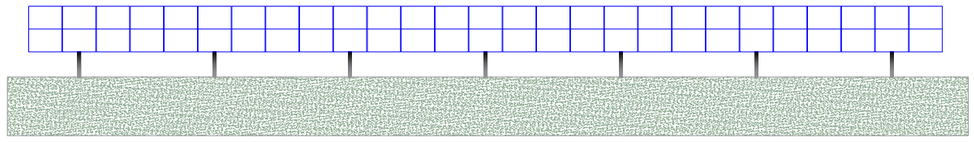
NOT TO SCALE

8.4 PROPOSED DETAILED MOUNTING



SIDE ELEVATION - 1:100

0 2 4 Meter



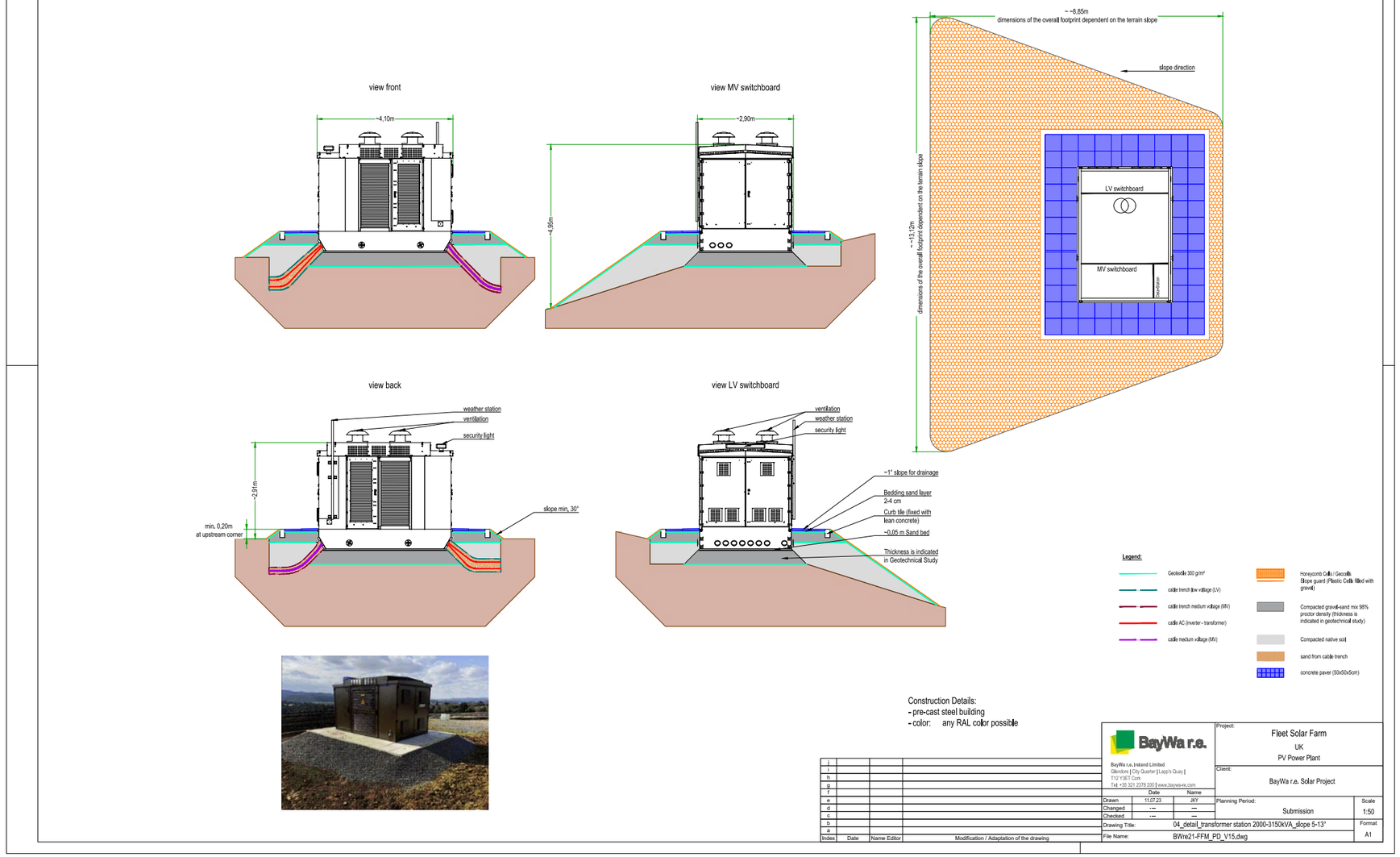
FRONT ELEVATION - 1:200

0 4 8 Meter

BayWa r.e.			Project: Fleet Solar Farm UK PV Power Plant
	Date	Name:	Client: Fleet Solar Ltd / Scale 1:100
Drawn	22.11.2022	JK	
Changed			
Checked			Planning Period: Permit / Format A4
Drawing Title:	02_detail_modul_mounting_1_100		
file name:	BWre21-FFM_PD_V15.dwg		

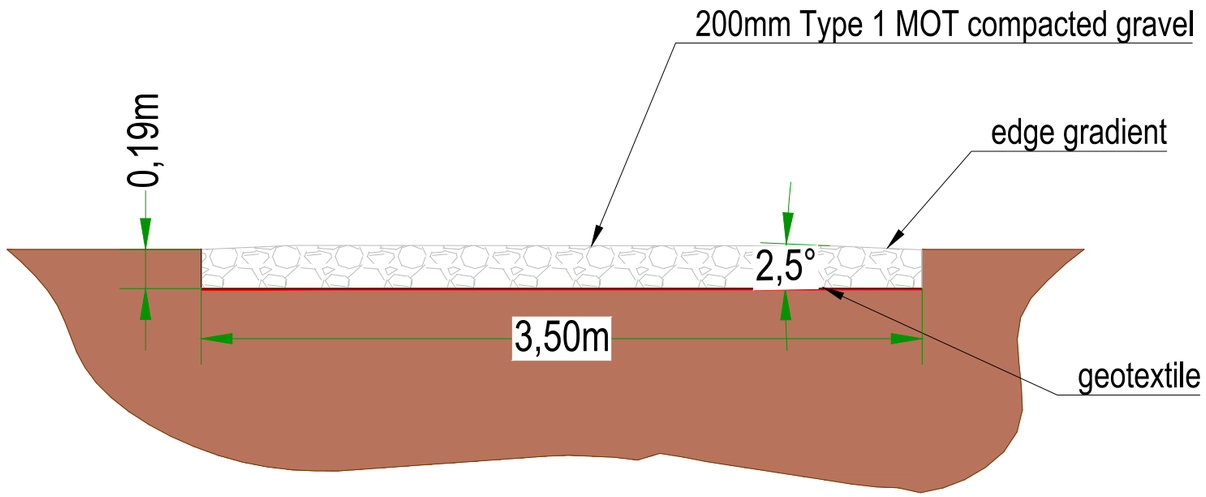
NOT TO SCALE

8.5 INDICATIVE TRANSFORMER



NOT TO SCALE

8.6 INDICATIVE ACCESS TRACK



Index	Date	Name Editor	Modification / Adaptation of the drawing
j			
i			
h			
g			
f			
e			
d			
c			
b			
a			

BayWa r.e.

BayWa r.e. Ireland Limited
Glandore | City Quarter | Lapp's Quay |
T12 Y3ET Cork
Tel: +35 321 2378 200 | www.baywa-re.com

	Date	Name
Drawn	11.07.23	JKY
Changed	---	---
Checked	---	---

Project: Fleet Solar Farm
UK
PV Power Plant

Client: BayWa r.e. Solar Project

Planning Period: Submission

Scale: 1:20

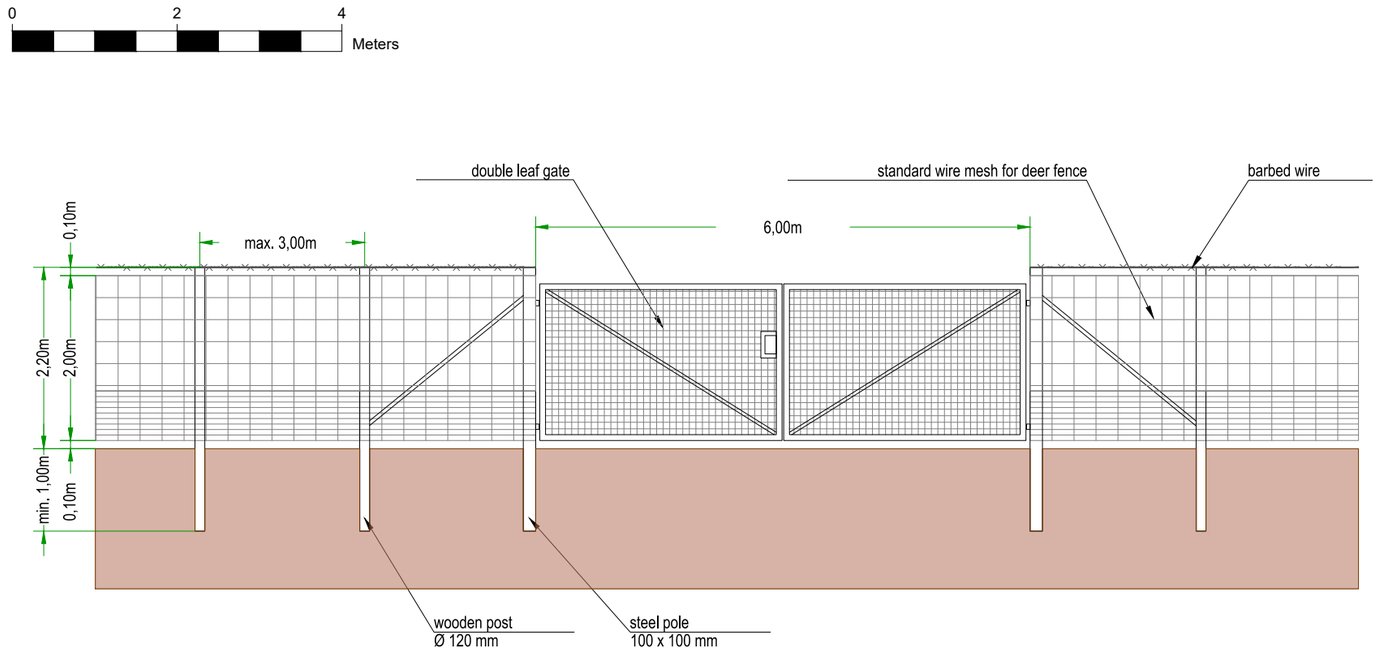
Drawing Title: 04_detail_gravel road

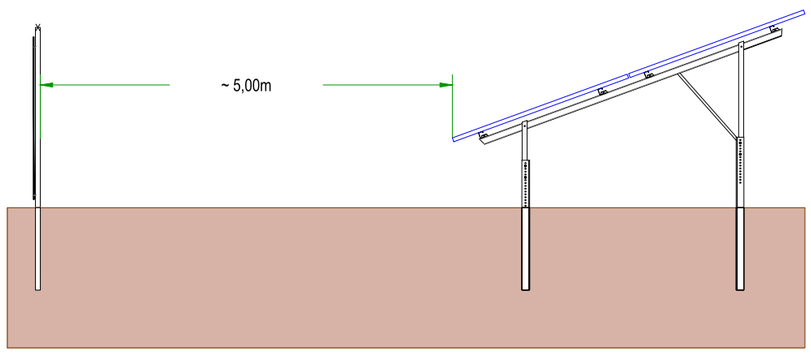
Format: A3

File Name: BWre21-FFM_PD_V15.dwg

NOT TO SCALE

8.7 INDICATIVE FENCE & GATE

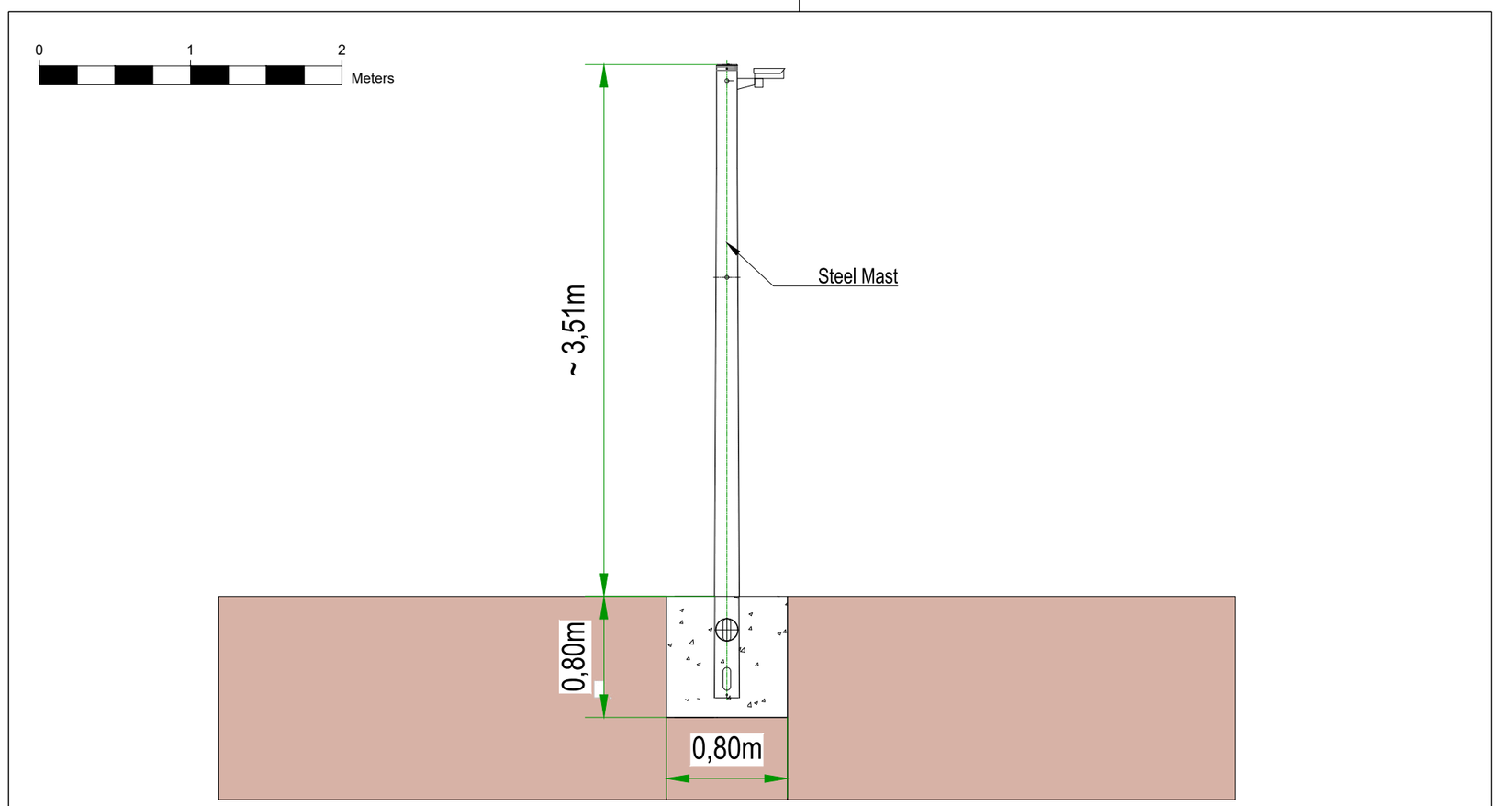




BayWa r.e. Ireland Limited Glandore | City Quarter | Lapp's Quay | T12 Y3ET Cork Tel: +35 321 2378 200 | www.baywa-re.com	Project: Fleet Solar Farm UK PV Power Plant	
	Date	Name:
Drawn	11.07.23	JKY
Changed	--	--
Checked	--	--
Drawing Title:	10_detail_fence and gate	
file name:	BWre21-FFM_PD_V15.dwg	
Client: BayWa r.e. Solar Project		Scale: 1:50
Planning Period: Submission		Format: A3

NOT TO SCALE

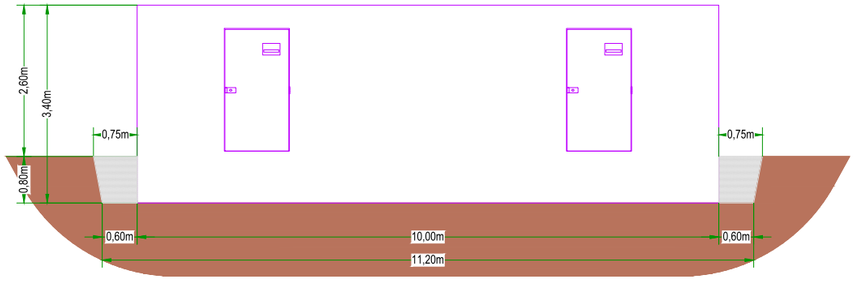
8.8 INDICATIVE SECURITY CAMERA

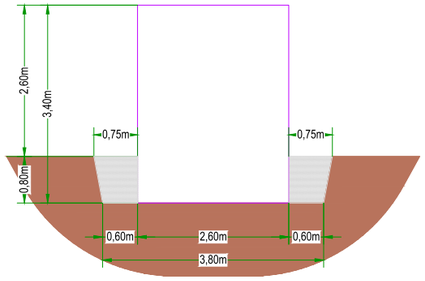


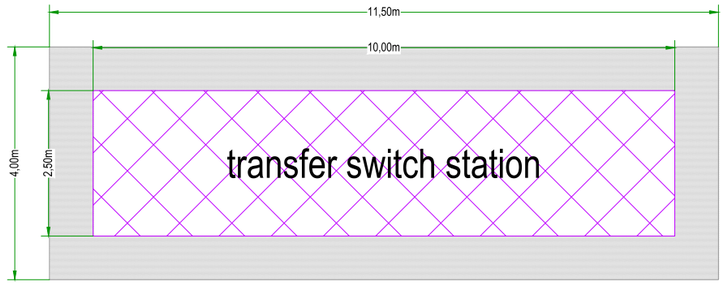
BayWa r.e. Ireland Limited Glandore | City Quarter | Lapp's Quay | T12 Y3ET Cork Tel: +35 321 2378 200 | www.baywa-re.com	Project: Fleet Solar Farm UK PV Power Plant	
	Date	Name:
Drawn	11.07.23	JKY
Changed	---	---
Checked	---	---
Drawing Title:	10_detail_security camera	
file name:	BWre21-FFM_PD_V15.dwg	
Client: BayWa r.e. Solar Project		Scale: 1:25
Planning Period: Submission		Format: A3

NOT TO SCALE

8.9 INDICATIVE SWITCH STATION







Index	Date	Name Editor	Modification / Adaptation of the drawing
j			
i			
h			
g			
f			
e			
d			
c			
b			
a			

BayWa r.e.
BayWa r.e. Ireland Limited
Glandore | City Quarter | Lapp's Quay |
T12 Y3ET Cork
Tel: +35 321 2378 200 | www.baywa-re.com

	Date	Name
Drawn	11.07.23	JKY
Changed	---	---
Checked	---	---

Project: Fleet Solar Farm
UK
PV Power Plant

Client: BayWa r.e. Solar Project

Planning Period: Submission

Scale: 1:50

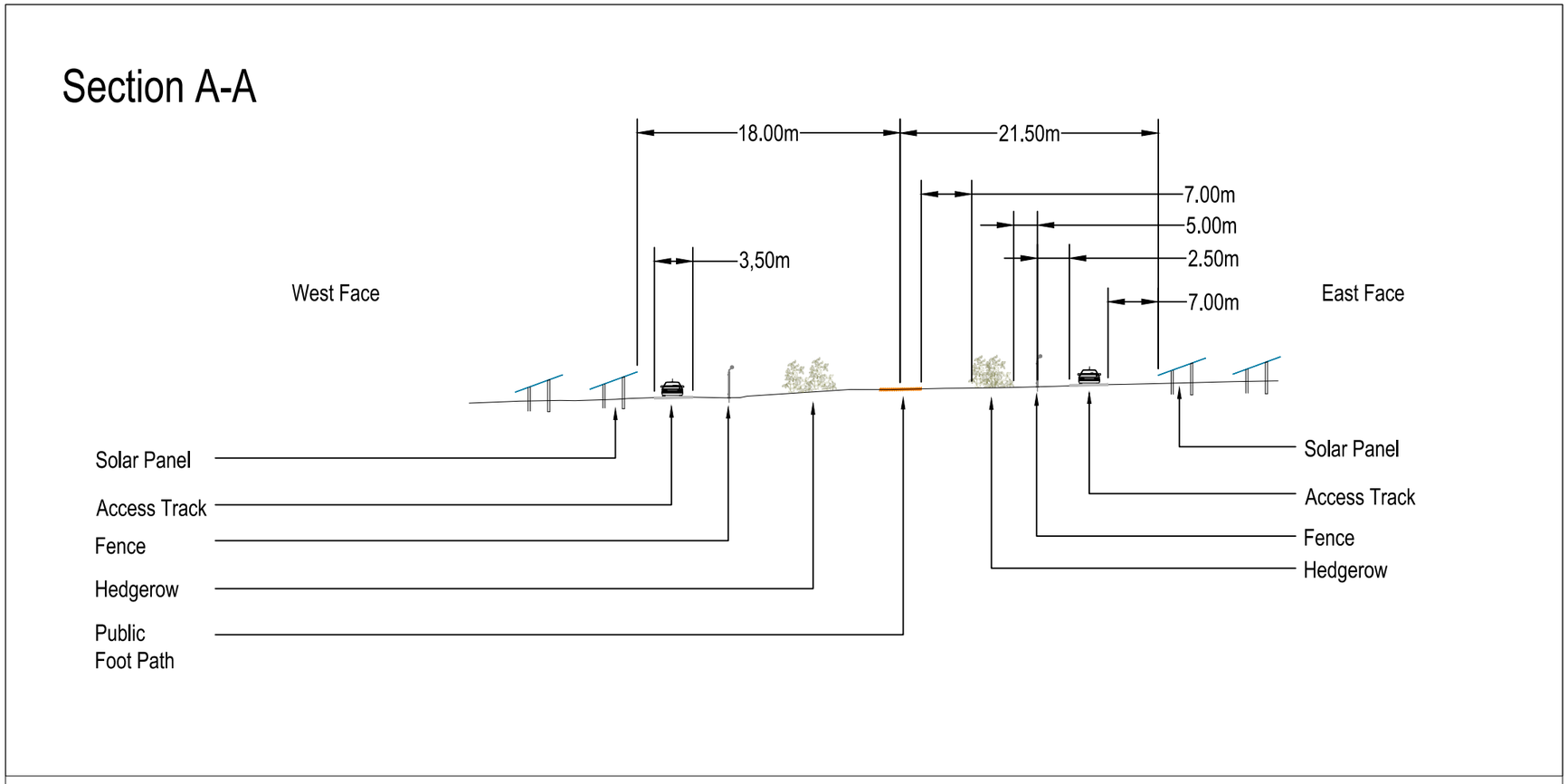
Format: A2

Drawing Title: 04_detail_transfer switch station

File Name: BWre21-FFM_PD_V15.dwg

NOT TO SCALE

8.10 PROW CROSS SECTION



BayWa r.e.			Project: Fleet Solar Farm UK PV Power Plant	
	Date	Name:	Client: Fleet Solar Ltd	Scale NTS
Drawn	06.02.2023	JK		
Changed				
Checked			Planning Period: Permit	Format A4
Drawing Title:	Site_Section A-A			
file name:	BWre21-FFM_PD_V15.dwg			

NOT TO SCALE

9.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise; meaning amongst other things any other supplementary / supporting planning documents and the government's guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023 .

The statutory development plan for the Site consists of the Hart Local Plan 2032 (the Local Plan), whilst material considerations in this instance comprise national policies set out within the NPPF 2021.

There is no neighbourhood plan designated for this area.

9.1 THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032

The Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032 ('Local Plan') was adopted in 2020 and sets out the broad development strategy for the area up to 2032. The Local Plan states that its success relies upon the delivery of its policies and proposals. The Local Plan is based on the delivery of sustainable development and goes beyond land use planning to bring together other policies and programmes that influence how the area functions. At present, the LPA has a series of 'saved' policies originally contained in their Local Plans.

The following policies and saved policies are applicable when determining the Application:

Policy SD1 – Sustainable Development: When considering development proposals, the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF.

Policy NBE1 – Development in the Countryside: Development proposals within the countryside (the area outside settlement policy boundaries and designated Strategic and Locally important Employment Sites, as defined by the Policies Map) will only be supported where they are:

a. meeting the proven essential need of a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work; or;
b. providing business floorspace to support rural enterprises (Policy ED3);
c. providing reasonable levels of operational development at institutional and other facilities;
d. providing community facilities close to an existing settlement which is accessible by sustainable transport modes;
e. providing affordable housing on rural exception sites (Policy H3);
f. providing specialist housing (Policy H4);
g. providing either a replacement dwelling, an extension to an existing dwelling or the subdivision of an existing residential dwelling; or
h. converting previously used permanent buildings or redundant agricultural buildings for appropriate uses; or

i. are for a replacement building that is not temporary in nature, or for an extension to an existing building, provided that the proposal does not require substantial rebuilding18, extension or alteration; or
j. located on suitable previously developed land appropriate for the proposed use; or
k. proposals for small scale informal recreation facilities such as interpretation centres and car parks which enable people to enjoy the countryside; or
l. To secure the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets (Policy NbE8); or
m. of exceptional quality or truly innovative in design and which significantly enhances its immediate setting and is sensitive to the local character; or
n. For traveller sites that comply with Policy H5.

Policy NBE2 – Landscape: Development proposals must respect and wherever possible enhance the special characteristics, value or visual amenity of the district's landscapes. An assessment of the impact on landscape character and visual quality should be carried out proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed.

Policy NBE4 – Biodiversity: In order to conserve and enhance biodiversity, new development will be permitted provided, it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of an international, national or locally designated site; it does not result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats; and opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity and contribute to wildlife and habitat connectivity are taken where possible.

Policy NBE5 – Managing Flood Risk: Development will be permitted provided it does not increase the risk of flooding and will be safe from flooding.

Policy NBE8 – Historic Environment: Development proposals should conserve or enhance heritage assets and their settings, taking account of their significance.

Proposals that would affect a designated or non-designated heritage asset must be supported by a heritage statement (proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset and the potential impact of the proposal) that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting, identifies the nature and level of potential impacts on the significance of the heritage asset, and sets out how the findings of the assessment has informed the proposal in order to avoid harm in the first instance, or minimise or mitigate harm to the significance of the asset.

Proposals which would lead to the loss of, or harm to, the significance of a heritage asset and/or its setting, will not be permitted unless they meet the relevant tests and assessment factors specified in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy NBE9 – Design: all developments should seek to achieve a high quality design and positively contribute to the overall appearance of the local area. Development will be supported where it would meet the following relevant criteria:

a. it promotes, reflects and incorporates the distinctive qualities of its surroundings in terms of the proposed scale, density, mass and height of development and choice of building materials. innovative building designs will be supported provided that they are sensitive to their surroundings and help to improve the quality of the townscape or landscape;
b. it provides or positively contributes to public spaces and access routes and public rights of way that are attractive, safe and inclusive for all users, including families, disabled people and the elderly;
c. the layout of new buildings reinforces any locally distinctive street patterns, responds to climate change, and enhances permeability by facilitating access by walking or cycling modes;
d. it respects local landscape character and sympathetically incorporates any on-site or adjoining landscape features such as trees and hedgerows, and respects or enhances views into and out of the site;
e. it protects or enhances surrounding heritage assets, including their settings;
f. it includes sufficient well-designed facilities/areas for parking (including bicycle storage) taking account of the need for good access for all users;

g. the design of external spaces (such as highways, parking areas, gardens and areas of open space) should be designed to reduce the opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour and facilitates the safe use of these areas by future residents, service providers or visitors, according to their intended function;
h. the future maintenance and servicing requirements of buildings and public spaces have been considered, including the storage and collection of waste and recycling;
i. it reduces energy consumption through sustainable approaches to building design and layout, such as through the use of low-impact materials and high energy efficiency; and
j. it incorporates renewable or low carbon energy technologies, where appropriate.

Development proposals should demonstrate compliance with the above criteria through a Planning Statement or a Design and access Statement (where one is required), submitted alongside a planning application.

Proposals must also demonstrate that they have taken account of any local supplementary guidance (such as any local town or village design statements, design codes or conservation area appraisals) and design related policies in Neighbourhood Plans.

Policy NBE10 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy: Proposals for the generation from renewable resources, or low carbon energy development will be supported providing that any adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily including individual and cumulative landscape and visual impacts.

Proposals for the generation of energy from renewable resources, or low carbon energy development (with the exception of wind turbines) will be supported providing that any adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily including individual and cumulative landscape and visual impacts. All such applications are subject to the following considerations:

a. proximity to, and impact on, transport infrastructure and the local highway network; 99
b. the impact on designated sites of European, national, regional and local biodiversity and geological importance;
c. the significance or special interest of heritage assets;
d. the impact on high grade agricultural land;
e. the impact on residential amenity including emissions, noise, odour and visual amenity; and
f. the degree to which the developer has demonstrated any wider environmental, economic and social benefits of a scheme as well as how any adverse impacts have been minimised.

Policy NBE11 - Pollution: Development will be supported provided:

a) it does not give rise to, or would be subject to, unacceptable levels of pollution (including cumulative effects); and
b) it is satisfactorily demonstrated that any adverse impacts of pollution, either arising from the proposed development or impacting on proposed sensitive development or the natural environment will be adequately mitigated or otherwise minimised to an acceptable level.

Where development is proposed on or near a site that may be impacted by, or may give rise to, pollution, such a proposal must be accompanied by an assessment that investigates the risks associated with the site and the possible impacts on the development, its future users and the natural and built environment. The assessment shall propose adequate mitigation or remediation when required to achieve a safe and acceptable development. Impacts on air quality should be considered in combination with other relevant plans or projects.

Policy INF2 – Green Infrastructure: Development will be supported provided that:

a. it protects the green infrastructure network as shown on the Policies map, avoiding any loss, fragmentation or significant impact on the function of the network;
b. where possible it enhances green infrastructure, through provision within the site, or where appropriate provision for off-site improvements in line with the green infrastructure Strategy;
c. any adverse impacts on the green infrastructure network are fully mitigated through the provision of green infrastructure on site or, where this is not possible, through appropriate off-site compensatory measures; and

d. where new green infrastructure is provided with new development, suitable arrangements are put in place for its future maintenance and management. Development proposals that would result in the loss of green infrastructure will only be supported if an appropriate replacement is provided that is of equivalent or better value in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility.

Development proposals that would result in the loss of green infrastructure will only be supported if an appropriate replacement is provided that is of equivalent or better value in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility.

Policy INF3 – Transport: Development should promote the use of sustainable transport modes prioritising walking and cycling, improve accessibility to services and support the transition to a low carbon future.

Development proposals will be supported that:

a. integrate into existing movement networks;
b. provide safe, suitable and convenient access for all potential users;
c. provide an on-site movement layout compatible for all potential users;
d. provide appropriate parking provision, in terms of amount, design and layout, in accordance with the Council's published parking standards, or as set out in Neighbourhood Plans;
e. provide appropriate waste and recycling storage areas and accessible collection points for refuse vehicles;
f. do not have a severe impact on the operation, safety or accessibility of the local or strategic highway networks;
g. mitigate impacts on the local or strategic highway networks, arising from the development itself or the cumulative effects of development; and
h. protect and where possible enhance access to public rights of way.

Development proposals that generate significant amounts of movement must be supported by a Transport Statement or Transport assessment and will be required to provide a robust Travel Plan.

Saved **Policy GEN1** – General Policy for Development: Proposals for development which accord with other proposals of this Plan will be permitted where they:

i. Are in keeping with the local character by virtue of their scale, design, massing, height, prominence, materials, layout, landscaping, siting and density;
ii. Avoid any material loss of amenity to existing and adjoining residential, commercial, recreational, agricultural or forestry uses, by virtue of noise, disturbance, noxious fumes, dust, pollution or traffic generation;
iii. Cause no material loss of amenity to adjoining residential uses, through loss of privacy, overlooking or the creation of shared facilities;
iv. Do not constitute ribbon or sporadic development, unrelated to existing patterns of settlement within the District;
v. Include provision for the conservation or enhancement of the District's landscape, ecology and historic heritage and natural resources;
vi. Where the public would reasonably expect to use the building, provide suitable access for people with impaired mobility, including those confined to wheelchairs;
vii. Have adequate arrangements on site for access, servicing or the parking of vehicles;
viii. Do not give rise to traffic flows on the surrounding road network, which would cause material detriment to the amenities of nearby properties and settlements or to highway safety;
ix. Do not create the need for highway improvements which would be detrimental to the character and setting of roads within the conservation areas or rural lanes in the District;
x. Do not lead to problems further afield by causing heavy traffic to pass through residential areas or settlements, or use unsuitable roads;
xi. Include provision for any necessary improvements to infrastructure and utilities resulting from the development;
xii. Take account of the proximity of overhead cables and power lines;
xiii. Avoid the installation of lighting, which is visually damaging to the character of the area.

Saved **Policy CON8** – Trees, Woodland & Hedgerows: Amenity Value: Where development is proposed which would affect trees, woodlands or hedgerows of significant landscape or amenity value planning permission will only be granted if these features are shown to be capable of being retained in the longer term or if removal is necessary new planting is undertaken to maintain the value of these features. planning conditions may be imposed to require the planting of new trees or hedgerows to replace those lost.

Much of the character of Hart is due to the large areas of woodland and the substantial numbers of trees and fine hedgerows in its towns and villages. Ecologically and visually, trees and hedgerows are an important part of the environment and the loss of trees and other features, which contribute to the character of the District, will be resisted. Management of woodlands and groups of trees will be encouraged by the Council. It should be noted that felling of individual trees, if carried out as part of an overall conservation management plan for the woodland, may be of positive benefit.

Ancient woodland or other woodland of ecological value will already be protected through the nature conservation policies CON 1-6. This policy aims to protect trees and woodlands for their public amenity and landscape value.

Where individual trees or groups of trees are considered to be of particular amenity value, the Council will protect them by the designation of Tree Preservation Orders. It is an offence to fell or carry out works to a protected tree without informing the Council. All trees within conservation areas are also protected. Further information is given in the Council's advice notes on Protected Trees and Conservation Areas.

The local planning authority will request the submission of a tree survey, showing the position, spread and condition of all trees, together with a proposed landscaping scheme and management plan. Where the local planning authority does not receive adequate information it may not be able to determine an application. Development proposals affecting trees will be considered against British Standard BS5837: 1991.

When preparing landscape schemes for development in rural settlements and greenfield sites, the developer will be requested to plant indigenous tree species. This will help to soften the impact of development in rural areas. The management of existing woodland areas will also be encouraged by the Council as this can enhance their ecological and amenity value.

The proposals are assessed against the above referenced criteria within Section 6 of this DAPA.

Other Local Planning Considerations

On 29th April 2021, the LPA agreed a motion which declared a Climate Emergency in Hart District. Policy NBE9 of the Local Plan requires proposals to demonstrate that they would reduce energy consumption and incorporate renewable or low carbon energy technologies, where appropriate.

With regard to equality, the LPA has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not under the Equalities Act. The Application raises no concerns about equality matters.

9.2 MATERIAL CONSIDERATION

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023

As per **Paragraph 2** of the NPPF and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the NPPF is a material consideration in the determination of this Application. It sets out Government planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

The key thread running throughout the NPPF is the Government's presumption in favour of sustainable development (**Paragraph 11**) whereby developments which correctly balance the requirements of economic, social and environmental issues should be granted planning permission unless there are strong reasons that permission should not be granted.

In terms of the environmental role, the planning system is required to:

> *'contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, help to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy'*

One of the core planning principles stated in **Paragraph 17** of the NPPF is to:

> *'Support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example by the development of renewable energy)'.*

Paragraph 38 states that LPAs should approach decisions on proposals in a positive and creative way and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area.

Paragraph 93 states:

> *'Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. This is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development'.*

Paragraph 97 lists a number of ways in which to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and confirms that LPAs should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable and low carbon sources.

Paragraph 98 advises that when determining planning application, LPAs should:

> *'Not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and Approve applications, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable'.*

NPPF **Paragraph 100** states:

> *"Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails".*

Section 14 of the NPPF is titled *"Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change."*

Paragraph 152 states that:

> *'The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk 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 155: *To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, plans should:*

> *'Provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts)'*

Paragraph 157: *In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should expect new development to:*

a) *comply with any development plan policies on local requirements for decentralised energy supply unless it can be demonstrated by the applicant, having regard to the type of development involved and its design, that this is not feasible or viable; and*
b) *take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption.*

Paragraph 158: *When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:*

a) *not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and*
b) *approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable54. 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.*

15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Paragraph 174: *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

a) *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
b) *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and 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;*
c) *n/a*
d) *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
e) *preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and*
f) *n/a.*

Habitats and biodiversity

Paragraph 179: *To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:*

b) *promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.*

16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Paragraph 202: *Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.*

Paragraph 203: *The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.*

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

The Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Chapter of the NPPG[1] sets out several factors that need to be considered by LPAs in determining applications for solar farms.

At **Paragraph ID 5-013** the guidance states that *'the development of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impacts on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively'.*

Paragraph ID 5-007 indicates that local topography is an important factor in assessing whether large scale solar farms could have a damaging effect on the landscape, and which recognises that impacts can be just as great in predominantly flat landscapes as in hilly or mountainous areas.

Paragraph ID 5-010 states that *'Renewable energy developments should be acceptable for their proposed location'.*

Also, at **Paragraph ID 5-008**, the guidance states that distance away from a development is just one consideration, stating that: *'Distance plays a part, but so does the local context including factors such as topography, the local environment and near-by land uses'.*

UK Solar PV Strategy (2014)[2]

This strategy sets out four guiding principles for solar PV, the third of which states that solar PV should be appropriately sited with proper weight being given to environmental considerations such as landscape, visual impact, heritage, and local amenity, and provide opportunities for local communities to influence decisions that affect them.

1 Gov.uk. 2023. Renewable and Low Carbon Energy. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy [Accessed: 20th October 2023].

2 Department of Energy and Climate Change. 2014. UK Solar PV Strategy. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-solar-pv-strategy-part-1-roadmap-to-a-brighter-future [Accessed: 24th October 2023].

Climate Emergency as a Material Consideration

On 1st May 2019, the UK Government declared an Environment and Climate Change Emergency. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change stated that to avoid more than a 1.5oC rise in global warming, global emissions would need to fall by around 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 with targets for net zero by 2050.

The climate emergency declaration has also been stated as a material planning consideration of approved appeal decisions for renewable energy proposals (Planning Inspectorate (PINS) Appeal Reference: APP/Y2620/W/16/3143028 Selbrigg Farm, Hempstead and APP/Y2620/W/15/3134132 Pond Farm, Bodham).

Brexit is a material consideration for energy and climate change. The Government's briefing paper Brexit: energy and climate change (Published June 2020[3]) identifies how one potential impact of leaving the Internal Energy Market (IEM) as a result of Brexit, is an increase in the cost of energy imports which would then affect businesses and households. The Development would contribute to an increased domestic energy supply through sustainable clean power. In meeting Climate Change Requirements from 1st January 2021 there is an emphasis that the "UK is deeply committed to domestic and international efforts to tackle climate change" and that the UK is its own party in the international agreements under the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreements. The Climate Change Act 2008[4] will also continue to apply across the whole of the UK.

In light of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the Government made a number of announcements surrounding the ambitions of a green recovery to rebuild society and the economy. On 17th November 2020, the government published The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution – Building back better[5] , supporting green jobs, and accelerating our path to net zero. The 10-point plan includes:

- Advancing Offshore Wind;
- Driving the Growth of Low Carbon Hydrogen;
- Delivering New and Advanced Nuclear Power;
- Accelerating the Shift to Zero Emission Vehicles;
- Green Public Transport, Cycling and Walking;
- Jet Zero and Green ships;
- Homes and Public Buildings;
- Carbon Capture;
- Protecting Our Natural Environment; and
- Green Finance and Innovation.

Other examples of a drive for a green recovery post-pandemic included funding to help drive the decarbonisation of heavy industry, construction, space and transport as well as the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to provide funding to charities and their partners working to conserve and restore nature, tackling climate change and connecting people with nature.

The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) published its paper Build Back Better – Putting Sustainability at the Heart of Recovery[6] in Summer 2020. IEMA sees a green recovery as:

> *"one that aligns with and accelerates a transition to a low-carbon, circular resource economy. One that protects and restores biodiversity and natural capital, tackles pollution of our air, rivers and seas, puts green spaces at the centre of urban renewal and applies nature-based solutions to address major infrastructure needs.*
>
> *A green recovery will bring multiple benefits including creating employment opportunities, increasing productivity, building resilience and increasing wellbeing and quality of life."*
> *(IEMA, 2020).*

3 House of Commons Library. 2020. Brexit: Energy and Climate Change. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8394/CBP-8394.pdf [Accessed: 24th October 2023].
4 Climate Change Act 2008. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/27/contents [Accessed: 24th October 2023].
5 Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. 2020. The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution [Accessed: 24th Octobre 2023].

6 IEMA. 2020. Build Back Better: Putting sustainability at the heart of recovery. Available at: file://la-files01/Folder%20Redirection/bellad/Downloads/Build-back-better-July-2020.pdf [Accessed: 24th October 2023].

IEMA state that working towards a green recovery would not be starting from scratch as the Government has already committed *"to achieving net zero by 2050, restoring biodiversity and natural capital and creating a circular economy. Countries have collectively committed to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030"* (IEMA, 2020). Therefore, the concept of a green recovery is putting sustainability at the forefront of future ambitions while continuing to work towards and exceeding existing targets.

The Environment Act 2021[7] ('The Bill') received royal ascent on 9th November 2021. The Bill arises from the governance gaps produced by Brexit and as an opportunity to provide measures for the significant environmental challenges faced. It provides a range of measures for improving the environment including water, resources, air quality, water, nature and biodiversity.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (known as 'COP26') took place in November 2021. As the host nation, the UK sought to provide leadership in carbon neutrality and net zero. 197 parties agreed to the 'Glasgow Climate Pact', countries committed to accelerating decarbonisation and strengthening their emissions reductions for 2030 rather than 2035 as previously scheduled under the Paris Agreement. The requirement for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2030 was also formally recognised.

7 Environment Act 2021. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted [Accessed: 24th October 2023].

10.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

This Section of the DAPA assesses the Development against the Local Plan and material considerations. Firstly, the need for the Development and the principle of the Development are assessed. Thereafter, relevant environmental considerations are assessed in turn.

10.1 THE NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is a wealth of Government legislation, guidance and policy which supports the transition to a low carbon future and the continue roll out of renewables and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

The Clean Growth Strategy[1] provides the Government's latest position on solar farms and sets out a comprehensive set of policies and proposals that aim to accelerate the pace of clean growth. To achieve this, the Government identifies how the UK will need to nurture low carbon technologies, processes and systems that are as cheap as possible, this includes subsidy free ground-mounted solar farms as modelled by this Development. The Government places significant emphasis on securing increased investment across the energy systems whilst minimising the public costs for securing such investments and make multiple references to how they are seeking the delivery of solar without subsidy. The Application would contribute towards this requirement.

On 29th April 2021, the LPA agreed a motion which declared a Climate Emergency in Hart District. Local Plan Policy NBE9 requires proposals to demonstrate that they would reduce energy consumption and incorporate renewable or low carbon energy technologies, where appropriate.

The Application fully addresses the requirements of Local Plan Policy NBE9 as it would convert solar energy into electricity. This would be transported to the point of connection with the National Grid at Fleet 400 kV Substation. The Development would contribute significantly to address climate change as it would be capable of supplying clean, renewable electricity to 18,600 homes per annum and would result in an offset of approximately 29,000 tonnes of C02 emissions every year.

Local and national planning policy does not require applicants to demonstrate the need for renewable energy development. It is, however, made clear in both that the environmental benefits arising from the development of renewable energy projects weighs heavily in favour of them and, having particular regard to guidance set out within the NPPF, that such developments should only be refused where other material considerations outweigh these benefits.

The Development therefore fully meets the requirements of Local Plan Policy NBE9 and the NPPF in terms of sustainability/renewable or lowcarbon energy technologies to address climate change.

1 Gov.uk. 2018. Clean Growth Strategy. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-growth-strategy [Accessed: 24th October 2023].

10.2 PRINCIPLE OF THE DEVELOPMENT

At a national policy level, the NPPF recognises the need to meet the challenge of climate change as set out in Chapter 14. As referred to in Section 5, the NPPF recognises that radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are essential and looks to support renewable energy development where its impacts are, or can be made, acceptable. It is therefore clear that there is overwhelming support at a national level for this type of development, and a demonstrable need for the UK to continue to deliver renewable energy projects.

The Site is located within the open countryside as designated within the Local Plan inset maps. Policy NBE1 of the Local Plan seeks to manage development in the countryside and contains 14 separate criteria where development is deemed to be acceptable. None of these criteria specifically provide for development of a solar farm. However, this policy seeks to only permit development when it is demonstrated that a countryside location is both necessary and justified. The nature and scale of the Development would realistically make it difficult to be delivered within any of the settlements of the District. It is well known that solar farms are delivered on countryside land for operational reasons. The Local Plan is not silent about this type of development; however, the main considerations of the Development would fall under other adopted policies.

Policy NBE10 - Renewable and Low Carbon Energy: Proposals sets out the LPA support of renewable energy generation at a local level and is generally aligned with Paragraph 152 of the NPPF. It is positively worded and states proposals for large scale renewable energy proposals will be supported providing they do not adversely impact upon matters such as residential and visual amenity, heritage, and biodiversity. The criteria at Local Plan Policy NBE10(a-f) are relevant and assessed later in this DAPA.

The Development is considered acceptable in principle, with regard to the Local Plan. The Application is accompanied by a suite of technical documents which confirm that the Development would not lead to adverse impacts and that appropriate mitigation can be provided where necessary. Section 6 of this DAPA demonstrates how the criteria set out by Policy NBE10 is complied with, drawing on supporting documentation and findings from relevant consultants and specialists.

10.3 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Local Plan Policy SD1 sets out how the LPA will take a positive stance on sustainable development which reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out within the NPPF.

As previously outlined, there is a significant level of international and national government policy that underpins planning policy in respect of developments to produce electricity from renewable sources. The Development is strongly supported by European Energy Policy on Renewables and National Planning Policy in the Government's NPPF. The UK has signed up to the EU Renewable Energy Directive, which includes a UK target of 15% of energy (electricity, heat, and transport) from renewable sources by 2020. The need for the development is therefore paramount, with reference to the failing of the UK to meet the 2020 renewable energy targets.

Ground-mounted solar farms can make a significant contribution to meeting these national targets and has the added benefit that it can be developed to operational stage in a short period of time; a characteristic that is not shared by its nuclear and fossil fuel counterparts.

The Development will generate up to 47.5 MW of electricity from a resource that will produce only negligible CO_2 emissions over a 40-year life span and as a result, will provide a significant net saving in CO_2 emissions when compared to existing established methods of energy production. The Development will result in the saving of approximately 29,000 tonnes of CO_2 per year and would produce clean energy which would be able to power approximately 18,600 UK households.

Moreover, the Development is underpinned by considerable landscape and ecological mitigation which includes the retention and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows; infilling gaps in existing hedgerows with native species; and native species grass and wildflower mix around and under the solar panels. Existing vegetation will be retained as far as possible and only three individual trees (Moderate quality), two stems from one group of trees (High quality) and two sections of hedgerow (Moderate quality) will be removed to accommodate new entrances into the fields where an existing access cannot be utilised. The loss of these trees and sections of hedgerow can be readily mitigated through new planting and the retained trees can be adequately protected during construction activities to sustain their health and longevity. This will result in an overall BNG of 61%.

It is clear therefore that the Development would provide clear environmental benefits in accordance with the aims and aspirations of current Government guidance. Local and national planning policy does not require applicants to demonstrate the need for renewable energy development. It is however, made clear at both national and local level that the environmental benefits arising from the development of renewable energy projects weighs heavily in favour of such applications being approved and, having regard to guidance set out within the NPPF, that such developments should only be refused where other material considerations outweigh these benefits.

The benefits of delivering renewable energy are substantial and far reaching, both for current and future generations, and the ability to allow farm animals (most likely sheep) to graze on the Site is a further environmental benefit (i.e., continued agricultural use). The environmental benefits on offer are considered significant and comprise a material consideration lending considerable weight in favour of the Application.

Topography, orientation, natural and built features and proximity to a suitable grid connection point are key in determining whether a site is suitable for solar panels. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that solar farms are better suited to the countryside than in built up areas as they are low scale, low impact developments which allow agricultural operations to continue (animal grazing) whilst safeguarding sites within settlements for housing and employment growth.

The layout of the Development has been well planned and well screened; it has been the subject of a thorough review process, with input from a range of specialist consultants over several years, having undergone numerous iterations to avoid impacts on trees, ecology, noise and the landscape. Regarding the latter, the submitted LVIA explains that landscape impacts will be localised and limited in nature, with small indirect effects on the wider landscape. Accepting that there will be limited adverse impact to the landscape, it is therefore important to outline the benefits of the Development, so that they can be weighed into the overall planning balance.

The land beneath and between the panels will continue to be used for agricultural purposes such as sheep grazing. Sheep grazing constitutes an accepted farming practice that could be employed by the landowner at any time regardless of this Development. Grazing sheep under solar panels is now common practice in the UK and studies have shown that sheep farming and solar panels can operate successfully together. The ability to allow animals to graze on the Site is a further environmental benefit, as is the landscape and ecology mitigation, set out in the LEMP. The LEMP that is submitted with the Application includes a range of landscaping measures targeted at both minimising the visual impacts of the Development whilst creating a haven for local wildlife to thrive, including habitat field margins, wildflower meadows, planted areas and new hedgerow and tree planting. Existing hedgerows and trees will be largely retained and enhanced and overall, these measures will result in an BNG of 61%.

It is a careful balancing exercise between adverse, localised impacts to the landscape and benefits of reduced CO_2 emissions (saving of approximately 29,000 tonnes of CO_2 per year) and BNG (61%) as a result of the Development. However, due to the localised and limited nature of the landscape effects identified in the LVIA, combined with the reversible nature of the Development, the adverse impacts are considered to be outweighed by the benefits of the generation of renewable energy and contribution this will provide to local and national renewable energy targets.

To summarise, it is considered the principle of the development is acceptable in the context of Local Plan Policies, as well as other material considerations. There will be some degree of adverse impacts to the landscape, but this will be limited to very close distant views of the Site and is ultimately outweighed by the significant environmental benefits on offer including reduced CO_2 emissions (saving of approximately 29,000 tonnes of CO_2 per year) and BNG (61%).

In relation to sustainable development, Paragraph 8 of the NPPF states that there are three dimensions to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental.

The Development will provide employment and business opportunities for component suppliers / installers and those involved in grid connection, transport, and logistics. There will be additional impacts during the construction period with incoming workers using local facilities such as retail outlets, cafes, restaurants, accommodation etc. resulting in economic and social benefits. This accords with Local Plan Policy NBE10 (f) which aims to demonstrate that developers are providing wider environmental, economic and social benefits.

In addition, should planning permission be secured, the Applicant intends to commence discussions with the Parish Council to agree terms for a CBF to direct funds to local Parish projects. The CBF would be for an annual payment for duration of the Development, once operational. Alternatively, this amount could be front-loaded if the community preferred. The amount and timeframe would be agreed with the Parish Council. Again, this accords with Local Plan Policy NBE10 (f) as it demonstrates wider benefits of the Development.

Finally, environmental gain would be secured through carbon reduction and local biodiversity enhancements (saving of approximately 29,000 tonnes of CO_2 per year and 61% net gain in biodiversity). The LEMP submitted with the Application describes the planned ecological and landscape mitigation, which is integral to the Development, as set out in Section 10.7 of this DAPA.

The Development would help support the transition to a low carbon future and produce a significant amount of renewable energy, powering up to approximately 18,600 UK households per year; saving approximately 29,000 tonnes of CO_2 per year. The Development would therefore fulfil an important environmental role.

As such, the requirements of Paragraph 8 of the NPPF are fulfilled and the Development is considered to be sustainable development. In applying the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development, and the test at Paragraph 11 regarding decision taking, it is ascertained that the Application should be approved.

10.4 SITE SELECTION

Locations for solar farm development are carefully selected based on a range of considerations, such as whether a site is subject to any national or local landscape, heritage or biodiversity designation, agricultural land quality, flood risk etc but also, and crucially, whether there is potential to connect to the grid.

The national grid infrastructure is under high pressure as the capacity to connect new schemes is extremely limited, and as charges associated with connecting continue to increase, small solar farms are not cost-effective. Thus, if the national targets to reduce carbon emissions are to be achieved, larger solar energy projects are necessary, but there are only limited locations to connect energy generation schemes at a viable cost.

One of the biggest challenges for building new energy projects is finding a grid connection point that has capacity to accept the electricity being generated. In addition, the costs of connection increase the further away the site is from the point of connection, and therefore the land closest to the point of connection that also fits with the criteria mentioned above is the most suitable for solar farm development. A grid connection at Fleet 400 kV Substation has been secured for this Development, approximately 4 km from the Site.

The project design team comprises individuals of various expertise and specialised consultants, including landscape architects, ecologists, archaeologists, and heritage specialists amongst others. These specialists have worked closely together over the last two years to design a Development which balances the need to optimise energy output whilst minimising environmental impacts.

The Site is not covered by any statutory environmental, heritage or archaeological designations. The Site's composition lends itself very well to the specific requirements of solar farms. A portion of infrastructure (i.e., the Developable Area) is located on Grade 2 agricultural land (5% which equates to 3.5 ha), with the remainder being Grade 3a (61% which equates to 40 ha) and 3b (34% which equates to 22 ha). Whilst Grade 2 and Grade 3a agricultural land is deemed 'Best and Most Versatile' (BMV), the need for renewable energy projects must be balanced against the usage of valuable agricultural land.

As with Chosley Farm solar development (Hart District Council Planning Reference: 20/03185/FUL, which was approved in 2021 with 51% of the site on BMV ALC Grade), the Site does not appear to have any particular agricultural attribute which would give an overriding and unusually high value, especially as similar quality land is available elsewhere in Hampshire. The loss of arable land use for the operational period of 40 years, when considering the current agricultural activity on the Site and its contribution to food supply, would appear to be a negligible impact. The Site is considered suitable for its intended use.

The Site is unincumbered by physical constraints such as above and below ground apparatus and buildings; and as noted, is not protected for its landscape or heritage value. The Site can continue to perform agricultural functions by allowing livestock to graze during operation, as native species grass and meadow mix will be planted around and under the solar panels. On parts of the Site where there is no infrastructure proposed, the landowner can continue current agricultural practices. Once the Development has been decommissioned, the Site will be returned to the landowner for agricultural purposes best suited to them at the time.

In identifying the Site, the Applicant has undertaken a detailed methodical site selection exercise. This exercise has involved the careful consideration and analysis of the design criteria and technical feasibility as well as planning and environmental constraints and land availability. This criterion was determined with reference to relevant planning policy and guidance.

The site selection process was broadly split into the following sequence of activities:

- Definition of a 'Search Area' based on available grid capacity;
- Analysis of any previously developed land;
- Analysis of any lower grade agricultural land;
- Analysis of planning constraints; and
- Establishment, and assessment, of a short-list.

The original design principles sought to:

- Maximise the generating capacity and efficiency of the solar resource to maximise production of renewable energy, reduce CO_2 emissions and contribute to national and local climate change targets;
- Achieve acceptable noise levels from the Development at sensitive properties;
- Reduce adverse landscape and visual effects on local communities, transport and recreational routes as far as possible;
- Safeguard the interests of residents living near the Site and take into account their interests and concerns;
- Ensure that sensitive habitats, species, and sites designated for conservation or historic interest are avoided and impacts minimised where possible;
- Protect, and enhance, existing trees and hedgerows wherever possible;
- Avoid areas of flood risk and minimise likely flooding elsewhere;
- Protect adjacent areas of ASNW / SINCs;
- Avoid, as far as possible, the use of BMV agricultural land; and
- Ensure glint and glare from the Development would not impact RAF Odiham or road users.

The first step in the Development design was to assess the sensitivity of the Site in terms of landscape visual impact and an ALC assessment. Following this, the design of the Development was further developed subject to the findings of several specialist reports, including ecology, arboriculture surveys and heritage surveys.

The site selection process and consideration of alternative sites within the vicinity of Fleet 400 kV Substation has identified this location as the most suitable for the Development to allow a viable grid connection for renewable energy to be exported.

Once the Site had been identified, an iterative design process was undertaken to ensure the Development is suitably designed to balance the need to maximise the efficiency of low carbon, low-cost electricity to the National Grid, while ensuring that environmental impacts are acceptable.

10.5 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

A detailed LVIA was carried out by Marta Lewin of Laurence Associates. The LVIA assesses the landscape character of the area and identifies landscape issues for the area to determine its sensitivity, through the quality and value of the landscape and its susceptibility to change leading to an evaluation of the magnitude of change on the landscape, that the Development would bring.

The baseline study looks at the existing landscape, the Site's historic use, its visual conditions and relationship with the surrounding area. Information was gathered through a desk-based study of existing documents (including landscape character information, planning background and topographic maps) as well as site visits to assess the Site and surrounding landscape.

As set out within the LVIA, existing landscape elements which help screen, integrate or act as barriers to visibility of the Development include:

- Boundary vegetation consisting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees screening Parcel 6 from the south, west and north;
- Boundary vegetation consisting of hedgerow and hedgerow trees screening Parcel 1-5 from the north, east and from the west along Andrew's Lane;
- Hedgerows and a block of woodland bounding the western edge of Parcel 7 and 8;
- Trees bounding Parcel 9 from the east, north and south;
- Although the Site is not entirely flat, the topography provides a level of screening, especially levels dropping from the southern boundary of Parcels 3-5 towards Long Sutton. This prevents immediate views of this parcel from Long Sutton and Footpath 148/1/1;
- The generally well-defined network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees within, and surrounding the Site provide good screening, especially for lower lying parts of the Site; and
- Blocks of woodland especially these located south of Parcel C and east of Parcel 3 provide a good level of screening.

Proposed mitigation to minimise adverse impacts of the Development on the landscape are set out within the plans attached to the LVIA. A summary of which is provided below:

- Enhancement of the boundary vegetation growing along the eastern boundary of Parcel 6 and western boundary of Parcel 5 by introducing native hedgerows;
- Enhancement of the boundary vegetation growing along the eastern boundary of Parcel 9 by introducing hedgerows;
- Enhancement of boundary vegetation growing along northern boundary of Parcel 7 and 8, along Hayley Lane;
- Introducing infill planting in a hedgerow bounding Parcel 1 from the south, along White Hill (between The Four Horseshoes and Andrew's Lane);
- Introducing hedgerow planting and a mix of woodland planting along the southern boundary of Parcels 3-5;
- Introducing hedgerow planting along Footpaths 148/8/3, 148/1/2 and 148/8/1 crossing Parcel 1-5; and
- Introducing hedgerow planting along the north-western boundary of Parcel 9.

This is in accordance with Local Plan Policy NBE2 which states that, 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 LVIA confirms that there will be no cumulative visual effects as there is no intervisibility with other planned solar farms (approved or in planning).

The LVIA concludes that the magnitude of direct landscape impacts on the Landscape Character Area (LCA) in which the Site is located would be medium to small and of moderate significance. The indirect landscape effects would be negligible as the effects will be very localised. It is considered that landscape impacts will generally be localised with predominantly negligible magnitude indirect effects on the wider landscape. There will, as is inevitable for a solar farm be some impacts on the landscape character and by its very nature there will be a significant change to the character of the landscape across the Site as the necessary materials and layout naturally contrast with the landscape elements, however, recognising that this cannot be overcome, there are robust attempts to mitigate the Development for visual receptors and to enhance key landscape characteristics and elements where possible to compensate for the adverse impacts.

It is acknowledged that there will be limited adverse impacts arising from the development. These are predominantly restricted to immediate and medium-range landscape impacts which have an effect on the landscape character of the Site and assets localised just outside the boundary of the Site. Similarly, visual impacts would predominantly affect visual receptors within the Site and just outside the boundary of the Site. Visual impacts will lesser within the distance from the Site and even if the proposed development will be obtained in medium-range views, the effect will be considerably reduced by the proposed mitigations. The mitigations proposed along footpaths will have a positive screening effect and will prevent receptors from immediate views of the proposal but at the same time they will change the character of the views from panoramic to narrow.

Although there will be major adverse effect within the Site, the Site is well contained and the effect on wider landscape and visual receptors is reduced by the inherited mitigation, and the effect within the close and medium-range will be reduced to minor and negligible by the proposed mitigation.

The LVIA concluded that whilst the development would give rise to varying degrees of adverse landscape and visual effects on a limited number of receptors, it will have major adverse effects on receptors located in an immediate proximity (within 1km) of the site. The degree of effects predicted to arise during the operational phase would be largely limited to the Site and its immediate setting due to the flat topography, low level nature of the development and large amounts of woodland blocks and hedgerows within the wider landscape.

It is considered the site has the capacity to accommodate the proposed development because it is predominately flat and well screened by hedges and trees; these inherited mitigations will limit the impact of the proposal on the LCA. Nevertheless, the proposal will cause temporary but long term changes to the landscape setting of Long Sutton Conservation Area and ASNW bounding the site as well as changes to the views within 1km of the site. There will be no harm to the character of the wider landscape and views that can be experienced from a distance greater than 1km. The proposed mitigation, in addition to enhancing the biodiversity of the landscape and contributing to enhanced habitat connectivity, will contribute to gradually reducing the effect of the proposal on landscape character, except from the character of the immediate landscape setting of Long Sutton Conservation Area and the ASNW. The proposed mitigation will also reduce the effect of the proposal on the visual receptors except from the views that can be obtained from PRoWs crossing the site.

Policy NBE2 of the Local Plan seeks to achieve development proposals that respect and wherever possible enhance the special characteristics, value, or visual amenity of the District's landscapes. This policy contains five criteria to assess development proposals in relation to landscape impacts, and states that where appropriate, proposals should be accompanied by a comprehensive landscaping scheme to ensure that the proposed development would successfully integrate with the landscape and surroundings.

Based on the conclusions set out within the LVIA, the Application complies with Local Plan Policies SD1, NBE2 and NBE10 with regard to landscape and visual impacts.

10.6 AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION

Paragraph 174 of the NPPF requires that planning decisions should enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the BMV agricultural land, trees and woodland.

Where possible, the development on agricultural land should steer towards areas of poorer quality agricultural land where this is available, except where this would be inconsistent with other policy and sustainability considerations.

An ALC Survey was conducted by Askew Land and Soil Limited. The ALC survey determined the quality of agricultural land within the Site which is set out in Table 10.1 below.

Table 10.1: ALC Grade within the Site

ALC Grade	**Area (Ha)**	**Area (%)**
Grade 1 (Excellent)	0	0
Grade 2 (Very Good)	21.6	21.0
Subgrade 3a (Good)	70.0	70.2
Subgrade 3b (Moderate)	8.4	8.2
Grade 4 (Poor)	0	0
Grade 5 (Very Poor)	0	0
Other Land / Non-agricultural (e.g., roads)	0.6	0.6
Total	**102.6**	**100**

The data provided in Table 10.1 relates to the entire area within the Site however, as shown in Section 8.2 – Site Layout, there are areas within the Site which will not be impacted by the Development and current land use can continue. The areas within the Site which will contain infrastructure during operation of the Development are called the 'Developable Area'. The ALC Grade within the Developable Area, is set out in Table 10.2 opposite.

Table 10.2: ALC Grade within the Developable Area

ALC Grade	**Area (Ha)**	**Area (%)**
Grade 1 (Excellent)	0	0
Grade 2 (Very Good)	3.5	5
Subgrade 3a (Good)	40	61
Subgrade 3b (Moderate)	22	34
Grade 4 (Poor)	0	0
Grade 5 (Very Poor)	0	0
Other Land / Non-agricultural (e.g., roads)	0	0
Total	**65.5**	**100**

From the ALC submitted with this Application, the Site does not have any particular agricultural attribute which would give an overriding and unusually high value. The Development would result in 43.5 ha of BMV (i.e., Grade 2 and Grade 3a within the Developable Area) changing use (from arable farming to livestock grazing). The change in use of agricultural land (i.e., no longer arable) for the operational period of 40 years, when considering the current agricultural activity on the Site and its contribution to food supply, would appear to be a negligible impact.

The Site can continue to perform agricultural functions by allowing livestock to graze during operation, as native species grass and meadow mix will be planted around and under the solar panels. On parts of the Site where there is no infrastructure proposed, the landowner can continue current agricultural practices. Once the Development has been decommissioned, the Site will be returned to the landowner for agricultural purposes best suited to them at the time.

The Impact of the Development on the land and soils is considered a reversible, temporary, and time-limited in nature. It would have a much lower impact than a permanent built development which includes soil sealing and permanent loss of agricultural land. Moreover, the AIA suggests that cessation of intensive arable agriculture within the buffers of ASNW would provide an overall enhancement to a locally significant resource.

The effect of the Development on agricultural land would be negligible and the LPA has set a president by supporting similar type of development on the same ALC Grade which is within the Site (i.e., the approval of Chosley Farm in 2021 (Hart District Council Planning Reference: 20/03185/FUL) with 51% of the Site on BMV ALC Grade). As such, it is anticipated that the LPA will not have any concerns regarding agricultural land.

The Development is compliant with Local Plan Policy NBE10 (d) which aims to protect the impact of development on high grade agricultural land. Moreover, support can be drawn from NPPF (Paragraphs 174 and 175) as the Development is reversible and would not have significant adverse effects on national agricultural interests in terms of agricultural land quality.

10.7 BIODIVERSITY

A PEA has been undertaken by Soltys Brewster Ecology (October 2023) which is submitted as part of this Application. A Barn Owl and GCN Survey Note and BNG Report also accompany the Application.

The findings of the surveys are set out by habitat and then for each of the species present on-site.

Appendix IV and V of the PEA illustrates the findings of the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey. Field Parcels F1-F6 and hedgerow H1-H22 are numbered on these figures for ease of reference. The Site supports a range of habitat types, as described below.

Habitat

Arable cropland – Comprises approximately 96 ha of the total 105 ha within the Site. At the time of the survey, all fields contained cereal crops. These arable field were considered to be of limited ecological importance.

Poor Semi-Improved Grassland – Found around the perimeter of Fields F1, F5 and F6.

Broad-Leaved Semi-Natural Woodland – Located along the eastern boundary of Fields F2 and F3 and are designated as ASNW within Hester's Copse and Hayley's Copse SINCs. Another parcel is located at the north-east boundary of F6 at Andrew's Copse SINC. The areas of ancient semi-natural woodland located at the Site and within the immediate surrounding land were considered to be features of high ecological importance and of local significance.

Broad-Leaved Plantation Woodland – Located along the margins of Fields F2, F3 and F6. The centres of Fields F3 and F6 are both characterised by small woodland copse.

Scattered Trees and Scrub – Located on the Site, supporting occasional scattered mature Oak trees within the arable fields. There are also occasional stands of bramble and rose scrub within the areas of poor semi-improved grassland.

Hedgerows – A characteristic bounding the Site through a well-connected hedgerow network. Most hedgerows at the Site were classified as species-rich hedgerows with trees characterised by >5 woody species, mature trees and a diverse ground-flora. However, these hedgerows were generally considered defunct with gaps between the hedgerow understorey present.

Tall ruderal – Located in a small area at the south-west corner of Field F3. The unmanaged area of the field is dominated by stands of Broad-Leaved Dock.

Short Perennial/Ephemeral Vegetation and Bare Ground – Found within the Site and includes scentless mayweed, ox-eye daisy, common field speedwell, red-dead nettle and spear thistle.

Invasive Species – Found in the form of Variegated Yellow Archangel within the woodland ground-flora and Rhododendron at the edge of Andrew's Lane.

Fauna

During the survey, a search for field signs of protected or notable species was undertaken and the potential of the habitats to support these species considered.

Badgers – The survey found evidence of Badgers at the Site in the form of setts, latrines and well-used mammal paths. Three setts were identified within the Site, as well as the location of three single-entrance outlier setts. The survey also found several latrines on the Site. All latrines contained several pits with fresh dung. The survey also noted numerous well-used mammal pathways across the Site, mainly associated with the hedgerow and woodland margins.

Bats – Whilst the majority of the habitats at the Site provide limited foraging opportunities for bats, the linear habitat features at the Site are likely to provide important commuting and foraging resource for bats in the local area. The desk study returned records of at least seven bat species within the surrounding area to the Site.

Birds – During the survey, a total of 21 bird species were seen, or heard, using the habitats present at the Site and included species considered typical of farmland and woodland environments. The species present at the time of survey would not be considered representative of the full range of species that the Site could potentially support. The habitats present at the Site were considered likely to support tree/shrub nesting bird species.

Barn Owl – Soltys Brewster Ecology have prepared a Barn Owl Survey Note which is submitted alongside the PEA. The findings indicate that there is one box currently used by a breeding Barn Owl pair within the Site. The tree containing the existing box will be retained as part of the Development and appropriate buffer has been maintained to minimise disturbance. To minimise disturbance on breeding Barn Owl during construction, a Barn Owl Mitigation Strategy will be prepared prior to commencement of construction.

GCN – Although no waterbodies are located within the Site, the desk study returned a positive GCN record. Whilst most of the terrestrial habitats within the Site are considered to be of negligible value for GCNs, the rank grassland margins, hedgerows and ASNW parcels within the Site were considered to provide 'good' terrestrial habitats for the species. Adult GCN are known to use terrestrial habitats within 250 m of breeding ponds and may disperse further in search of higher value foraging habitats within arable landscapes. As such, there is a low potential that the terrestrial habitats at the Site could be used by GCN if ponds within the surrounding area support a breeding population.

Soltys Brewster Ecology have prepared a GCN Survey Note which is submitted alongside the PEA. Analysis of the samples collected returned a negative result for presence of GCN. Although the desk study data returned a positive GCN record at the Site. As such, it is considered that there is low potential that GCN may be present within the terrestrial habitats at the Site. The GCN Survey Note recommends that the Development is supported by a mitigation strategy to minimise potential disturbance to GCN during any vegetation or clearance works. Avoidance and mitigation measures could include:

- Removal of any hedgerow or buffer vegetation to be undertaken via a two-phased process – where woody and grassland vegetation to be trimmed to a height of 150-300mm in autumn or winter (avoidance of nesting bird season) with all arisings removed;
- Removal of stumps/root systems and other refugia to be undertaken outside of the hibernation season (typically November – February) under direct ecological supervision. Works will be undertaken via the use of a small excavator equipped with a toothed bucket. Root balls will be carefully pulled by and inspected by hand by the ecologist prior to removal; and
- In the event a GCN is found, all works with stop immediately and the project ecologist or Natural England contacted for advice on how to proceed.

Hazel Dormouse – The hedgerow and ASNW habitats within the Site and within the immediate surrounding area were considered suitable to support Hazel Dormouse. Although the desk study did not include any recent records of dormouse within 2 km of the Site, the species was previously considered to be widespread in the wider landscape. As such, the habitats at the Site were considered to have a low potential to support dormouse.

Reptiles – The habitats at the Site were considered to have a low potential to support common reptiles. The areas of rough grassland located along the field and hedgerow margins are likely to provide suitable shelter and foraging resources for reptiles and could support a small population of common reptiles. The extensive open area of arable field at the Site were considered to be of negligible value for reptiles.

Terrestrial Invertebrates – A small number of invertebrates were seen during the survey, none of which are of conservation interest.

Hedgehog – No records for hedgehog were identified from the desk study although the grassland and arable field margins were considered suitable to support foraging hedgehogs. There are no conservation concerns regarding hedgehog.

Brown Hare – During the survey, a number of brown hare were recorded at the Site, associated with the arable fields and rough grassland margins. The desk study returned previous records of hare within the surrounding area. The arable fields are likely to provide suitable foraging resources for hare with the rough grassland budders providing opportunities for protection and forms. There are no conservation concerns regarding brown hare.

All SINCs and ASNW habitats will be retained, with the vast majority of hedgerows and linear habitat features also retained with existing gaps utilised for field access, as far as possible. The AIA confirms that only three individual trees (Moderate quality), two stems from one group of trees (High quality) and two sections of hedgerow (Moderate quality) will be removed to accommodate new entrances into the fields where an existing access cannot be utilised. The design of the Development has considered the location of badger setts within the Site, with design measures implemented to minimise disturbance to badgers and barn owls during construction and operation.

The avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures have been considered appropriate to the construction and operational phase of the Development are detailed in full within Section 5 of the PEA, summarised below.

Avoidance

- Retention of S41 priority habitats as far as practicable;
- Retention and protection of irreplaceable ASNW habitats;
- Retention of SINC habitats;
- Retention of trees with potential to support roosting bats;
- Retention of existing rough grassland margins; and
- Vegetation clearance (including both woody vegetation and ground) to avoid nesting bird season and be undertaken over the winter period (between September – February).

Mitigation

- Covering of any excavations overnight or means of escape provided during construction phase to minimise risks to badger, brown hare, deer and any other small mammals that may become trapped;
- Security fencing to include an access gap at the bottom to allow continued connectivity for badger and other small mammals post-development;
- Layout to include 30m buffer between sett locations and the extent of the development design;
- Design of site lighting to minimise artificial light spill onto retained habitat features and SINC habitats to minimise disturbance to foraging/commuting bats and other nocturnal wildlife;
- Appropriate buffer established between extent of development design and ASNW and SINC habitats; and
- Sensitive approach to vegetation/grassland clearance to minimise any risks to reptiles that may be present (vegetation to be cleared via a directional two-stage process between April and October).

Enhancement

- Creation of new species-rich grassland beneath solar arrays and at field margins – to be managed to promote botanical diversity;
- Planting Plan to include native tree and hedgerow planting or those with a known biodiversity benefit;
- Strengthening of existing defunct hedgerow boundaries with new tree and shrub planting;
- Provision of bat and bird boxes onto retained trees;
- Creation of reptile and amphibian hibernacula within grassland field margins; and
- Control measures for invasive species.

Biodiversity Enhancements

A BNG assessment has been undertaken and is submitted in support of the Application. The results demonstrate that there will be a total net increase of both habitat and hedgerow units, as per the below:

- Habitat units – 61.48%; and
- Hedgerow units – 80.85%.

These measures are included in the LEMP submitted with this Application. It is anticipated that the delivery of the LEMP would be secured via a suitably worded planning condition which would in turn enable compliance with National Planning Policy and European Legislation.

Policy Assessment

With regards to biodiversity, Policy NBE4 of the Local plan states that to conserve and enhance biodiversity, new development will be permitted provided where:

a) *It will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of an international, national or locally designated sites including… Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). The level of protection afforded to these sites is commensurate with their status within this hierarchy and gives appropriate weight to their importance and contribution to wider ecological networks;*

b) *It does not result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss; and*

c) *opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity and contribute to wildlife and habitat connectivity are taken where possible, including the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations. All development proposals will be expected to avoid negative impacts on existing biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible.*

With regard to Local Plan Policy NBE4 Part (a), the Development will not have any impact on the integrity of international or nationally designated sites. Regarding locally designated sites, Hayley' Copes SINC is within the Site, with Hester's Copse and Andrew's Copse SINCs bordering the Site. There are also two RVEI located immediately adjacent to the Site, designated for moth species. These are features of high ecological importance and of local significance.

As detailed in the PEA, the Development will retain these irreplaceable habitats and will not adversely impact the condition of the features for which the SINCs and RVEIs have been designated. Buffers have been applied between infrastructure and the edge of the ASNW/SINCs (based on RPA or otherwise a set distance of 15m). No construction will be undertaken within these buffers. The Development will also aim to minimise artificial light spill on these retained features to minimise disturbance to bats and other nocturnal wildlife.

As such, the Development is compliant with Local Plan Policy NBE4 Part (a) as it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of an international, national or locally designated sites including the nearby SINCs.

As the aforementioned SINCs are also designated as ASNW and the Development will not result in the loss or deterioration of these irreplaceable habitats, the Development is also compliant with Local Plan Policy NBE4 Part (b).

Likewise, Local Plan Policy NBE10 (b) aims to protect designated sites of European, national, regional and local biodiversity and geology. As above, the Development will not have any adverse impacts on such sites and therefore, complies with Local Plan Policy NBE10 (b).

The BNG assessment further demonstrates that the Development will have a positive impact on the Site and its surroundings, resulting in an overall BNG of 61%. The Development will clearly result in ecological enhancements and as such, it is considered that the Development would meet the objectives of Policy NBE4 Part C of the Local Plan.

As the Development will protect and enhance the valued landscape and provide net gains for biodiversity, support can be drawn from NPPF Chapter 15 – Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment.

10.8 ARBORICULTURE

Barton Hyett Associates Ltd were commissioned to inspect trees relevant to Site and provide written advice on how they inform feasibility and design options for the Site. The AIA accompanies this Application.

The layout of the Development has been designed to avoid the ASNW buffers, with the perimeter security fencing, solar panels and access tracks being located outside of them. The cessation of agricultural cultivation within the ASNW buffers will provide an overall enhancement. Therefore, there would be no loss or deterioration of the ASNW habitats.

Three individual trees (Moderate quality), two stems from one group of trees (High quality) and two sections of hedgerow (Moderate quality) will be removed to accommodate new entrances into the fields where an existing access cannot be utilised. No other tree or hedgerow removal will be required for the installation of the Development. The loss of these trees and sections of hedgerow can be readily mitigated through new planting and the retained trees can be adequately protected during construction activities to sustain their health and longevity.

The Cellular Confinement System (CCS) (i.e., no dig principle) described for use for access tracks within the RPA of the retained trees shall be subject to an engineer-led design to ensure the system is fit for purpose. To ensure that the retained trees remain wind-firm, resilience pruning is recommended.

There is a good opportunity to improve the long-term tree cover through appropriate new tree or woodland planting. Suitable planting alongside existing features and establishing new wildlife corridors to link woodland would help with improving biodiversity and connectivity. This has been considered during the development of the LEMP which is integral to the Development.

There is an opportunity to enhance the existing low-quality hedgerows with supplementary planting to fill in gaps brought about by undesirable species colonising the hedgerows, such as bramble or elder, or to extend gaps and connect orphan sections of hedgerow. Again, this has been considered during the development of the LEMP which is integral to the Development.
The AIA confirms that, subject to the implementation of the advice provided, the Development is acceptable from an arboricultural perspective.

The Development is compliant with Local Plan Policy NBE4 (b) as it does not result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats including ASNW.

In terms of trees and landscaping, Saved Policy CON8 of the Local Plan states that where development is proposed which would affect trees, woodlands or hedgerows of significant landscape or amenity value planning permission will only be granted if these features are shown to be capable of being retained in the longer term or if removal is necessary new planting is undertaken to maintain the value of these features and that planning conditions may be imposed to require the planting of new trees or hedgerows to replace those lost.

As no trees, woodland or hedgerows of significant landscape or amenity value would be impacted as a result of the Development, it is considered compliant with Local Plan Policy NBE4 (b) and Saved Policy CON8.

Further support can be obtained from NPPF Paragraph 180 (c) as the Development would not result in the loss or deterioration of ASNW. NPPF suggests that developments which would impact on such habitats should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons. It is therefore inferred that NPPF suggests that the LPA should support the Application in this regard as no adverse impacts are anticipated.

10.9 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Policy NBE8 states that development proposals should conserve or enhance heritage assets and their settings, taking account of their significance. Paragraph 194, 195, 199, 200 and 203 of the NPPF are of relevance for determining the significance of a Heritage Asset.

An HDBA has been prepared by Cotswold Archaeology (dated June 2023). The assessment has included a review of a comprehensive range of available sources, in accordance with key industry guidance. The HDBA has demonstrated a thorough understanding of the significance of the nearby heritage assets and their settings, identifies the nature and level of potential impacts on the significance of the heritage asset, and sets out how the findings of the assessment has informed the Development to avoid harm in the first instance, or minimise or mitigate harm to the significance of the asset.

There is good potential for archaeological remains to have survived within the Site, due to lack of development within the fields through recorded history. Development within the Site would be likely to result in comparatively limited impacts on any surviving below ground archaeological remains where present within the footprint of intrusive sub-surface development. Given the level of prehistoric activity in the surrounding area, it may be that further works would be required at appropriate stage in the planning process, to be discussed with the archaeological advisor at HCC.

The assessment considered the potential impact of the Development on designated heritage assets within the surrounding area. The Development would not alter any key element of the setting of Long Sutton or South Warnborough Conservation Areas, nor any Listed Building therewithin. It is considered that the Development could be accommodated with no harm to the significance of the Long Sutton Conservation Area.

It is anticipated that Andrew's Farmhouse Grade II Listed Building would also not be harmed by the Development. Whilst the asset is adjacent to the eastern part of the Site, the immediate and most important setting of the farmhouse would remain secluded and unchanged. Any glimpsed views onto the Development would not be considered significant. No other designated heritage asset would be sensitive to change within the Site.

The Development would conserve the nearby heritage assets and their settings, taking account of their significance. The Development would not lead to the loss of, or harm to, the significance of nearby heritage assets and/or their settings.

Taking the above into account, it is considered that the Development would not represent a conflict with Policies NBE8, NBE9 and NBE10 (c) of the Local Plan or the NPPF (Paragraphs 195, 199, 200, 202 and 203) as the Development would not compromise the significance of the nearby heritage assets. The Development would therefore accord with the legal duties set out in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990[2], national and local planning policy.

2 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/contents [Accessed: 24th October 2023].

10.10 NOISE

24 Acoustics Ltd undertook a NIA to assess the noise that could arise from the operation of the Development. Figure 3 of the NIA shows the layout of the Development which this section cross-references.

The noise-generating aspects of the Development are anticipated to be the inverters and transformers. The assessment was undertaken following background noise surveys at receptors close to the Development and acoustic modelling of the noise emission to predict operational noise levels at nearby residential properties.

The rating level exceeds the measured background noise level at five properties by up to 5 dB during the daytime and at three receptor locations by up to 2 dB at nighttime. This is considered acceptable for the following reasons:

- The difference is generally lower than +5 dB, which is the level at which BS 4142 states an adverse impact will occur (depending on the context);
- BS 4142 requires that context be taken into account. The daytime assessment is based on the inverters operating at 100% duty, which would only occur at certain times of the day/ year, and this therefore represents a worse case assessment; and
- The absolute noise level is very low (33 dB Laeq at its highest for Andrew Farm). BS 4142 states that absolute levels are likely more relevant when background noise levels and rating noise levels are low.

There are two types of inverters proposed, one a reduce noise model which will be installed at Fields A, B and C due to proximity to receptors. The assessment concludes that noise arising from the operation of the Development would be acceptable at all residential locations for daytime and night-time periods.

Local Plan Policy NBE11 supports development that would not give rise to unacceptable levels of pollution (including noise pollution) where it has been satisfactorily demonstrated that any adverse impacts arising from the proposed development, or impacting on the natural environment, will be adequately mitigated and minimised to an acceptable level. Likewise, the Development is complaint with Local Plan Policy NBE10 (e) which aims to minimise impacts on residential amenity including noise. The NIA has demonstrated that the Development complies with the wording of these policies, and as such, the LPA should have no concern regarding noise.

10.11 LIGHTING

On-site lighting during operation will be limited to emergency security lights over the switchgear and transformers. These will likely be activated by motion only. As such, the very small amount of artificial lighting which is associated with the Development will not result in adverse impacts on bats and other protected species sensitive to lighting or the natural environment. The Development therefore complies with Local Plan Policy NBE4 and NBE11 with respect to lighting.

10.12 GLINT AND GLARE

Pager Power carried out a Glint and Glare Study to inform the design of the Development. The three main factors for assessment were the impact of the Development on aviation, roads and dwellings.

Aviation – The impact of the Development upon personnel located within the ATC Tower at RAF Odiham is predicted to be low due to the short duration of glare per year and the low intensity. Furthermore, solar reflections are only possible when the sky is clear. Therefore, mitigation is not recommended.

Roads – Mitigation factors were identified to reduce the level of impact:

- Solar reflections are not predicted to be directly in front of a road use travelling south. In the worst case scenario, the reflective area will be 30 degrees to the left of a road user; and
- The sun will be low at the horizon when solar reflections are predicted to occur. Therefore, a road user will see both the reflective area and the sun, with the sun being a much brighter source of light.

Therefore, the impact upon road users travelling along B3349 is predicted to be low and no mitigation is recommended.

No impact on residential properties is anticipated due to existing intervening screening including vegetation, terrain or buildings and as such, no mitigation is recommended.
With regard to glint and glare, the Development is compliant with Local Plan Policy NBE11 as it would not give rise to unacceptable levels of pollution in terms of glint and glare.

10.13 TRANSPORT

A CTMP was prepared by Key Transport Consultants Ltd (KTC), dated July 2023.

Access to/from the Site is proposed to be from Junction 5 of the M3, south along the A4287 then the B3349. This route is suitable for HGV traffic and the B3349 to A4287 is the signed route to the M3. A banksman would be located at the main site accesses to control access to the Site and maintain security.

Construction hours would be limited to 07:00 to 20:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 to 12:00 on Saturdays, with no construction planned to take place on Sundays or public holidays, except with the agreement of the LPA. Deliveries would be timed to arrive after 09:00 and avoid 16:00 to 18:00, to avoid peak hours on the wider road network.

Measures would be put in place to seek to precent mud being tracked onto the road, such as wheel washing facilities. Should mud be tracked onto any of the highways which surround the Site, a road sweeper would be hired to clean the road.

Policy INF3 of the Local Plan states that development should promote the use of sustainable transport modes prioritising walking and cycling, improve accessibility to services and support the transition to a low carbon future. The Development is not a traffic-generating facility and will not be accessible to the public and therefore, promoting sustainable transport is not applicable in this case. Construction employees will be encouraged to utilise public transport or car share wherever possible. The Development therefore complied with Local Policy INF3.

Local Plan Saved Policy GEN1 supports developments that do not give rise to traffic flows on the surrounding road network which would cause material detriment to the amenities of nearby properties and settlements or to highway safety. Moreover, Local Plan Policy NBE10 (a) sets out the need to protect transport, infrastructure and the local highway networks.

In terms of impacts arising from the Development to the operation of the highway network, any potential impact arising would be during the construction stage only, as once operational traffic would be in the order of one van every 1-2 weeks. The construction of the Development would take approximately 7 months and would attract HGV movements. A 6-day operation per week would result in approximately 4 HGV movements a day. The traffic flow resultant from the construction and operation of the Development would not result in material detriment to the amenities of nearby properties and settlements or to highway safety as per Local Plan Policy NBE10 (a) and Saved Policy GEN1. The Development is also compliant with Local Plan Policy NBE10 (e) with regard to emissions as these will be negligible during construction and operation. Therefore, the Development would not conflict with the objectives of Local Plan Policy NBE10 (a), Local Plan Policy INF3, saved Local Plan Policy GEN1 or the NPPF (Paragraph 111) with regard to transport.

10.14 FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE

The Development is accompanied by an FRA and SWDS prepared by SLR, dated June 2023. Flood mapping indicates that the Site falls within Flood Zone 1 which has the lowest risk of fluvial flooding.

Local Plan Policy NBE5 (Managing Flood Risk) sets out five criteria of when development would be permitted. The applicable criteria are:

a) Over its lifetime it would not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere and will be safe from flooding;
b) Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) are used in major developments unless demonstrated to be inappropriate;
c) Within Causal Areas (as defined in the SFRA) all development takes opportunities to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding;
d) If located within an area at risk from any source of flooding, now and in the future, it is supported by a site-specific flood risk assessment and complies fully with national policy including the sequential and exceptions tests where necessary; and
e) It would not compromise the integrity and function of a reservoir or canal embankment.

The FRA and SWDS identifies the following potential sources of flooding:

- Flooding from sea or tidal flooding – *the site is considered to have negligible risk of flooding from sea or tidal sources;*
- Flooding from rivers or fluvial flooding - *the site is considered to have negligible risk of flooding from rivers and fluvial sources;*
- Flooding from surface water and overland flow – *the site is predominantly at very low risk of flooding from surface water, however there are distinct flow pathways indicated with potential surface water flood risk (see below);*
- Flooding from groundwater – *the risk of flooding from this source is considered to have low probability and the mitigations for surface water flooding (see Section 5 of the submitted FRA and SWDS report) would prevent damage to the development and avoid increases to offsite flooding from this source;*
- Flooding from sewers and mains water systems – *the risk of flooding from this source is very low;*
- Flooding from reservoirs, canals and other artificial sources - *the risk of flooding from these sources is very low; and*
- Flooding from infrastructure failure - *the site is considered to have negligible risk of flooding from infrastructure failure.*

The Flood Risk screening in Section 4 of the FRA and SWDS identified surface water flow pathways progressing onto the Site. Of these, the surface water flow pathway into Field 4 (as numbered in the FRA and SWDS) required further assessment – which is provided at Section 5 of the FRA. A conservative mitigation for this risk includes the digging of a drain parallel to the southernmost fence boundary in the northwestern field to direct potential flows away from water-sensitive equipment. The proposed cut-off drain is able to manage the design flow expected from this catchment and as such, is able to reduce the surface water flood risk to the Site. Thus, the surface water flood risk to the local area will not be increased as a result of this Development.

Thes assessment concludes that the Site is at low risk of flooding from tidal, fluvial, groundwater, sewers and mains water systems and artificial sources of flooding and the residual risk for surface water flooding is also low.

This assessment considers the risk of flooding by surface water on the Development and concludes that the aforementioned measures proposed will contribute to this flood risk being reasonably managed without increasing the flood risk off-site.

The FRA concludes that the risk of the Development flooding from all sources is Negligible. Based on the FRA and SWDS, compliance with Local Plan Policy NBE5 and the NPPF is achieved.

10.15 PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY (PROW)

The Development has been designed to minimise impacts on the PRoW on-site (footpaths 148/8/1; 148/8/2; and 148/8/3), both during construction and operation of the Development.

Adverse impacts arising from the Development are limited to visual impacts within close proximity to the Site, which will include impacts on the PRoW which run through the Site. With appropriate siting and design (i.e., minimum 18 m set back distances either side of the PRoW) and mitigation in the form of extensive planting, the adverse impact on visual receptors are satisfactorily addressed.

An indicative cross section is shown in Section 8.10 – PRoW Cross Section (Drawing Title: Site_ Section A-A). This set back buffer distance is larger at certain points throughout the Site. The Application is accompanied by photomontages which demonstrate how the proposed planting would look once establish, in Years 5 and 15 (i.e., 5 and 15 years after construction of the Development). The aim of this planting is to ensure that user experience of the PRoW remains positive.

During the design process, the number of crossings of PRoW with access tracks has been minimised, as has the need to re-route PRoW (this has been avoided).

PRoW may be subject to short-term temporary closures during construction however, closures will be minimised and avoided where possible via effective management measures.

Where a PRoW will be impacted by the construction, appropriate signage will be erected which would provide details of closures including dates and hours affected. Signage will also include details of proposed diversions, if required. Signs would also inform PRoW users of the potential presence of construction activities.

It is intended that all PRoW which are outside the Site will remain open throughout construction. If required, the location and details of signage would be agreed with the LPA as part of a PRoW Management Plan prior to commencement of construction.

Impacts on PRoW users will be transient as they pass through the landscape. Given carefully planned mitigation (i.e., buffer distances and planting plans), the impact of the Development on PRoW is minimised.

The Development has avoided the loss or fragmentation of PRoW which can be considered Green Infrastructure, as defined by Local Plan Policy INF2 – Green Infrastructure. Given the considerable planting proposed along the PRoW within the Site, it is considered that the existing green infrastructure within the Site has been enhanced however, it is appreciated that this is subjective to the individual's appreciation.

Moreover, the Development achieves high quality design as it ensures the existing PRoW are attractive and safe, in line with Local Plan Policy NBE9 - Design.

The Development has been designed to protect and enhance PRoW, and therefore complies with NPPF Paragraph 100, Local Plan Policies INF3 (h) and INF2.

10.16 CLIMATE CHANGE

On 29th April 2021, the LPA agreed a motion which declared a Climate Emergency in Hart District. Local Plan Policy NBE9 requires proposals to demonstrate that they would reduce energy consumption and incorporate renewable or low carbon energy technologies, where appropriate. The Application fully addresses the requirements of this policy as it would convert solar energy into electricity. This electricity would then be transported to the point of connection with the National Grid at Fleet 400 kV Substation. The Development would contribute significantly to address climate change as it would be capable of supplying clean, renewable electricity to 18,600 homes per annum and would result in an offset of approximately 29,000 tonnes of C02 emissions every year.

The Application therefore fully meets the requirements of Policy NBE9 of the Local Plan and the NPPF in terms of sustainability/renewable or low carbon energy technologies to address climate change.

10.17 SUMMARY

The Development comprises a 47.5MW AC capacity solar farm. As set out at the beginning of this Section, the UK has ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and moving towards a low carbon society. The only realistic way these aims can be achieved is if renewable energy is deployed and at present, the UK is falling behind on its obligations in this respect, which makes the need for new renewable energy to be deployed ever the more urgent.

The principle of the Development is considered acceptable in line with the relevant policies of the Development Plan. This includes Local Plan Policy NBE10 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy which allows for the generation from renewable resources, or low carbon energy development providing that any adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily including individual and cumulative landscape and visual impacts.

The Development would contribute significantly to address climate change as it would be capable of supplying clean, renewable electricity to 18,600 homes per annum and would result in an offset of approximately 29,000 tonnes of C02 emissions every year.

This Application is supported by a suite of supporting information which demonstrates that there would be no unacceptable impacts as a result of the Development, and that the relevant development management policies are adhered to.

Adverse impacts arising from the Development are restricted to immediate and medium-range landscape impacts. With appropriate siting and design (i.e., minimum 18 m set back distances either side of the PRoW) and mitigation in the form of extensive planting, the adverse impact on visual receptors is satisfactorily addressed.

Moreover, weighed against these adverse impacts are the numerous benefits of the Development, most notably the considerable carbon saving associated with the production of renewable energy (offset of approximately 29,000 tonnes of C02 emissions every year), contribution to climate change targets and the associated environmental benefits (including significant BNG of 61%), which are material benefits weighing heavily in favour of the Application.

Through careful design of the layout and various mitigation measures, it is ensured that there would be no unacceptable impacts in terms of heritage, ecology, trees, flood risk or on local amenity. Adverse impacts on landscape and visual amenities are local and have been satisfactorily addressed through design and extensive mitigation.

The Development complies with the following:

- Local Plan Policy SD1 – Sustainable Development;
- Local Plan Policy NBE1 – Development in the Countryside;
- Local Plan Policy NBE2 – Landscape;
- Local Plan Policy NBE4 – Biodiversity;
- Local Plan Policy NBE5 – Managing Flood Risk;
- Local Plan Policy NBE8 – Historic Environment;
- Local Plan Policy NBE9 – Design;
- Local Plan Policy NBE10 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy;
- Local Plan Policy NBE11 – Pollution;
- Local Plan Policy INF2 – Green Infrastructure;
- Local Plan Policy INF3 – Transport;
- Saved Policy GEN1 – General Policy for Development; and
- Saved Policy CON8 – Trees, Woodland & Hedgerows: Amenity Value.

The Development can also draw support from NPPF in terms of Paragraphs 17 which sets out a core planning principle of *"supporting the transition to a low carbon future"* and *"encouraging the use of renewable resources (for example by the development of renewable energy)"*.

Paragraph 93 of NPPF aims to *"secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions"* and *"supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure"*. As stated above, the Development will result in the offset of approximately 29,000 tonnes of C02 emissions every year and therefore, can draw support from NPPF Paragraph 93.

Paragraph 98 of NPPF states that LPAs should *"approve applications [for renewable energy development], unless material considerations indicate otherwise, if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable"*. This DAPA demonstrates that, although some adverse visual effects are anticipated, the impacts of the Development are acceptable in the planning balance and therefore, in line with NPPF Paragraph 98, the Application should be approved.

The Development will also improve economic, social and environmental condition of the area, in line with NPPF Paragraph 38. The Development further accords with NPPF Paragraphs 97, 152, 155, 157, 158, 174, 179 and 202.

11.0 CONCLUSION

This DAPA provides a detailed assessment of the Development against relevant planning policy, guidance and material considerations. The document compliments the environmental reports which accompany the Application and has provided an assessment of the acceptability of the Development in the context of the legislative and planning framework.

Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990[1] (TCPA 1990) provides that the decision-maker shall have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In the case of the Development, the LPA should determine the Application in accordance with the Local Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The benefits of the Development are as follows:

- Environmental benefits include:
  - Production of renewable energy that would offset approximately 29,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions each year;
  - Biodiversity gain of 61% which would result due to the environmental and landscaping proposals which are integral to the Development; and
  - Cessation of intensive arable agricultural within the buffers of ASNW would provide an overall enhancement to a locally significant resource.
- Social benefits would arise as a result of the generation of electricity as it can be exported to the National Grid which can then be used at local, regional or national level and would be capable of supplying 18,600 homes for a year; and
- Economic benefits attracted by the Development would be employment and local expenditure during the construction and, to a limited extent, following provision at operational stages.

The adverse effects associated with the Development are as follows:

- The Development would result in major adverse effect within the Site however, the Site is well contained and the effect on wider landscape and visual receptors is reduced by the inherited mitigation, and the effect within the close and medium-range will be reduced to minor and negligible by the proposed mitigation; and
- The Development would result in the temporary change of use of agricultural land which is considered BMV (Grade 2 – 3.5 ha and Grade 3a – 40 ha within the Developable Area). Sheep grazing will continue around and under the solar panels during operation of the Development.

The siting of the solar panels and ancillary infrastructure at this location is acceptable in principle. Whilst there would inevitably be some impacts associated with the Development, it is considered that the enhancement and mitigation measures proposed, in combination with the substantial benefits which the Development would bring with respect to renewable energy generation, are sufficient to outweigh any adverse impacts that might arise.

The Site is not subject to any local, or national, designations and has no major constraints which would preclude the ability to accommodate this Development. It is exactly these sorts of sites that should be actively promoted by the LPA to help meet the UK's renewable energy generating targets.

As part of the planning and decision-making process, the impacts must be weighed against the benefits of the Development. The Development would deliver substation benefits on a scale such as to outweigh the limited adverse impacts identified.

The Development, along with the mitigation strategies proposed, would not materially conflict with the policy objectives of the Local Plan in relation to the principle of the Development, heritage, amenity, biodiversity, ecology, landscape, flood risk, drainage, transport and sustainability. The Application can also draw considerable support from NPPF in these respects.

The substantial environmental benefits of the Development should carry considerable weight in the decision-making process to indicate that the Application should be granted.

1 UK Government (1990) Town and Country Planning Act 1990 [Online] Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/contents (Accessed 07/11/23)