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DEVELOPMENT CONSULTING

Planning Design and Access Statement

Installation of a solar farm with a
38.78MW AC output for a temporary
period of 50 years, associated
infrastructure and environmental
enhancements

Glebe Farm, Ropsley

Glebe Farm Solar Limited

June 2025



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Document Review:

Prepared by: Kate Cantwell

Signed:

Checked by: Nick Beddoe

Signed:

Verified by: Peter Grubb

Signed:



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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of Glebe Farm Solar Limited in support of a planning application for solar farm development on land at Glebe Farm, Welby Road, Ropsley, Grantham, NG32 3LU.
- 1.1.2 The site area measures 74.17 ha (including the cable run to the connecting substation).
- 1.1.3 The application proposes the installation of a solar farm comprising ground mounted solar PV panels with an installed capacity of 38.78MW AC including mounting system, inverters, underground cabling, stock proof fence, CCTV, internal tracks and associated infrastructure, landscaping, biodiversity net gain and environmental enhancements for a temporary period of 50 years.
- 1.1.4 The development is proposed to meet an evidenced need for solar energy development in the UK to address the Government priority to reach Net Zero, decarbonise the energy industry and in response to climate change.
- 1.1.5 As a result of Government targets and commitments and in recognition of the environmental imperative for the UK to reach Net Zero, all UK coal-fired power stations were decommissioned by the end of September 2024. Alternative sources of electricity are therefore needed immediately to replace these major sources of energy.
- 1.1.6 In 2020 fossil fuels made up 84% of the global energy mix, but this figure will need to fall to less than 20% by 2050 in order to reach net zero. It is also estimated that electricity consumption in the UK and US will increase by approximately 50% by 2036 and more than double by 2050¹. Transitioning to clean, renewable energy to meet this demand is critical to support the economy and maintain our current way of life. Solar farms offer a safe and cost-effective solution, it addresses the causes of climate change and delivers a secure energy source in the UK, reducing our reliance on the fluctuations and international politics of global energy markets.
- 1.1.7 The proposals would generate approximately 38.8MW of electricity which would offset around 16,684 tonnes of CO₂ per annum and 834,200 tonnes over the lifetime of the scheme. This equates to enough electricity to serve the total power needs of around 11,576 average UK households per annum. The economic benefits of the scheme include economic output of £1.3m GVA over 14 months, £121,600

¹ <https://www.nationalgrid.com/stories/energy-explained/how-will-our-electricity-supply-change-future>

business rates generated per annum to the Council, and significant spin off benefits for the supply chain with gross value added (GVA) far in excess of £1million.

- 1.1.8 The site falls within South Kesteven Borough Council and as such Policies contained within the Local Plan (2011 – 2036) are relevant to the proposal. The proposed development has been assessed against the relevant policies and it is concluded that it complies with the Development Plan when taken as a whole. The public benefits of the proposed development weigh substantially in favour of granting planning permission and outweigh the limited adverse effects identified in this report. The economic benefits of the development, local biodiversity benefits and contribution to national Net Zero targets also weigh significantly in favour of the proposal. In conclusion, the planning balance is convincingly in favour of granting planning permission.

2.0 The Site and Designations

2.1 Site Location

2.1.1 The site is located at Glebe Farm. It is approximately 1km west of Oasby, 1.2km northeast of Welby and 1.7km south west of Kelby and approximately 8.5km to the northeast of Grantham. The site includes several fields located north of Glebe Farm and the site boundary includes the proposed cable route which extends west from the solar farm, along the public highway in Welby, south along the High Dyke/B5403 before continuing through agricultural land to reach the Londonthorpe Substation.



Figure 1: Site Location Plan

2.2 Site Description

2.2.1 The site measures 74.17ha including the cable run. The solar farm part of the development is located on fields which together are roughly rectangular in shape. The site is in a predominantly flat lowland area, forming part of a broader agricultural landscape interspersed with occasional areas of slight undulation. Site elevations range from approximately 86m to 99m AOD which reflects the local area.

2.2.2 The land is currently in agricultural use and is surrounded by agricultural land on all sides. Hedgerows are present along several of the field boundaries and were largely found to be species poor, comprising

native species. Ditches were also identified along parts of the site boundary as described in more detail on page 30 of the PEA. The eastern boundary is marked by Ropsley Road which runs along its length. The buildings at Glebe Farm are located outside but immediately south of the site boundary. seven large arable fields enclosed by hedgerows and ditches with some mature trees. Three waterbodies (ponds), two within and one just outside of the site boundary, were noted.

- 2.2.3 The four southernmost arable fields had been cropped with turnip fodder grazed by sheep over the winter when initial surveys took place. The northern half of the site is divided into five fields, all of which had been sown with a winter cereal crop.
- 2.2.4 The site is bordered by roads on its eastern and southern boundaries, arable fields to the west and north. An area of scrub borders the site at the eastern end of the northern boundary.
- 2.2.5 The site is located entirely within the National Character Area profile 47: Southern Lincolnshire Edge. There is an area of woodland north of the site which forms part of the Quarry Farm, Ancaster landholding north of the site. In the centre of the site is a triangular woodland area which will be left in situ and not developed.
- 2.2.6 There are no watercourses within the site.
- 2.2.7 There is an existing water pipe which crosses the site in a diagonal from the northeast to the south west the path of which will not be overlain with development. Similarly, the route of an old Roman road crossing the site will remain undeveloped. Outside of the site boundary on the south eastern corner is a high pressure gas pipeline.

2.3 Planning Policy Designations and Constraints

- 2.3.1 The site sits wholly within the administrative boundary South Kesteven District Council area and outside of the Ropsley and District Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- 2.3.2 The site is not located within any significant planning designations which include National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), National Parks, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Green Belt. The review of the MAGIC website revealed that there is one statutory designated nature conservation site within 2km of the proposed development site, Wilsford Heath Quarry SSSI (Figure 12). This SSSI lies 1.2km to the north of the site (see Figure 12, page 27 of the PEA).
- 2.3.3 The data search with LERC revealed eight Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within 2km of the proposed

development site.

2.3.4 There are no National Parks or Ancient Woodland within 1km of the site boundary the closest Ancient Woodland is located approximately 2.2km to the southeast at Heydour Southings.

2.3.5 The site is located wholly within Flood Zone 1 with less than 1 in 1000 (0.1%) annual probability of fluvial or tidal flooding in any given year. Page 6 of the submitted FRA shows an excerpt from the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning.

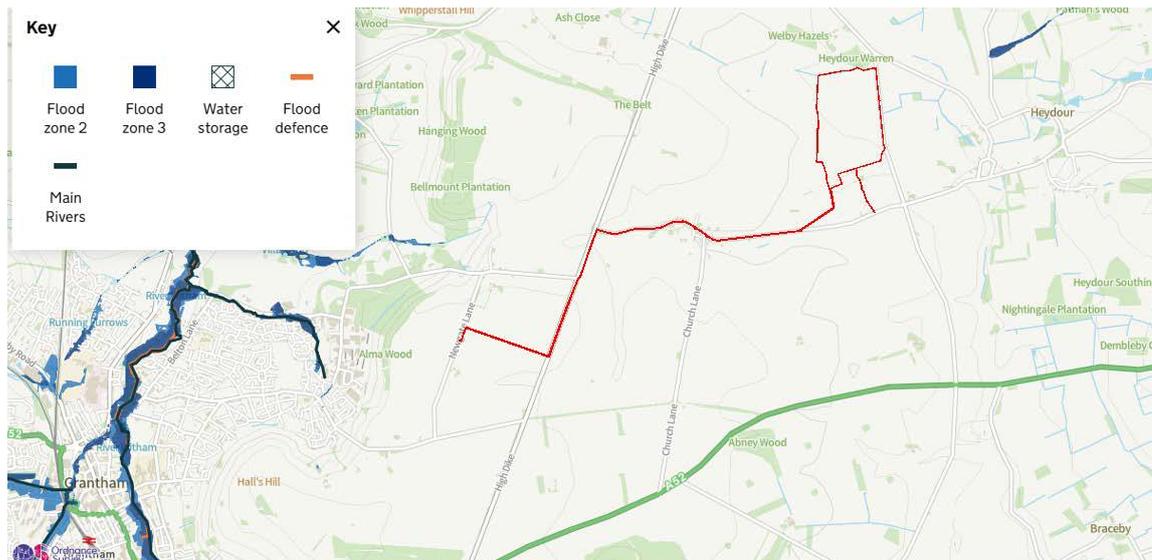


Figure 2: EA Flood Map for Planning

2.3.6 There are no designated or non-designated heritage assets within or adjoining the site. There are 22 designated heritage assets within the study area, none of which fall within the application site. They comprise one Registered Park and Garden, two Conservation Areas and 19 Listed Buildings. All are summarised in the Heritage Assessment accompanying this planning application.

2.4 Public Rights of Way

2.4.1 There are no footpaths or bridleways crossing the site or its access, although several Public Rights of Way (PROWs) are located nearby, as shown in Figure 2.5 of the submitted Transport Assessment.

2.4.2 Public Right of Way/Bridleway 'Wlby/8/11' extends north from Welby and turning east toward the site, terminating on its western boundary. Bridleway 'Heyd/19/1' is also located north of the site, extending from Quarry Farm east to High Dyke. There are several Public Rights of Way footpaths that cross the land around and between Oasby, Heydour and Aisby as illustrated on the excerpt from the Lincolnshire Council electronic working copy definitive map.

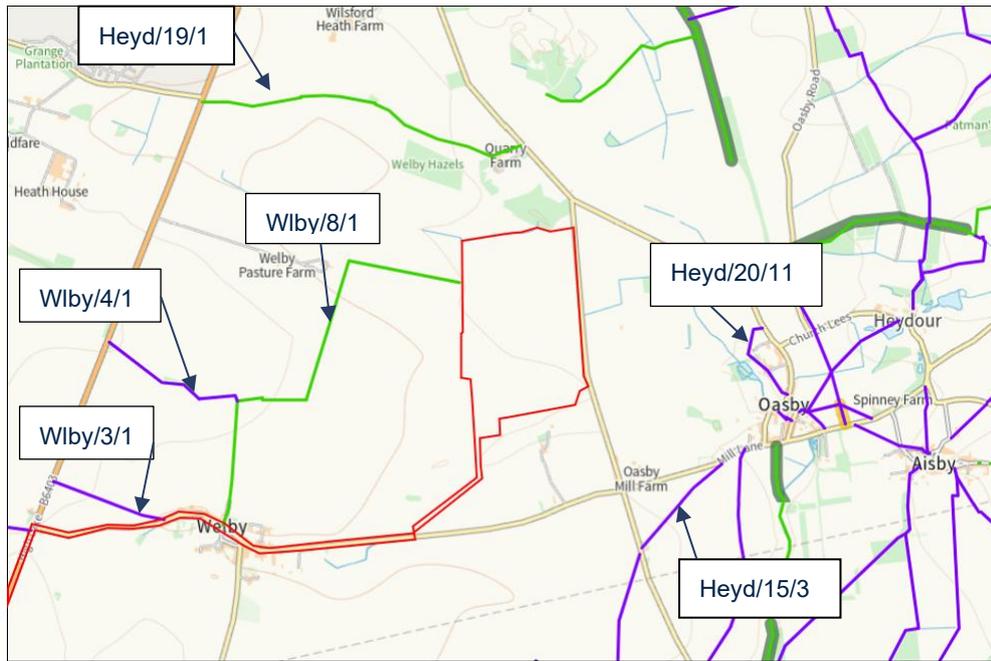


Figure 3: Lincolnshire Council working copy of the definitive map

3.0 Site Selection

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Solar farm developments require a large site area in the open countryside to accommodate solar arrays. The size of the solar farm is initially determined by the available grid capacity in the area and the formal grid offer made by National Grid. With the grid offer made, the developer undertakes a site search for suitable land that is available for this form of development. The site search is informed by detailed feasibility studies and site assessments looking at all relevant planning and environmental constraints. This is an iterative process which ultimately defines the site boundary to avoid adverse environmental impacts as far as possible and to build in appropriate mitigations and compensations as may be necessary.

3.1.2 The grid connection offer establishes both the export value (in MW) and the point of connection (where the solar farm feeds into the grid). One of the key site search criteria for a solar farm is the distance between the solar array and the point of connection – longer distances mean a loss of thermal power through long cable runs and increased trenching costs (often enough to affect scheme viability) and more disturbance to the environment through groundworks required to lay cables. In addition, long cable routes will often require multiple landowners to allow works on their land with associated costs, legal and planning implications. For this reason developers aim to secure sites as close as possible to the point of connection.

3.1.3 The process of site selection is therefore complex and there are often very few or just one deliverable site option. While there may be swathes of open countryside which might appear suitable for solar development, once the site constraints have been taken into account, along with the technical requirements for the technology, land availability and the fixed point of connection – much of that land has to be disregarded.

3.2 Macro Scale Site Search

3.2.1 The proposed development is defined as ‘major development’² and as such should be located outside of important environmental designations such as National Parks, National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) and other, locally significant landscape designations and designation for ecological protections.

² Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010

3.2.2 The image below shows the extensive area of the country which has at least one of these major planning constraints. These areas are avoided from the outset of the site selection process where at all possible – the proposed site falls outside of all these designations (other than a small portion of Grade 3a agricultural land) and lies within viable proximity to an agreed point of connection to the local electricity network.

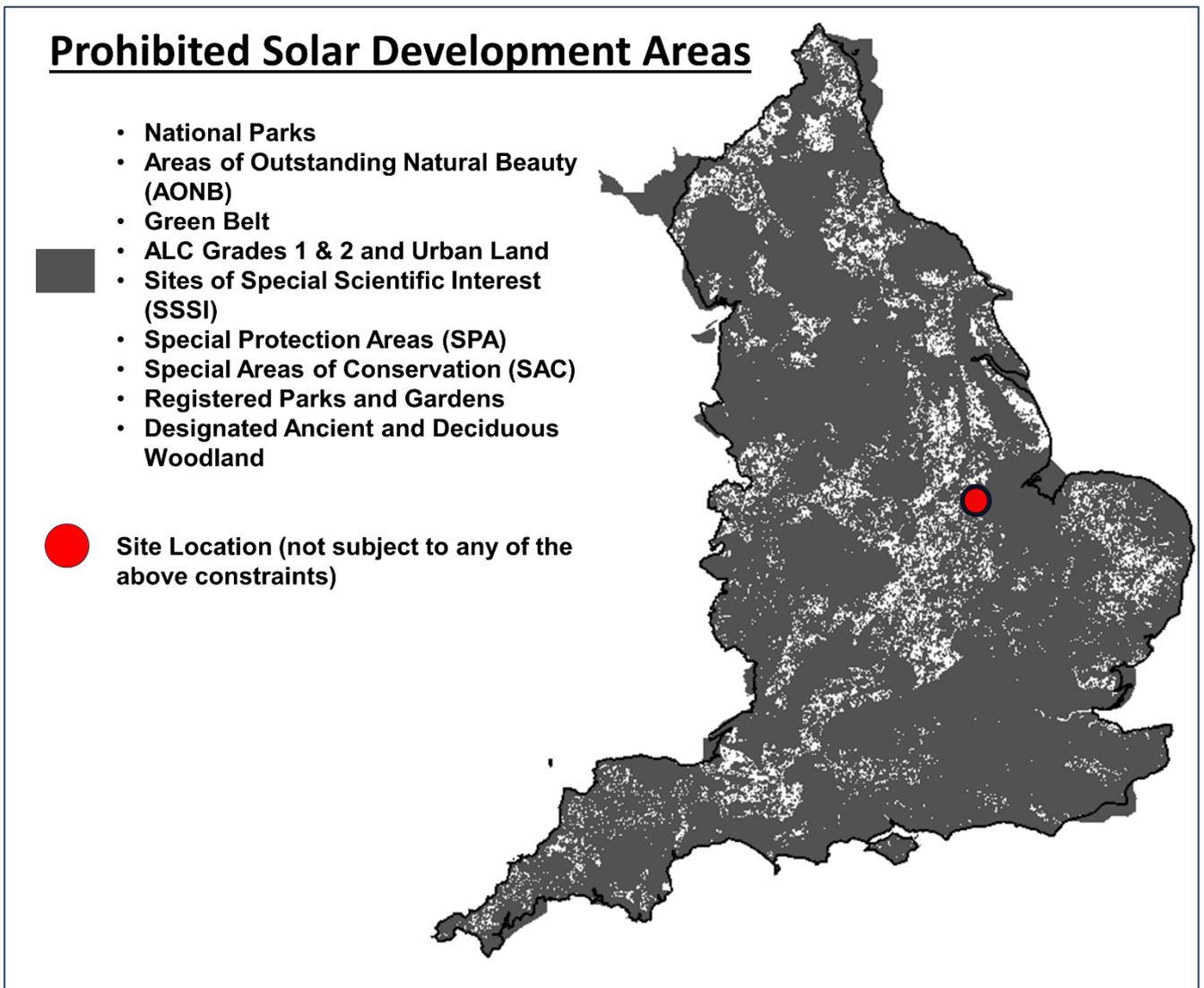


Figure 4 Macro (National) Scale Planning Constraints Map

3.3 Optimised Site Selection

3.3.1 The site selection process is then refined to identify the most suitable site within viable proximity to the agreed point of connection, considering factors such as grid connection costs, anticipated scheme yield, and landowner agreements. The search covers an area of approximately 3km from the point of

connection, which is considered to be the maximum distance from the grid connection point within which the scheme can remain commercially viable.

3.3.2 This exercise considers development management and operational needs. Accordingly, the purpose of the site search at this stage is to assess potential sites throughout the search area against the following criteria:-

- A location with a relatively high level of solar irradiation
- Compatible neighbouring uses
- Previously Developed Land (brownfield land) that is available
- Landscape and visual impacts and landscape character and landscape sensitivity
- Existing land allocations in the Local Plan
- Cumulative effects with other consented developments
- Agricultural Land Classification – avoiding Best and Most Versative agricultural land
- Heritage and archaeological impacts
- Site orientation and size (capability of accommodating 38.78MW of solar panels)
- Site availability
- Suitable construction access
- Viability

3.3.3 These are explained through the table below with reference to the proposed site location:

Table 1 Site Selection Criteria within the defined search area

Siting Consideration	Implications
<p>A location with a relatively high level of solar irradiation</p>	<p>At the wider scale, areas in the south of the UK generally benefit from higher levels of solar irradiation but this does not rule out development sites elsewhere in the country. Modelling of irradiation and potential energy generation is undertaken for every site. Sites which are south facing are preferred and locations with significant overshadowing from vertical infrastructure, buildings, hedges or trees. Large fields are preferred over smaller ones to avoid shadowing effects of boundary features.</p>

Compatible neighbouring uses	<p>While it is not always unsuitable to locate solar development near to residential development, site choice aims to maintain a significant distance from residential properties to avoid noise, glint and glare and adverse visual effects. Railways lines and airports also require careful analysis to avoid glint and glare effects on drivers and pilots for obvious safety reasons.</p>
Previously Developed Land ('Brownfield Land')	<p>Re-using previously developed land for new development can make a major contribution to sustainable development by avoiding open countryside and productive agricultural land.</p> <p>It should be noted that Previously Developed Land/Brownfield Land is often not suitable for solar development. The sites are not well located with overshadowing effects from surrounding development, incompatible neighbouring land uses and sites are often not in the limited site search area close to the point of connection which is offered by the National Grid. In addition, the solar industry finds it hard to compete with land rental values compared to other forms of development such as residential or commercial and in fact Previously Developed Land/Brownfield Land is often more suited to residential development which needs to be closer to services and community infrastructure.</p>
Landscape and Visual Impact, Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Character	<p>Due to the scale of development impacts of this kind cannot be avoided entirely. Site selection aims to avoid significant adverse effects and make best use of existing opportunities for screening using landform and existing vegetation.</p> <p>Landscaping proposals as part of the development can not only avoid or mitigation the impacts of the development but may offer some improvement where, for example, hedges and trees may have been lost to facilitate commercial farming.</p> <p>Relatively flat topography is preferred as it is easier to screen the site from view.</p> <p>Site assessment also considers impacts on sensitive receptors such as Public Rights of Way and other publicly accessible land.</p>
Heritage and Archaeology	<p>The location of Registered Parks and Gardens, Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings are considered to avoid adverse effects on their character, setting and heritage significance.</p> <p>Known archaeological remains can be avoided through site choice and the</p>

	<p>layout of the development within the site boundary can be designed to avoid areas of special interest.</p>
<p>A site of suitable size, and orientation that can accommodate the proposed development</p>	<p>Small to medium solar sites (i.e. under 25 MW) are not usually viable since the removal of government subsidy for this type of development. To become viable, a solar site generally needs to be between 40 – 50 MW. For solar schemes over 25 MW, sites will have a minimum land requirement to achieve the required power output.</p> <p>Importantly where potential sites contain physical obstructions that cannot be removed (such as public footpaths, historical field boundaries, woodland, rivers, streams, highways etc.) the site area requirements can be significantly increased. Additionally, a site positioned on a north-facing slope would require a greater development footprint.</p>
<p>Site availability</p>	<p>The site must be available for the duration of energy generation. This will give more certainty that the scheme can be delivered. Site availability is determined by the willingness of the landowner to enter into an option agreement and in this instance the proposal is for an operational period of 50 years.</p>
<p>Site allocation</p>	<p>Consideration should be given to any site allocations made by the Local Development Plan. In South Kesteven District Council there is no land allocated for renewable energy development and as such sites that are proposed are considered in terms of their compliance with the relevant policies in the Plan. The absence of site allocations for potential renewable energy development does not imply the absence of suitable sites.</p>
<p>Avoiding ‘Best and Most Versatile’ agricultural land</p>	<p>The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG³) requires that the proposed use of any agricultural land must be shown to be necessary and that poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land. It also encourages the continued agricultural use of the site and biodiversity improvements around the arrays. The intention of this approach is to limit loss of good quality and productive agricultural land.</p>
<p>Viability</p>	<p>The development must be viable having regard to the cost of land rent and grid connection costs.</p>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy>

3.4 Avoiding Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

3.4.1 Publicly available records show that the site has areas of grade 2 and Grade 3 agricultural land. An Agricultural Land Classification survey is being undertaken to establish with more certainty what the land classification of the site is and whether the Grade 3 land is Grade 3a (Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land) or Grade 3b (not Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land).

3.4.2 The plan below shows small areas of Grade 3A within the site boundary. These form just 10% of the solar farm fields.

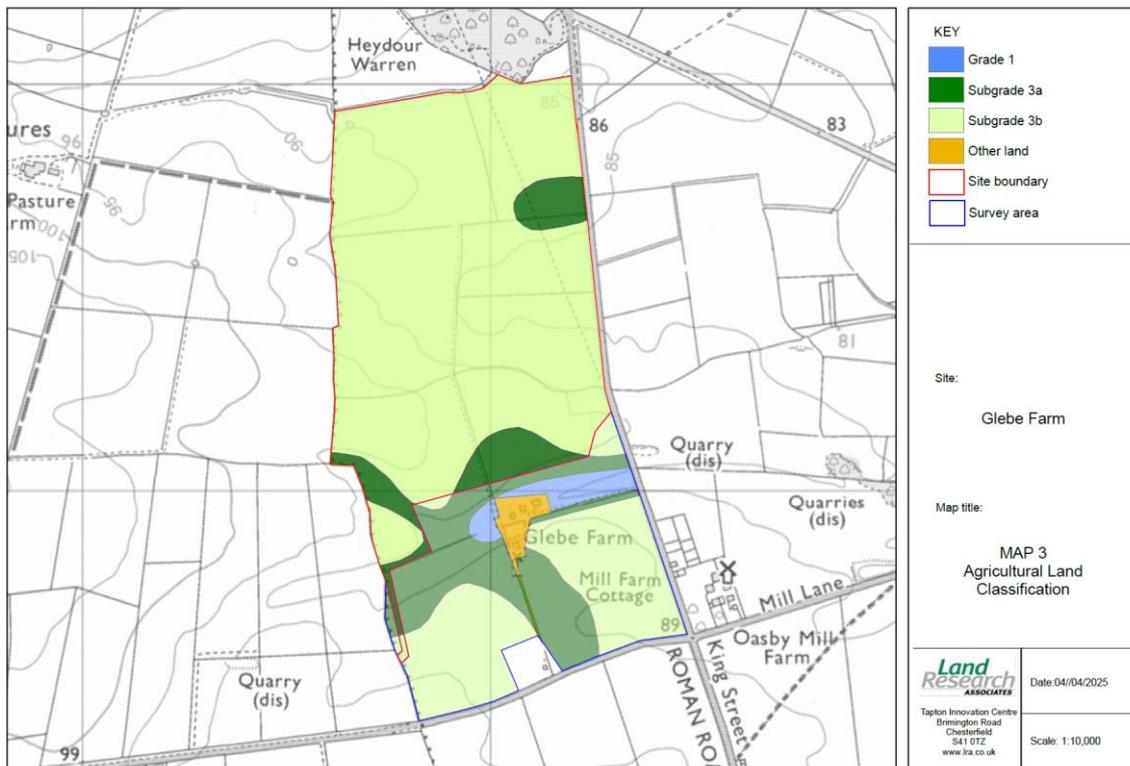


Figure 5 Excerpt from submitted agricultural land classification survey

3.5 Summary

3.5.1 Taking account of the various planning and operational constraints, it has been demonstrated that the site location is well thought-out and is considered to be justified with regards to the key factors driving the site selection process. In particular, it is noted that the proposed site:

- Lies within viable proximity to the point of an agreed grid connection
- Sits outside of any key planning designations
- Is of an adequate scale and is physically suitable to accommodate the development, being

relatively flat and unshaded by nearby topography of vertical features

- Is available for the planned 50-year duration of the scheme
- Largely avoids 'Best and Most Versatile Agricultural' (BMV) Land and the proposals can preserve an agricultural function through grazing
- Is distanced from nearby Public Rights of Way
- Is distanced from nearby Historic Environment features
- Is distanced from nearby residential properties or other potentially incompatible neighbouring land uses
- Sits outside of Flood Zones 2 & 3
- Benefits from relatively high levels of solar irradiation, being located in the south of the UK and not overshadowed
- Utilises existing grid infrastructure

minimises disturbance to the ground, it minimises disturbance to existing habitats and minimises the release of carbon that is sequestered in the soils and would be released through more invasive foundation types. The frames will be static (non-rotating) and allow for sheep to graze underneath. This enables an agricultural use to be retained while the solar farm is operational and improves the value and economic yield from the land. The panels will be arranged in rows spaced at a distance that avoids shadows being cast by one row upon another. The panels are fixed to an angled frame and positioned along an east-west axis, facing south for optimal solar energy absorption.



Figure 7 Photograph of an example ground mounted solar array in South Wales



Figure 8 Photograph showing the arrays with standard gaps between panels to allow rainwater to reach the ground. Image also shows installed track for maintenance vehicle use



Figure 9 Photograph showing the minimal ground disturbance following framework installation.

4.3 Battery Storage Units

4.3.1 Battery storage does not form part of the proposed development. The Development will be connected directly to the National Grid at the nearby substation (National Grid Electricity Distribution's (NGED) Grantham BSP Substation on Newgate Lane) via an underground cable connecting to the substation on the solar farm which is proposed for the south west corner of the site (see Figure 6 above).

4.4 Associated Infrastructure

4.4.1 The scheme also incorporates the following ancillary elements (shown on drawings submitted with this application):

- Stock-proof fencing – agricultural in nature, screened by existing trees and hedges and additional planting and will allow for the passage of small mammals
- Security cameras/CCTV around the perimeter of the site
- Stone tracks running through the site – formed from crushed stone like agricultural tracks
- Underground cables – trenches will be backfilled after laying and directional drilling under trees and hedges where necessary minimises disturbance to established vegetation.
- Inverters
- A customer sub-station and associated small scale plant

- Ecological enhancements and landscaping works
- Temporary site compound (to be removed once construction is complete)



Figure 10 Photograph showing the typical specification of a stock proof security fence and security cameras

- 4.4.2 The security cameras are operated remotely and activated by motion. They would be located at intervals around the perimeter of the site and directed to the interior of the site. There would be no flood lighting.
- 4.4.3 Existing tracks are used where available and additional stone tracks installed to enable small maintenance vans to access the site for operational and maintenance site visits. These tracks are formed from compacted hardcore (like farm tracks), are easily reversible and fully permeable.
- 4.4.4 Cabling is put into a conduit at the back of the panels and a cable from the inverter would run underground to the transformer within the site.
- 4.4.5 Inverter units would convert the variable direct current (DC) output of a photovoltaic (PV) solar panel into a utility frequency alternating current (AC) that can be fed into a commercial electrical grid. They are normally sited underneath the panels at the end of the row as shown below.



Figure 11 Photograph of inverters at the end of the 'string' of panels

- 4.4.6 Ecological enhancements are achieved through resting the ground from intensive farming, creating a quiet 'haven' for a variety of wildlife and biodiversity, using large buffer strips to create wildflower mixes and retaining and strengthening and planting native hedgerows. A biodiversity net gain is achieved as assessed through the Natural England Metric (see accompanying Biodiversity Net Gain documents).
- 4.4.7 Hedgerow trees will all be retained. Existing trees and hedges will be protected in accordance with the advice of an arboriculturist, in line with BS5837:2012. A Tree Survey has already been undertaken and is submitted as part of this planning application. The survey is used to inform the site layout, to ensure construction activities do not encroach into the Root Protection Areas of trees and shrubs and to ensure that other construction related effects on these habitats are avoided, mitigated or compensated in the proposed landscaping scheme and site design.
- 4.4.8 The proposed site layout includes meadow planting along the route of the Roman road which is an identified heritage feature and along the route of the waterpipe where no construction will take place.



Figure 12 Photograph of wildflower margins in large buffer strips

4.5 Site Access

- 4.5.1 Site access is proposed from Ropsley Road on the eastern boundary of the site where there is an existing agricultural access. The site access has been designed to accommodate an HGV. The site's perimeter fencing and access gate will be set back from the field boundary, ensuring that vehicles do not need to stop on the carriageway to open the gates. Vehicle tracking has been modelled (see accompanying Transport Statement and supporting plans) which demonstrate there is sufficient space for those vehicles to achieve the necessary manoeuvre from, and onto, Ropsley Road.
- 4.5.2 A secondary/alternative access is available via the existing Glebe Farm access to the south of the site and where it meets Welby Road.
- 4.5.3 The submitted Block Plan shows where existing tracks within the site are included in the proposed layout to minimise the extent of new tracks which are needed. The purpose of the proposed tracks is to allow small maintenance vehicles to reach parts of the site e.g. transformers, inverters and storage containers as well as the customer substation on site. This will allow maintenance vehicles to undertake repairs and monitoring at all times of year and to ensure the site operates efficiently. In the long term, operational access will be maintained via Ropsley Road. However, vehicular trips will be infrequent, primarily for panel cleaning and site maintenance, and will typically involve light vehicles.
- 4.5.4 A Transport Assessment has been undertaken by Hydrock (now Stantec) and is submitted as part of this planning application. The report illustrates that HGV tracking is achievable at both site access

points and the required standard visibility splays can be achieved in both locations. See page 20 and Appendix D of the submitted Transport Statement for more details and illustrative drawings.

- 4.5.5 Traffic management measures will be implemented along Ropsley Road and Welby Road at both access points to ensure the safe entry and exit of vehicles, using marshals to oversee vehicle movements to and from the site, ensuring controlled and safe access. Proposed locations of marshals are shown in Figure 4.5 on page 22 of the Transport Statement.
- 4.5.6 To ensure carriageway conditions are maintained to a good condition, during and post construction it is proposed that temporary heavy-duty matting is provided across the full width of the unmetalled carriageway where required. Matting will also be provided within informal passing bays where identified and required, to ensure that damage to these areas is avoided during the most intense periods of construction. This matting will withstand any potential vehicular movements, including HGV vehicles.
- 4.5.7 Once construction is complete, the solar installation is unmanned and attracts fewer traffic movements than the existing agricultural use – see tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 in the Transport Statement.

4.6 Period of Generation

- 4.6.1 The proposal will be temporary for a period of 50 years after which all equipment will be removed and the land returned to its existing condition. The process of decommissioning will be fully detailed in a technical note that would be required via a planning condition. The nature of the construction means the scheme can be easily reversed and would leave a positive legacy of biodiversity and landscape improvements for the site, in addition to the significant generation of electricity over its generating life.
- 4.6.2 Full details of decommissioning would be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority prior to any works taking place to remove the components and infrastructure.

5.0 Relevant Planning History

5.1 The Site

5.1.1 A review of the planning history of the site showed that the site had been subject to the following planning applications:

Planning Reference	Location	Application Description	Decision
S22/1847	Pipeline between Ancaster and Bexwell, Norfolk	Section 73 application to vary condition 13 (construction working hours) of S22/0230 (Hybrid Planning Application for the proposed Grantham to Bexwell potable water Pipeline Scheme with full planning consent sought for 95 kilometres of pipeline and 4 kilometre spur, and outline consent for associated above ground infrastructure at Elton and Welby Heath with all matters reserved except for access.)	13/01/2023
S22/0230	Pipeline Between Ancaster And Bexwell, Norfolk	Hybrid Planning Application for the proposed Grantham to Bexwell potable water Pipeline Scheme with full planning consent sought for 95 kilometres of pipeline and 4 kilometre spur, and outline consent for associated above ground infrastructure at Elton and Welby Heath with all matters reserved except for access.	Approved conditionally
S22/2222	Land Along The Grantham To Bexwell Pipeline Scheme	Submission of details reserved by conditions 5 (archaeology), 7 (biodiversity), 8 (bird hazard management plan) and 11 (CEMP) of planning permission S22/1847 - Section 73 application to vary condition 13 (construction working hours) of S22/0230 (Hybrid Planning Application for the proposed Grantham to Bexwell potable water Pipeline Scheme)	Conditions discharged
SK.93/0809	Quarry Farm South To Glebe Farm & Oasby Mill Oasby	Erection of 11kv overhead line	Approved 17/09/1993

5.2 The Surrounding Area

5.2.1 A review of the planning history of the surrounding area showed that similar proposals for solar developments had been consented. Of relevance are the planning applications below:

Planning Reference	Location	Application Description	Decision
S23/1845	Land North Of Welby Grantham Lincolnshire	Request for an EIA Screening Opinion for the installation and operation of a 46MW ground mounted photovoltaic solar farm with battery storage, grid connection and supporting infrastructure	Decided, EIA not required 18/12/2023
S24/1040	Pastures Farm High Dike Welby Lincolnshire NG32 3LU	Installation of solar farm with associated battery storage, comprising ground mounted solar photovoltaic panels, including mounting systems, inverters and transformers, electrical substation, underground cabling, stock proof fencing, CCTV, internal access tracks and associated infrastructure for a temporary period of 40 years	Approved 10/02/2025
S24/0360	Land West Of Church Lane Welby Lincolnshire	Installation of solar farm comprising ground mounted solar photovoltaic panels, including mounting systems, inverters, underground cabling, stock proof fencing, CCTV, internal access tracks, electrical substation and associated infrastructure for a temporary period of 40 years	Refused 25/07/2024
S20/1907	Installation Of Water Pipeline From Lincoln To Heath Lane, Ancaster	Installation of 25km potable water Pipeline between Lincoln and Ancaster and new Pumping Station at Waddington.	EIA not required 05/03/2021
S18/2130	Installation Of Water Supply Pipe Land South	Development of a 55km potable water pipeline from Lincoln to Grantham with associated infrastructure including partially buried 20	28/02/2019

	Of Byards Leap To Harrowby Lane Grantham	million litre bulk potable water storage tank, 3km of connecting pipeline to Anglian Water (AWS) site at Bracebridge Heath (Bracebridge Spur) connecting sections of pipeline to the existing Central Lincs Trunk Main, partially buried 3 million litre break tank and erection of 3 pumping stations (the Grantham Resilience Pipeline Project)	
S25/0859	Land To The South Of Foxdale Oasby Grantham NG32 3ND	Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Opinion for battery energy storage system.	Withdrawn

6.0 The Need for the Scheme

6.1 Transition to Net Zero

6.1.1 The Climate Change Act legally commits the UK government to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by 2050.

6.1.2 The environmental impact of climate change is also linked to significant damage to the UK economy. Combined, the net-zero transition (estimated to cost a maximum of 2% of UK GDP) is expected to have a net benefit of around 4% of GDP (LSE 2022), meaning addressing climate change will protect and benefit the UK economy.

6.1.3 *The UK's Climate Change Act (2008) sets the framework for domestic action to address climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Act requires the Government to propose regular, legally binding milestones on the way to achieving Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions, known as carbon budgets. The Committee is required to advise the Government on the level of these. ... Our recommended level for the Seventh Carbon Budget, a limit on the UK's greenhouse gas emissions over the five-year period 2038 to 2042, is 535 MtCO₂e, including emissions from international aviation and shipping. This would be an ambitious target, reflecting the importance of the task. But it is deliverable, provided action is taken rapidly. (Exec Summary, The Seventh Carbon Budget (2038 – 2042)*

6.1.4 **“Low-carbon supply: by 2040, our Balanced Pathway sees offshore wind grow six-fold from 15 GW of capacity in 2023 to 88 GW by 2040. Onshore wind capacity doubles to 32 GW by 2040 and solar capacity increases to 82 GW.”**

6.1.5 HM Government's Net Zero Strategy: Build back greener (2021) confirms:

“By 2035 the UK will be powered entirely by clean electricity, subject to security of supply.”

“A low-cost, net zero consistent electricity system is most likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar generation”

“The net zero economy will be underpinned by cheap clean electricity, made in Britain. A clean, reliable power system is the foundation of a productive net zero economy as we electrify other sectors – so we will fully decarbonise our power system by 2035”.

6.2 Increase in Electricity Demand

6.2.1 The UK's electricity demand is predicted to double by 2050⁴ due to the electrification of the UK including widespread use of heat pumps and electric cars, changes in the economy, increasing demand for cooling mechanisms and temperatures rise and our increasing use of electronic devices in everyday life. Solar farms play a crucial role in meeting the National Grid's renewable energy needs, providing green electricity and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Solar technology is a safe and sustainable source which can be delivered without the need for tax subsidies.



Figure 13 Electric car charger and heat pump driving electricity demand which is set to double by 2050

6.3 Decline of centralised fossil fuel power stations and decarbonise the grid

6.3.1 Seven nuclear power stations have been decommissioned in recent years, and all 14 UK coal-fired power stations had closed by September 2024. The urgent need for clean renewable electricity generators to reduce carbon emissions and power the country is a pressing issue.

6.4 Energy Security Strategy

6.4.1 HM Government's Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan (March 2023) sets out the steps the Government is taking to ensure the UK is more energy independent, secure and resilient. It states that *"Energy security necessarily entails the smooth transition to abundant, low-carbon energy. If we do not decarbonise, we will be less energy secure."* The Plan builds upon the ambitions set out in the British Energy Security Strategy and the Net Zero Strategy.

6.4.2 Furthermore, and specifically in relation to solar power, the Plan states *"The UK has huge deployment potential for solar power and we are aiming for 70 gigawatts of ground and rooftop capacity together by 2035."* This amounts to a fivefold increase on current installed capacity. The Plan proceeds to state *"We need to maximise deployment of both types of solar to achieve our overall target"*. The plan recognises that ground-mounted solar is *"one of the cheapest forms of electricity generation and is*

⁴ National Grid Briefing: <https://www.nationalgrid.com/stories/energy-explained/how-will-our-electricity-supply-change-future>

readily deployable at scale”.

6.5 Declaration of Climate Emergency

6.5.1 A report to Cabinet by Sustainability and Climate Change Officer Serena Brown said: *“There is a clear role for local government to shape, drive, influence and deliver local action on climate change.”*

6.5.2 South Kesteven District Council made a formal declaration of climate emergency on 26 September 2019 with cross party support. *“Alongside this, the Council confirmed the political ambition to reduce the organisation’s carbon footprint by at least 30% by 2030, and to endeavour to become net-zero as soon as viable before 2050.”*

6.5.3 As a result of the feedback received through the consultation exercise, a revised version of the Climate Action Strategy was prepared. In it, the ambition to *“Help to deliver new developments in South Kesteven in which low-carbon principles are embedded.”* The council also asserts that it is embedding climate change and carbon reduction through the Local Plan review *“to enable SKDC to make evidence based decisions on Local Plan Policy.”* The council recognises that:

6.5.4 *“The development of renewable energy at every level will be important to drive local energy generation and provide a tangible contribution to national net zero targets...In order to expand renewable energy potential at scale, unlocking small and large scale renewable projects throughout the district is necessary.”*

6.5.5 Furthermore, and as a sign of how seriously the council is taking the issue of climate change and its likely effect on the district, the Draft Local Plan 2021-2041 (Para 5.11) explains that *“the Council has commissioned a Climate Change Study to accord with the NPPF, the results of which will be used to formulate new policy ensuring that the Local Plan takes a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long term implications of flood risk, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes and the risk of overheating from rising temperatures. New policy will also seek to support appropriate measures to ensure future resilience of communities and infrastructure to climate change impacts.”*

6.6 National Policy (NPPF)

6.6.1 Paragraph 168 of the NPPF confirms that 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. As such, national planning policy clearly

states the need for renewable energy is 'a given'.

6.7 Conclusions on Need

- 6.7.1 The Climate Change Act commits the UK government to reaching net zero by 2050. The HM Government's Net Zero Strategy confirms that by 2035, the UK will be powered entirely by clean electricity, composed predominantly of wind and solar generation.
- 6.7.2 Electricity demand is set to double by 2050 and the biggest benefit to solar farms is their role in meeting the National Grid's renewable energy needs, providing green electricity and reducing the reliance on fossil fuels.
- 6.7.3 As a result of the decommissioning of nuclear power and coal fired power stations by 2025 there is an urgent need not just to replace these generators but to double electricity generation.
- 6.7.4 The HM Government's Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan aims to make the UK more energy independent, secure and resilient. The Plan builds on the British Energy Security Strategy and Net Zero Strategy, focusing on transitioning to abundant, low-carbon energy. The Plan aims for 70 gigawatts of ground and rooftop solar capacity together by 2035, a fivefold increase on current installed capacity. The Plan recognises ground-mounted solar as a cost-effective and easily deployable form of electricity generation.
- 6.7.5 South Kesteven District Council aims for net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and has committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 75% by 2030 by generating more renewable energy and improving energy efficiency.
- 6.7.6 Considering all of the above, it is clear that there is a demonstrable need for solar development and the proposed development will contribute to this need. Significant weight should be attributed to the benefits of generating renewable energy in the context of the climate emergency and the socio-economic imperative to sustain the country's power supply. The need is serious and urgent - the benefits are significant and necessary.

7.0 Implications for Food Production

7.1 Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture

7.1.1 The LSE has released data indicating severe climate change impacts on the UK, including agriculture, livestock, fisheries, drought, flooding, and coastal impacts.⁵

7.1.2 It confirms that *“Agriculture is one of the UK sectors expected to be most impacted by climate change. The reduction of arable land as regions become drier is projected to halve its total contribution to UK GDP by 2100.”*

7.1.3 Renewable energy generation, even on farmland, can help reduce the adverse impact of climate change on the agricultural sector. Failure to deliver renewable energy will result in a 50% reduction in agricultural yield and help safeguard the industry by tackling the effects of climate change that will otherwise threaten it. Changes in temperature, flooding, species diversity and unpredictable weather patterns all result from climate change and pose a threat to modern farming and food production.

7.2 Planning Policy

7.2.1 The NPPF (footnote 65) directs that land which is previously developed (or ‘brownfield’), contaminated land, industrial land or Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Grades 3b, 4 or 5 should be used before Best and Most Versatile Agricultural land is used for development or any kind.

7.2.2 Notwithstanding the above, the *UK Solar PV Strategy Part 1: Roadmap to a Brighter Future* (October 2013) emphasizes the importance of considering each project on a case-by-case basis and considering all material planning considerations. It states: *“The key issue is ensuring that proposals to deploy solar PV take account of the circumstances of each project. A brownfield site may contain a Site of Special Scientific Interest or be part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Likewise, even plots of the highest grade agricultural land could include areas which are in themselves lower grade and could legitimately be used for solar PV deployment.”*

7.2.3 The submitted Soils and Agricultural Report concludes, following site survey and soil sampling, that the site is 90% Grade 3b and 10% Grade 3a land. Grades 1, 2 and 3a are Best and Most Versatile. However, in a field with more than one grade of land, a landowner must farm the whole field in a way suitable for the poorer of the grades it contains. The pattern of Grade 3a and Grade 3b land within the

⁵ <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/What-will-climate-change-cost-the-UK-risks-impacts-mitigation-1.pdf>

red line therefore means that the whole site must be farmed as Grade 3b. The implications of this is that there is no real-term impact or loss of BMV land. As such, the NPPF and Local Plan policy SP1 and Objective 9.

7.2.4 Furthermore, the South Kesteven District Council Climate Action Strategy acknowledges that *“Land is a critical natural asset, but the UK’s net zero target will not be met without changes in how we use land. In 2020, the agriculture sector was attributed to 15.97% of reported greenhouse gas emissions: higher than the UK national average, reflecting South Kesteven’s rural geography ...”*. The council has already recognised the relationship and the tension that can exist between agriculture and climate change. This development, however, enables agricultural activity to continue on the site, and a significant biodiversity net gain in the medium term, leaving a positive environmental legacy in the local context as well as the broader environmental benefits and contribution to net zero and climate change targets.

7.3 Land Use in the UK

7.3.1 The UK needs to balance land use between food production and energy production. Solar farms currently take up 0.06% of land, compared to 1.41% for golf courses and parks. Should government plan to increase solar land use to be in line with net-zero targets, this would still just account for 0.3% of land area. This is equivalent to around 0.5% of the land currently used for farming and roughly half of the space taken up by golf courses. In comparison, according to National Food Strategy, agricultural land covers 70% of the UK, with 70,000km² used for grazing and 67,000km² for cereals and legumes.

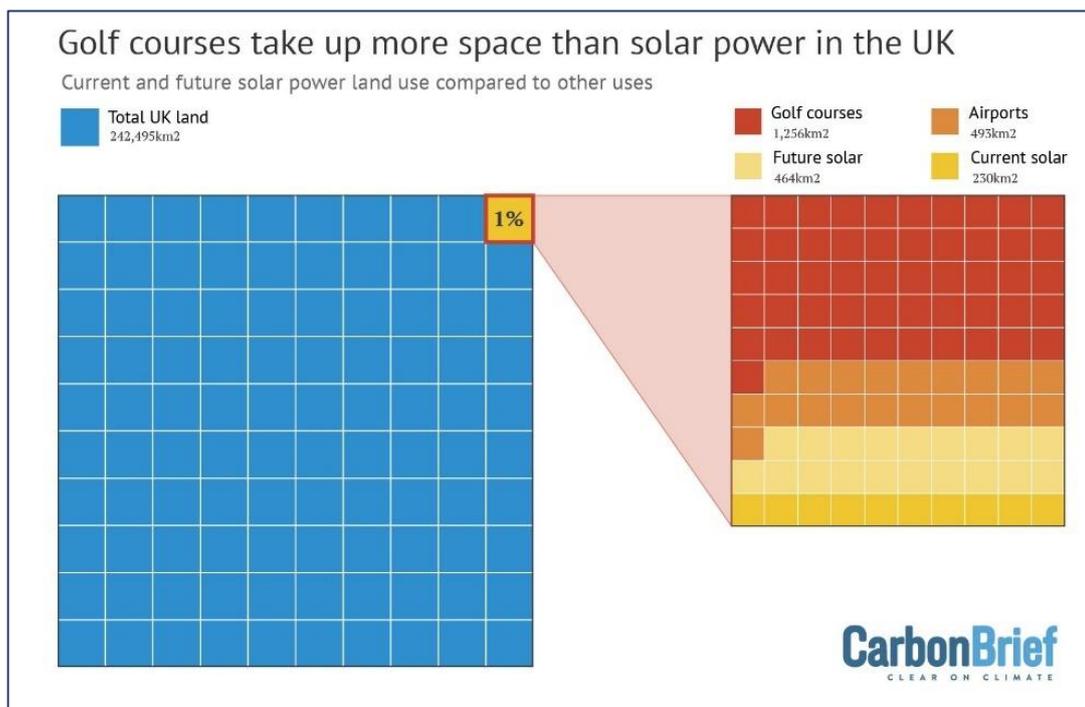


Figure 14 Image illustrating the amount of space solar power takes up in the UK.

7.4 Review of Previously Developed (Brownfield) Sites

Grid Connection

7.4.1 Solar farm development faces challenges in gaining access to the grid, making it crucial to identify a suitable area for grid connection. The distance from the grid increases the challenge of transferring generated electricity, leading to increased cabling, increased costs and potential third-party land easements. Sites more than 3km from the grid are usually unviable for these reasons.

Availability of Previously Developed Land

7.4.2 Previously Developed Land (PDL) should be explored as a starting point for solar farm schemes, as established through the Ministerial Statement (2015). England has a national database of previously developed sites in its National Land Use Database of Previously Developed Land (NLUD-PDL). There is also a database at the local level, but those sites are specifically assessed as being suitable for housing development.

7.4.3 A search has been undertaken for a previously developed land on the council's register that meets the basic criteria of the requirements of a solar farm, which are:

- Available for long term lease (50 years) in the range of £500 to £1200 per acre with no

remediation required

- Land area of approximately 75 hectares/200 acres
- Located close to the grid connection point

7.4.4 In this case, no such sites that come close to the size required have been identified. Furthermore, the Council does not allocate land for renewable energy.

Roof top solar

7.4.5 Commercial scale roof top solar arrays are encouraged by planning policy, but they do not offer a realistic alternative to solar farms due to the difficulties inherent in securing sufficient panel coverage to meet national demand for power. Issues such as control over the roofspace, building design not being appropriate to support retrofitted arrays, and the need for proximity to a grid connection point all prevent development on what might appear to be a suitable roof.

7.4.6 Large scale ground mounted schemes are required to feed into the grid alongside rooftop solar, making rooftop solar an ineffective alternative.

8.0 Benefits of the Proposed Development

8.1 Environmental Benefits

8.1.1 The proposals would generate approximately 38.8 MW of electricity. This equates to enough electricity to serve the total power needs of around 11,756 average UK households per. In accordance with guidance outlined by the Solar Trade Association (now Solar Energy UK) this would offset around 16,684 tonnes of CO₂ per annum, and 834,200 tonnes over the life of the scheme. All calculations are shown at Appendix A.

8.1.2 The proposals will deliver a net gain in biodiversity as measured using the Natural England Metric 3.0 tool. As recommended in the PEA, the proposal includes several ecological enhancements which are specified within the accompanying LEMP. These can be summarised as:

- Proposed scattered native trees along field boundaries.
- Proposed native shrub planting to fill gaps in vegetation and connect to existing vegetation.
- Proposed new hedgerow and infill hedgerow planting.
- Proposed species-rich grassland.
- Proposed hedgerow buffer grassland.

8.2 Economic Benefits

8.2.1 The scheme offers significant economic benefits, including:

- Economic output of £1.3 million GVA over 14 months
- £9,120 business rates generated per annum (£456,000 total) to South Kesteven District Council
- Significant spin off benefits for the supply chain

8.2.2 Wider economic spin-off benefits would also be realised via the following means:

- Plant and equipment hire
- Benefits to the hospitality sector through hotel and restaurant bookings
- The use of locally sourced construction materials for ancillary components of the development

- The use of local haulage companies

8.2.3 In addition to these construction phase benefits, there will also be contracts issued in relation to the ongoing operation and maintenance of the solar farm, covering a wide range of activities including;

- Remote performance monitoring of the scheme
- Landscaping contracts relating to the maintenance of hedgerows and wildflower areas
- Periodic cleaning and maintenance of all panels and componentry
- Site security contracts

8.2.4 The energy crisis is expected to lead to fuel poverty and risk for small businesses. A transition to secure UK-produced energy could mitigate this, resulting in reduced energy bills and supply security. Economic benefits of the project would be realised through reduced energy bills and security of supply which will reduce the UK's exposure to the volatility of the wholesale energy markets (particularly the natural gas market). This is crucial for addressing fuel poverty, which disproportionately affects low-income households and contributes to economic inequality.

8.2.5 The Seventh Carbon Budget (2038 – 2042): Net Zero considers the need for economic security against fossil fuel price shocks, which have caused around half of the UK's recessions since 1970. It estimates that a **low-carbon electricity supply system will be cheaper per unit of electricity than the high-carbon alternative**. It states: *“The UK's energy will be predominantly home grown, reducing our reliance on imported fossil fuels. This will shield households and businesses from damaging price shocks. In the Balanced Pathway, total net energy imports fall from 867 TWh in 2025 to 202 TWh in 2050.”*

8.3 Social Benefits

8.3.1 The proposal aims to decrease the UK's reliance on imported fossil fuels thereby enhancing energy security and control over future prices. It will contribute to stable, cost-efficient, local energy production, benefiting all households in the UK in the short and long term.

8.3.2 The UK Energy Security Strategy (7th April 2022) states in the Prime Minister's foreword:

“Global energy costs have been rising for some time as demand soars and factories roar back into life after COVID-19; Putin's invasion of Ukraine pushed them still higher and, ultimately, it is the consumer who ends up paying the price. This government is already stepping in to help, with over £9 billion of help for families struggling with their bills. But if we're going to get prices down and keep them there for

the long term, we need a flow of energy that is affordable, clean and above all secure. We need a power supply that's made in Britain, for Britain – and that's what this plan is all about. We're not going to try and turn back the clock to the days when we choked our streets and our atmosphere with filthy fumes and ever-rising levels of climate-imperilling carbon dioxide. Instead, we're going to take advantage of Britain's inexhaustible resources of wind and – yes – sunshine.”

8.3.3 In terms of social benefits at the local level, the applicant has opened discussions with the local community (through a meeting with the Parish Councils) about a community benefit fund. They have invited the parishes to submit details of local community projects that would benefit from funding with a view to preparing an agreement for capital funding if the application is successful. It has been stressed that the fund is separate from the planning process and will not affect the rights of people or groups involved in making representations about the proposals to the Local Planning Authority.

8.4 Weight to be Given to the Benefits in the Planning Balance

8.4.1 The weight to be given to the benefits of this proposal is a judgement for the decision maker. However, it is appropriate to review the degree of weight given to such benefits by reviewing the Government's decisions on other similar solar farm proposals, where the benefits are broadly similar.

8.4.2 Planning appeal (Ref: 22/3300299) for a solar farm in Dorset was assessed at Public Inquiry appeal. It provides a highly relevant steer on the degree of weight given to the benefits of producing renewable energy, stating:

“In the light of the local and national imperative summarised above related to the provision of renewable energy, this matter weighs very heavily in favour of the proposal.”

“But the public benefits summarised above, particularly the importance of the provision of renewable energy and the need to tackle climate change, are exceptionally weighty. I conclude that the public benefits of the proposal outweigh some non-compliance with policy on the basis of harm to landscape and heritage assets, and would be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the clear benefits of the scheme.”

8.4.3 Whilst this proposal does not have the same constraints as the above case study and conforms with both local and national planning policy, this case study clearly demonstrates the benefits to the environment of utility scale production of renewable energy and should carry exceptional and significant weight.

9.0 Summary of Community Consultation

9.1 Engagement with Parish Council

9.1.1 The Parish Council were informed in May 2025 of the proposed solar farm development and were presented with a Briefing Note providing further details of the draft proposals at that time. It was outlined that the developer intends to commence a period of pre-application consultation with the local community and that following this period of engagement, an application would be submitted, taking into account any feedback received.

9.1.2 A briefing via Teams was held 18th June 2025 and at that meeting the Parishes were advised that a public exhibition was being planned to take place shortly after submission of the planning application being submitted to South Kesteven District Council. The purpose of the exhibition will be to provide interested members of the public an opportunity to review the draft proposals and to ask the development team any questions regarding the scheme. It will also provide an opportunity to provide written feedback prior to the submission of a formal planning application.

9.1.3 At the Parish Councils briefing those who attended were informed that the Applicant is offering a community benefit fund, which would provide capital to be spent on selected community projects and implemented via a legal agreement, in the event the planning application is secured.

9.2 Community Consultation

9.2.1 A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been submitted alongside this planning application. The report outlines the process of community consultation undertaken in respect of the proposed solar farm development, summarise the outcomes and be used to inform the final project details.

10.0 Planning Policy Context

10.1 Legislative Context

- 10.1.1 Part 3 (15) of the Planning Act 2008 provides thresholds under which energy generating schemes are categorised as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). The Act identifies should an onshore solar farms exceed 50 megawatts, it would qualify as an NSIP. Such schemes must be consented via a Development Consent Order (DCO), approved by the Secretary of State.
- 10.1.2 The proposed scheme falls below the threshold of 50 MW and as such, the proposals should be determined by the Local Planning Authority in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act (1990).
- 10.1.3 Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that all planning applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

10.2 The Development Plan

- 10.2.1 The South Kesteven Local Development Plan 2011 – 2036 was adopted in January 2020.

10.3 Relevant Development Plan Policies

- 10.3.1 The following table(s) summarises the pertinent planning policies of relevance to the proposed development. These are set out in more detail below and the Planning Case section of the report explains how the development proposals are compliant with these policies.

Planning Consideration	Relevant Planning Policy	
Principle of Development	SD1	The Principles of Sustainable Development
	SP5	Development in the Open Countryside
Landscape and Visual	EN1	Landscape Character
	EN3	Green Infrastructure
	DE1	Promoting Good Quality Design
Ecology	EN2	Protection Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Cultural Heritage	EN6	The Historic Environment
Flood Risk and Drainage	EN5	Water Environment and Flood Risk Management
Renewable Energy/Climate Change	RE1	Renewable Energy Generation
Amenity	EN4	Pollution Control

Renewable Energy

10.3.2 Policy RE1: Renewable Energy Generation states that *“Proposals for renewable energy generation will be supported subject to meeting the detailed criteria as set out in the accompanying Renewable Energy Appendix 3 and provided that:*

- a. The proposal does not negatively impact the District’s agricultural land asset;*
- b. The proposal can demonstrate the support of affected local communities;*
- c. The proposal includes details for the transmission of power produced;*
- d. The proposal details that all apparatus related to renewable energy production will be removed from the site when power production ceases; and*
- e. That the proposal complies with any other relevant Local Plan policies and national planning policy.”*

10.3.3 Local Plan Renewable Energy Appendix asserts that *“It is because of its adverse impacts, particularly on agricultural land, that the Government’s clear preference in the UK Solar PV Strategy is for future expansion of solar PV power to be on commercial and industrial roof-space. This Council shares this policy. Nevertheless, large scale ground mounted proposals may be acceptable subject to testing against rigorous criteria.”* In fact, the UK Solar PV Strategy (2013) does not establish a preference for one type of solar deployment and states (Paragraph 90): *“DECC will consider the distribution of potentially suitable deployment sites across domestic, commercial and industrial roofs and large-scale ground mounted sites ...”.*

10.3.4 It should also be noted that the UK Solar PV Strategy was published under the previous Conservative Government in 2013 and is now out of date.

10.3.5 The Renewable Energy Appendix establishes 9 criteria for solar developments summarised below:

- Submission of an LVIA to accompany an EIA development
- Residential Visual Amenity Assessment
- Cumulative Impact Assessment where there are several solar developments in the area
- Development to avoid adverse impact on heritage assets and their setting
- Strategic siting to avoid adverse noise impacts
- Development should avoid glint and glare and provide a document considering construction impacts
- Proposals should demonstrate that due consideration has been given to the potential impacts of the proposal on local, national and international designated sites
- Consider glint and glare impacts on aircraft
- Requires development on agricultural land to: carry out an extensive search for derelict or brownfield sites; carry out a search for poorer agricultural sites; prove the MAFF agricultural grade classification for the proposed site and if it is Grade 3 whether or not it is Grade 3A or 3B, and; be required to prove why the site has to be located close to a particular power grid line and that there is spare capacity in that grid line.

Principle of Development

10.3.6 Policy SD1 states: *“Development proposals in South Kesteven will be expected to minimise the impact on climate change and contribute towards creating a strong, stable and more diverse economy.*

Development proposals shall consider how they can proactively minimise:

a. the effects of climate change and include measures to take account of future changes in the climate...

c. the use of resources, and meet high environmental standards in terms of design and construction with particular regard to energy and water efficiency; and

d. the production of waste both during construction and occupation Development proposals shall consider how they can proactively avoid:

e. *developing land at risk of flooding or where development would exacerbate the risk of flooding elsewhere.*

f. *the pollution of air, land, water, noise and light*

Development proposals shall consider how they can proactively encourage, as appropriate:

g. *the use of previously developed land, conversions or the redevelopment of vacant or unutilised land or buildings within settlements; and*

h. *the use of sustainable construction materials ...*

Development proposals shall consider how they can proactively enhance the District's:

j. *character;*

k. *natural environment,*

l. *cultural and heritage assets;*

m. *services and infrastructure, as needed to support development and growth proposals."*

10.3.7 Policy SP5 then establishes that "*Development in the open countryside will be limited to that which has an essential need to be located outside of the existing built form of a settlement.*" It then goes on to list development that will be supported, and does not include renewable energy development, but the policy wording does not specifically exclude it or establish that it will not be acceptable in the countryside.

Landscape and Visual

10.3.8 The Landscape and Visual Policies in the Local Plan includes Policy EN1 which requires that "*Development must be appropriate to the character and significant natural, historic and cultural attributes and features of the landscape within which it is situated, and contribute to its conservation, enhancement or restoration.*"

10.3.9 In addition, Policy EN3 requires that "*Development proposals should ensure that existing and new green infrastructure is considered and integrated into the scheme design, taking opportunities to enrich biodiversity habitats, enable greater connectivity and provide sustainable access for all. Proposals which may result in recreational and visitor pressure on designated biodiversity sites will be particularly expected to provide such green infrastructure.*"

Ecology

- 10.3.10 Policy EN2 states that SKDC will *“facilitate the conservation, enhancement and promotion of the District’s biodiversity and geological interest of the natural environment. This includes seeking to enhance ecological networks and seeking to deliver a net gain on all proposals, where possible.”*

Cultural Heritage

- 10.3.11 Policy EN6 states that *“The Council will seek to protect and enhance heritage assets and their settings in keeping with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework. Development that is likely to cause harm to the significance of a heritage asset or its setting will only be granted permission where the public benefits of the proposal outweigh the potential harm. Proposals which would conserve or enhance the significance of the asset shall be considered favourably. Substantial harm or total loss will be resisted.”*

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 10.3.12 Policy EN5 states *“Development should be located in the lowest areas of flood risk, in accordance with the South Kesteven Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)...A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) will be required for all development in Flood Zones 2 and 3 and for sites greater than 1 hectare in Flood Zone 1 ... All development must avoid increasing flood risk elsewhere. Runoff from the site post development must not exceed pre-development rates for all storm events up to and including the 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP)* storm event with an allowance for climate change. The appropriate climate change allowances should be defined using relevant Environment Agency guidance. Surface water should be managed effectively on site through the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) unless it is demonstrated to be technically unfeasible. All planning applications should be accompanied by a statement of how surface water is to be managed and in particular where it is to be discharged.”*

Residential Amenity

- 10.3.13 Policy EN4 relates to Pollution Control, encompassing amenity matters. It establishes that *“Development should seek to minimise pollution and where possible contribute to the protection and improvement of the quality of air, land and water”,* and in achieving this seeks for *“development to be designed from the outset to improve air, land and water quality and promote environmental benefits.”*
- 10.3.14 The policy establishes that development resulting in significant air, light, noise, land, water or other

environmental pollution or harm to amenity, health well-being or safety “*will not be permitted*” and that “*development will only be permitted if the potential adverse effects can be mitigated to an acceptable level by other environmental controls, or by measures included in the proposals.*” The policy also secures water quality objectives and works on contaminated ground.

Renewable Energy

10.3.15 Policy RE1 states “*Proposals for renewable energy generation will be supported subject to meeting the detailed criteria as set out in the accompanying Renewable Energy Appendix 3 and provided that:*

- a. The proposal does not negatively impact the District’s agricultural land asset;*
- b. The proposal can demonstrate the support of affected local communities;*
- c. The proposal includes details for the transmission of power produced;*
- d. The proposal details that all apparatus related to renewable energy production will be removed from the site when power production ceases; and*
- e. That the proposal complies with any other relevant Local Plan policies and national planning policy.”*

Emerging Local Plan/Local Plan Review

10.3.16 The Local Plan Review has begun and in line with the Local Plan timetable, the next consultation on the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan (focussing on additional sites) will take place in June/July 2025. The Local Plan is therefore at a reasonably advanced stage yet still has significant further steps to make before it can be adopted. What is notable from a review of the Draft Local Plan 2021 – 2041 is that it introduces a chapter titled ‘Climate Change and Energy’ with a subsection specifically dealing with Renewable Energy and policy RE1 which reads:

10.3.17 “*Renewable Energy Generation Proposals for renewable energy generation will be supported subject to meeting the detailed criteria as set out in the accompanying Renewable Energy document (currently an Appendix of the adopted Local Plan) and provided that:*

- a. The proposal does not negatively impact the District’s agricultural Land asset;*
- b. The proposal can demonstrate the support of affected local communities;*

c. The proposal includes details for the transmission of power produced;

d. The proposal details that all apparatus related to renewable energy production will be removed from the site when power production ceases; and

e. That the proposal complies with any other relevant Local Plan policies and national planning policy.”

10.3.18 Criteria a) has already been considered earlier in an earlier section of this report. Criteria b) applies a test that reflects the approach applied to wind development following a Ministerial Statement in 2015. The current Labour Government withdrew that policy promptly on taking office in July 2024 and that approach is not one reflects their current position in renewable energy development and stated intention to limit powers of local veto to ensure essential clean energy projects can proceed. Criteria c) d) and e) are met through the details which form part of this planning application.

10.3.19 Taken in the round, the proposed development accords with both the adopted and emerging local plan.

10.4 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

10.4.1 The NPPF is clear that planning has a key role in supporting renewable energy and associated infrastructure. Paragraph 157 proposes that the planning system should “*support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate*” and “*support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure*”.

10.4.2 In order to increase the supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, Paragraph 158 states that plans should provide a positive strategy for renewable and low carbon energy development. The NPPF is also clear that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should 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*” (Paragraph 163).

10.4.3 Applications for renewable and low carbon development should be approved if the impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

10.5 Draft NPPF (July 2024)

10.5.1 Although not formally adopted, the draft NPPF, which includes proposed reforms to the NPPF emphasises the support of renewable energy developments. A proposed change at Paragraph 164 states “Local planning authorities should support planning applications for all forms of renewable and low carbon development”.

10.5.2 Furthermore it states “*When determining planning applications for these developments, local planning authorities should:*

- a) *Not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and **give significant weight to the proposal’s contribution to renewable energy generation and a net zero future***” (proposed change in bold)

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

10.6.1 The National Policy Statements (NPSs) for energy outline national policies for energy infrastructure and provide planning guidance for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). Whilst they relate specifically to NSIPs, in England they are a material consideration in decision making on applications that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Whether the Policies in the NPS are material and to what extent, will be judged on a case-by-case basis and will depend upon the extent to which the matters are already covered by applicable planning policy.

10.6.2 The revised EN-1 and EN-3 came into force on 17th January 2024. The NPSs highlight the urgent need for new electricity generating capacity in the UK to ensure a secure, reliable and affordable energy supply while meeting decarbonisation targets.

10.6.3 Section 4.2 (*The critical national priority for low carbon infrastructure*) of EN-1 sets out that Government have concluded that there is a “*critical national priority (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure.*”

10.6.4 Paragraph 1.1.1 of EN-3 states there is “*an urgent need for new electricity generating capacity to meet our energy objectives*”. It proceeds to state “*Electricity generation from renewable sources is an essential element of the transition to net zero and meeting our statutory targets for the sixth carbon budget (CB6)*”. Government analysis suggests that demand for electricity could more than double by 2050 suggesting a requirement for a fourfold increase in low carbon electricity generation, with most from renewables.

10.6.5 Section 2.10 relates solely to Solar Photovoltaic Generation. Paragraph 2.10.9 states “*The government has committed to sustained growth in solar capacity to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions. As such solar is a key part of the government’s strategy for low-cost decarbonisation of the energy sector*”.

- 10.6.6 Paragraph 2.10.10 states *“the British Energy Security Strategy states that government expects a five-fold increase in solar deployment by 2035 (up to 70GW)”*.
- 10.6.7 Due to the size of area needed for solar development it is accepted that there will be impacts on rural areas. The NPS states at Paragraph 2.10.17 *“Along with associated infrastructure, a solar farm requires between 2 to 4 acres of each MW of output. A typical 50MW solar farm will consist of around 100,000 to 150,000 panels and cover between 125 to 200 acres...this scale of development will inevitably have impacts, particularly if sited in rural areas.”*
- 10.6.8 The NPS recognises the various factors that influence site selection and design. It acknowledges at Paragraph 2.10.25 that the distance from the solar farm to the point of connection can have a *“significant effect on the commercial feasibility”* of a proposal.
- 10.6.9 It also states at Paragraph 2.10.29 *“while land type should not be a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location applicants should, where possible, utilise previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land. Where the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to higher quality land (avoiding the use of “Best and Most Versatile” agricultural land where possible.”* However, it proceeds to explain at Paragraph 2.10.30 that ground mounted solar arrays *“is not prohibited”* on BMV land or sites designated for their natural beauty or recognised for ecological or archaeological importance.
- 10.6.10 The NPS has also clarified at Paragraph 2.10.53 that *“From the date of designation of this NPS, for the purposes of Section 15 of the Planning Act 2008, the maximum combined capacity of the installed inverters (measured in alternating current (AC)) should be used for the purposes of determining solar site capacity.”* As such, the capacity threshold for Town and Country Planning Act applications is 50MW in England.
- 10.6.11 The emphasis on the need for renewable energy, particularly solar, is evidenced by the revised National Policy Statements. These statements highlight the critical need for new electricity generating capacity in the UK to meet decarbonisation targets.

10.7 Planning Practice Guidance

- 10.7.1 PPG confirms that, where PV farms are proposed on greenfield land, projects should be such that: (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; (ii) And the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

11.0 Planning Case

11.1 Assessment of the Principle of Development on the Proposed Site

11.1.1 Paragraph 168 of the NPPF makes it clear that LPA's should 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.

Policy SD1 of the South Kesteven District Council Local Plan 2011 - 2036 sets out the overall strategy for sustainable development and requires development proposal to minimise the impact on climate change, contribute towards creating strong, stable and more diverse economy. It is evident in policy RE1 and the renewable Energy Appendix 3 that South Kesteven District Council understands the role renewable energy has to play in tackling climate change. Earlier sections of this report have set out the economic contributions this development would make via to GVA and council tax income. The role of renewable energy in providing a stable energy resource and help secure stable energy prices has also been set out.

Policy SP5 'Development in the Countryside' establishes that development in such locations will be limited to that which has an essential need to outside settlements. The land required for this development and lack of brownfield/previously development land available makes is plain that a countryside location is necessary for projects of this type.

11.1.2 Policy RE1 'Renewable Energy' has 5 criteria and refers to further criteria in the Local Plan 'Energy Appendix 3'. To begin with, RE1 criteria are addressed here:

a. The proposal does not negatively impact the District's agricultural land asset: The site is 90% Grade 3b (not Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land). Grazing can continue with the solar farm in situ. The 10% of Grade 3a land cannot be farmed as such due to its composition within the field boundaries and therefore there is no real terms loss of BMV land.

b. The proposal can demonstrate the support of affected local communities: This policy test is outdated and does not align with the Government position and NPPF which requires that *"Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development 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. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible."* (Para 39)

c. The proposal includes details for the transmission of power produced: The submitted plans include the cable route which will connect the site to the substation in Londonthorpe parish. It is routed along the public highway and some agricultural land as necessary.

d. The proposal details that all apparatus related to renewable energy production will be removed from the site when power production ceases: This is confirmed and, furthermore, the temporary nature of the development is stated in the application description which establishes the life of the consent. We would also expect and accept a planning condition requiring the submission of a programme detailing the decommissioning of the site.

e. That the proposal complies with any other relevant Local Plan policies and national planning policy: This is covered in other sections of this report.

11.1.3 Alignment with these key policies demonstrates that the principle of development is acceptable and for the scheme should be approved subject to planning conditions.

11.2 Landscape and Visual

11.2.1 The site is located **within** National Character Area 47: South Lincolnshire Edge with key characteristics identified in the LVApp as including large scale open landscape of arable cultivation with large regular fields, few boundaries and tightly cut hedgerows **and** semi natural habitats in isolated fragments.

11.2.2 The following ' environmental opportunity', identified in the National Character Area description are of relevance to the area (bold added): "*SEO 1: **Enhance the agricultural landscape and soils to increase efficiency of food production, conserve and connect fragmented patches of limestone grassland and woodland and maintain the traditional fabric of the rural landscape, to preserve sense of place and sense of history, protect water quality, enhance biodiversity and improve resilience to climate change.***"

11.2.3 Susceptibility and sensitivity of landscape receptors is assessed in the LVApp as ranging between Moderate sensitivity to Moderate-Low Sensitivity. The magnitude of change is provided in Table 4-2 of the LVApp and is combined with the sensitivity assessment to establish the assessment of effects on landscape receptors which is set out in Table 4-3. The effects on visual receptors (occupiers of residential properties and users of Public Rights of Way for example) are assessed in a similar way (see table 5-4 in the LVApp).

11.2.4 A photographic survey was undertaken to identify the potential extent of the visibility of the proposed

development by locating viewpoints available to sensitive receptors. To inform the initial viewpoint selections, visual study area from the site was mapped showing the surrounding landscape designations, public access, landscape character and the predicted ZTV for the proposed development. Potentially sensitive visual receptors within the study area include residents, users of public rights of way and road users. Those locations are detailed in Table 5-1 of the LVApp.

11.2.5 The potential for adverse effects on landscape and visual amenity has been recognised and mitigation measures incorporated in the scheme to avoid or reduce adverse effects or to offset or compensate for unavoidable adverse effects.

11.2.6 Mitigation and enhancement measures incorporated into the scheme design include:

- Photovoltaic panels are to be aligned inside of existing field boundaries to avoid the removal of vegetation and to ensure the existing field pattern is retained.
- Hedgerows to be managed to allow significant structure to develop.
- New loose hardcore gravel access tracks would follow existing access routes and access between fields utilising existing field gateways where possible.
- Security fencing is to be offset from hedgerows and tree canopy edges to ensure existing vegetation is not damaged or disturbed.
- Cabling is to be bored under hedgerows and trees to avoid disturbance to sensitive landscape elements and to prevent the inclusion of unsightly cabling bridges.
- Limited site infrastructure ensures construction and decommissioning can be achieved with little disturbance.
- Strengthening and gapping up of hedgerows to reduce visual effects and reinforce these landscape elements which make an important contribution to landscape character.
- Some native trees and groups of native shrub planting is proposed along field boundaries to help screen and filter views of the proposed development which enhancing existing field pattern.
- Creation of buffers at least 10m in width, between sensitive boundary habitats and development footprint.
- New native species hedgerows will be planted in gaps to increase connectivity across the site and

compensate for some potential minor losses required to facilitate access.

11.2.7 In view of the characteristics of the existing landscape, the sensitivity as assessed in the LVApp and the design of the development including the mitigations and enhancements listed above, the development complies with Local Plan Policy EN3 evidently being appropriate to its character and contributing to its conservation (by tackling climate change), enhancement and restoration.

11.3 Ecology, Landscape and Environmental Management

11.3.1 The accompanying Ecology report has considered in detail the existing baseline condition of the site, species present and its sensitivity to change. The application has been designed to include the recommendation of the ecology report, building in environmental enhancements which have secured a significant **Biodiversity Net Gain of 83% Habitat Units and 18% Hedgerow Units.**

11.3.2 The Ecology Report concludes that “the proposal poses low risks of causing adverse impacts on valued ecological receptors” and where there are low risks of minor impacts, these can be adequately addressed by adopting the mitigation measures it advises. The effects and suggested mitigation measures are summarised below:

- **Development effect:** A minor in magnitude impact at a local scale to foraging barbastelle bats and other bat species is expected given the impacts of solar arrays to foraging bats. **Mitigation:** compensatory habitat creation and a sensitive lighting strategy.
- **Development effect:** Risk to mobile badger population. **Mitigation:** Pre-construction surveys and potential amendment of site layout to account for badger setts, or securing a license for the proposed works.
- **Development effect:** Minor-negative impacts at a local level upon ground nesting skylarks due to the loss of open arable field habitat. **Mitigation:** creation of compensatory habitat known as ‘skylark plots’ resulting in neutral or even minor positive impacts are predicted.
- **Development effect:** Minor negative impacts at a local scale are predicted to other terrestrial species such as brown hare. **Mitigation:** best practice measures such as creating and maintaining diverse habitats.

11.3.3 The report also notes that there is scope for ecological enhancement as part of the development and their advice on what that should include has been included in the proposed design i.e. habitat creation in the form of grassland creation and specific site and management techniques which will be secured

in the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP).

11.3.4 The LEMP has been drafted to include the following key design concepts which protect the retained habitats that are of ecological and nature conservation interest:

- A suitable buffer established around the root protection zone of each tree/ tree group to be retained.
- Implementing buffers to boundaries and ditches, between sensitive boundary habitats and development footprint.
- Strengthening and gapping up of hedges and tree lines, where there are gaps, with the aim of reducing visual effects and reinforcing these as landscape features which are typical of the local landscape character. Species chosen will be native species consistent with adjacent trees.
- Creation of areas of species-rich grassland in open areas and field margins around the solar panel installations.
- Creation of meadow areas with appropriate native seed mix.
- Creation of a species-rich grassland as an understorey to hedgerows.

11.3.5 Species-rich grassland will be sown around and between panels and a meadow seed mix used along the route of the waterpipe and the Roman road that both cross the site. The creation of a more flower-rich sward in the above areas will result in a locally-significant positive impact in terms of habitat quality, which is likely to be reflected in more abundant and varied invertebrate fauna, which in turn will provide better-quality foraging resources for bats and birds.

11.3.6 During the operational phase, the grassland between the solar panel installations site can be grazed by sheep at low density. This will encourage tillering and maintain grassland. No fertilizers will be used and, where necessary, perennials will be removed by hand. Retained trees will be protected, gaps will be in-filled with native species and ongoing management of lines of trees will promote more mature trees including deadwood being retained in situ where possible.

11.3.7 The new native tree, hedgerow and shrub planting along the southern boundary will provide screening and separation from Glebe Farm to the south of the site. The proposed shrub species are all native and will be managed to a height of 5m to avoid shade being cast onto the panels. The planting is protected from grazing livestock with a stock-proof fence and rabbit guards will be installed around the individual plants.

- 11.3.8 The new grassland habitat will be planted with Emorsgate's 'Meadow Mixture for Chalk and Limestone Soils EM6' or similar) which enhances the floral species diversity in fields previously occupied by arable habitat. Ongoing management of the grassland will aim to maintain and promote the establishment of wildflowers associated with less intensively managed neutral grassland habitats and the wildlife these support.
- 11.3.9 These measures will reduce the visual impact of the proposed development when viewed from publicly accessible locations; reduce the visual impact of the development when viewed from public rights of way and access land, and; protect, enhance and maintain the retained habitats and the wildlife they support. The planting and maintenance set out in the LEMP is also important to secure the predicted Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 11.3.10 As a result of adopting these measures, the report concludes that "the development would be expected to lead to positive outcomes for a number of valued ecological receptors." This demonstrates compliance with NPPF Paragraph 187 and Local Plan Policy EN2 and established South Kesteven District Council support for the development: which asserts that that SKDC will "facilitate the conservation, enhancement and promotion of the District's biodiversity and geological interest of the natural environment. This includes seeking to enhance ecological networks and seeking to deliver a net gain on all proposals, where possible."

11.4 Trees and Hedges

- 11.4.1 The purpose of the tree survey was to assess the location, size and general condition of the trees on and around site as well as determine their retention value and categorise them in accordance with the British standard: BS5837: Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations. A Tree Constraints Plan has been produced to indicate the locations of trees and the BS5837 calculated rooting areas in relation to the site. Where trees have been noted to be hazardous in terms of unacceptable third-party risk this has been noted and recommendations given. General management recommendations have been given where appropriate.
- 11.4.2 The site is currently in use for agricultural purposes and as such, tree cover is sparse, limited to boundary hedgerows surrounding fields, with occasional standard trees having developed from these.
- 11.4.3 The site layout has included buffers from trees and hedges to respect root protection areas and protect them from damage during construction.
- 11.4.4 These measures mean that the proposed development complies with Local Plan Policies EN2, DE1

and Objectives 12 and 13 as well as Section 15 of the NPPF which requires planning decisions to enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs (Para 187).

11.5 Cultural Heritage

- 11.5.1 The King Street Roman road crosses the proposed solar site, visible as a cropmark. The proposed scheme will preserve the road by excluding the area from the solar farm development and including a 25m buffer across it. This will result in no adverse impact to the road and the development will therefore help to preserve it by removing it from normal agricultural cultivation.
- 11.5.2 The route of Ermine Street is situated within part of the cable route and there is some potential for associated deposits that may have survived the construction of the modern B6403. The archaeological assessment also identified further known possible archaeological remains including prehistoric enclosures, hut circles and a trackway visible as cropmarks within the proposed solar site. It also noted that there is some wider potential for below-ground archaeological remains to be preserved within the proposed solar site and the cable route based on relatively extensive nearby prehistoric and Romano-British archaeological activity and the site's topography on gently sloping land either side of a ridge including a south-facing slope above a palaeochannel.
- 11.5.3 The archaeological assessment concludes that the proposed development is anticipated to result in a **minor adverse temporary change** to the significance of Glebe Farm, the remains of a 19th-century farmstead recorded in the Lincolnshire HER 50m to the south of the proposed solar site which is of **negligible significance**.
- 11.5.4 All designated assets within a 1km study area have been considered as well as the Honington Camp Scheduled Monument 4km to the north, and the proposed scheme is predicted to result in a **negligible adverse temporary change** to the significance of the Grade II Listed Oasby Mill, a heritage asset of **medium significance**, via change to part of its setting. No other designated heritage assets are anticipated to be impacted by the scheme either directly or indirectly via change to their settings.
- 11.5.5 The scale of the impact and the limited heritage value of the assets identified means that the proposed development (including the impact avoidance measures described), comply with local plan policies SD1 and EN6, as well as the policy and guidance for the conservation of the historic environment

contained in Chapter 16 (Paragraphs 202 - 221 and associated footnotes) of the National Planning Policy Framework.

11.6 Flood Risk and Drainage

- 11.6.1 The EA's online 'Flood Map for Planning' provides information on flood risk associated with rivers and sea and identifies that the site (including the grid connection cable route) is entirely located in Flood Zone 1 – **land** with less than a 1 in 1000 (0.1%) annual probability of fluvial or tidal flooding in any given year.
- 11.6.2 The **submitted Flood Risk Assessment has several aims:** to direct development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding, taking all sources of flood risk into account including climate change effects; to ensure that the development incorporates appropriate flood mitigation measures to manage any identified risk; to ensure the development includes the appropriate management and treatment of development runoff and; ensure **there are** wider environmental benefits **from the** development in relation to flood risk.
- 11.6.3 The published risk of flooding from surface water mapping indicates that most of the site remains out of surface water flood risk zone. One small area of ponding to a 600mm depth has been predicted in a localised depression by Ropsley Road with a high chance of occurrence and as a result panels will not be located in that area.
- 11.6.4 Based on the fact the high flood risk area is limited, with the majority of the site experiencing shallow flooding (c. 300mm), flood risk from surface water can be considered low. Groundwater flood risk is considered low and risk from infrastructure fails is considered to be low. There is no historical evidence of flooding in the vicinity of the site on the EA mapping sources.
- 11.6.5 Whilst some of the proposed solar panels will be positioned in areas identified to be at potential risk of shallow surface water flooding, the proposed infrastructure would not be at risk of flood damage as the structures are designed to withstand short term flooding. The solar panels are also designed to fitted with a 500mm freeboard above the maximum flood water depths. The Flood Risk Assessment also states that the site access will remain safe if there was a surface water flooding event because the predicted water depths are just 300mm in the affected areas.
- 11.6.6 There is no ground raising proposed across the site and water can flow freely beneath panels an around the metal supports. As such there will be no displacement of surface water floodplain or impedance of overland flow routes. Similarly there are no changes to overland flow routes.

- 11.6.7 The development will largely retain the existing site permeability and runoff. Surface water runoff will dispose naturally via infiltration into the underlying ground. Further swales and wide landscape buffers incorporated around the site boundary will capture and treat runoff.
- 11.6.8 Maintenance of thick grass cover and wild flower meadow beneath the solar panels, and the inclusion of shallow swales or berms at regular intervals will help to capture, slow and spread the flows, thereby mimicking the existing greenfield state.
- 11.6.9 On the basis of the design and mitigation measures included in the design, the Flood Risk Assessment concludes that the flood risk to and as a result of the development is low. As such, the development complies with local plan policies DE1 and EN5 as well as the NPPF Section 14. Delivering the solar farm will support the transition to net zero (noting the Government target to achieve by 2050), the design takes full account of storm and flood risks, it will contribute to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, improve environmental resilience to climate change effects and supports renewable and low carbon energy by delivering the necessary infrastructure (NPPF Paragraph 161).

11.7 Residential Amenity

- 11.7.1 Glebe Farm is the closest residential property to the site but retains a sufficient buffer between the panels and property to protect the amenity of possible future occupants.
- 11.7.2 Quarry Farm Ancaster to the north of the Site is in separate private ownership, but also at a suitable distance to avoid adverse amenity effects. The solar farm is not a noisy operation – the equipment produces no nuisance noise and once operational there would be only occasional (approximate monthly) maintenance visits made by small motor vehicle. An area of woodland and thick mature tree belt also provides an effective screen between Quarry Farm and the panels. It should be noted that the panel will be oriented to face south so there is no risk of glint and glare effects for this property located to the north.
- 11.7.3 The site will be secured by a stock proof fence and monitored remotely via CCTV making it a secure development without imposing visually invasive security fencing or similar.
- 11.7.4 The LVApp has considered in detail the effects on visual receptors and visual amenity. It concludes that proposals for the site retain and incorporate existing key landscape features such as the large, rectilinear field pattern and hedgerows. It observes that this would help integrate the proposed solar farm and ancillary structures into the landscape whilst minimising any potential impacts on character. The LVApp observes that whilst the site would change from farmland, the characteristic flat, low-lying

landscape would accommodate the development and changes would be fully restored following decommissioning, incorporating landscape enhancement through planting and management. Visual effects of the site would also be contained due to the shallow nature of the landscape with field boundary screening; the largescale agricultural landscape would accommodate the development, and; the development would be fully reversible.

- 11.7.5 Taking this into account, it is evident that the proposed development accords with local plan policy DE1 which requires that there is no adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring users in terms of noise, light pollution, loss of privacy and loss of light and that the development will have regard to features that minimise crime. This also complies with NPPF policy 135 which requires that development functions well, has effective landscaping and a high standard of amenity for existing and future users where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

11.8 Public Rights of Way

- 11.8.1 There are no PROWs within the site boundary, but several in the surrounding area. Bridleway Wlby/8/1 to the west which connects to Welby and Bridleway Heyd/19/1 to the north which terminates at Quarry Farm. To the east there are several PROWs in and around Oasby but the distance and inventing landscape features in the relatively flat landscape means that there users of footpaths to the north would generally not have views of the proposed development (see Figure LA.08-2 in the LVApp). This is also confirmed by context view B. ZTV Figures LA.08-1 and LA.08-2 which shows that most public rights of way within the study area would not have views of the proposed solar development.

11.9 Construction and Access

- 11.9.1 The A52 is located approximately 2.2km to the south of the site. It is a key freight route and is a major road in the East Midlands. Ropsley Road is aligned north/south along the eastern boundary of the development site, providing connections to High Dike (B6403) and A52, to the north and south, respectively. Welby Road is aligned west/east south of the site where the existing Gleve Farm access is located.
- 11.9.2 The Transport Statement includes an assessment of the PIA data which revealed that during the five-year period there have been 21 slight accidents recorded at various points within the study area, noting that one occurred on Ropsley Road, another at the junction where A52 intersects with Ropsley Road, and a third at the junction of Ropsley Road, Welby Road, and Mill Lane. Hydrock considered these accidents and concluded in its report that *“Whilst these accidents are unfortunate, it is Hydrock's view*

that the accident frequency and severity does not indicate any specific highway safety issues associated with the road network. A52 is a major road within the local area, therefore a higher number of accidents can be expected due to the higher volume of traffic.”

- 11.9.3 It has already been stated that the primary construction access to the proposed site will be provided by upgrading the existing field entrance from Ropsley Road at the eastern edge of the site, this will also be the operational and maintenance access. A secondary access is proposed to the south of the site on Welby Road. These upgraded accesses will be designed to accommodate HGV turning movements, with on-site turning facilities to eliminate the need for vehicles to reverse in or out of the entrance.
- 11.9.4 The site’s fencing and access gate will be set back from the field boundary, ensuring that vehicles do not need to stop on the carriageway to open the gates. During construction, the access gate will be positioned far enough from the road to allow an HGV to wait for entry without obstructing the carriageway.
- 11.9.5 Traffic management measures will be implemented along Ropsley Road and Welby Road at both access points to ensure the safe entry and exit of vehicles, in the form of Marshals. These will be deployed to oversee vehicle movements to and from the site, ensuring controlled access. These measures will help minimise potential conflicts at the proposed holding area access.
- 11.9.6 Visibility splays on both access points are achievable without highways changes. Ropsley Road is considered a narrow road in some sections and is unable to accommodate two-way vehicle movements, although, informal passing locations are present. To minimise potential conflicts on the highway network, it is proposed that marshals would be stationed at key locations along Ropsley Road and Welby Road to manage interactions between construction traffic and the public. More details are provided in the submitted Transport Assessment.
- 11.9.7 To ensure the road is kept in good condition, during and post construction it is proposed that temporary heavy-duty matting is provided across the full width of the unmetalled carriageway where required. Matting will also be provided within informal passing bays where identified and required, to ensure that damage to these areas is avoided during the most intense periods of construction.
- 11.9.8 Details of the construction traffic generation, work hours, vehicle types are included in the Transport Assessment. Based on the assumptions detailed in that report, it is estimate that there will be 7 deliveries for day (equating to 14 vehicle movements). On this basis no operational capacity assessment is required.

- 11.9.9 After commissioning, there are anticipated to be around an average of one vehicle per month to the site for equipment maintenance. These will typically be made by light van or 4x4 type vehicles.
- 11.9.10 Construction is expected to take approx. 6 weeks. The Transport Assessment includes a CTMP which set out vehicle routing and traffic management. This includes providing residents on Welby Road dedicated contact numbers for marshals to ensure they can have access to properties and that HGVs are halted to accommodate residents.
- 11.9.11 Following a comprehensive analysis of the development sites, including construction logistics, vehicle access, the proposed solar farm has been demonstrated to align with relevant highway access design recommendations and sustainability objectives. The assessment confirms that there are no justifiable highway or transportation reasons for refusing the planning application *and “it is concluded that the proposed development can proceed without adverse impacts on highway safety or the operation of the surrounding transport network.”* This demonstrates compliance with Local Plan policy ID2 and NPPF Section 9.

12.0 Overall Conclusions

12.1 Summary of Planning Policy Requirements

12.1.1 National policy promotes increasing energy efficiency, minimising energy consumption and developing renewable energy sources. Local Policy supports development that promotes these objectives wherever any adverse impacts can be addressed satisfactorily.

12.2 Need for the Proposals

12.2.1 The Climate Change Act commits the UK government to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels by 2050, with a net benefit of around 4% of GDP. The UK will be powered entirely by clean electricity, subject to security of supply and electricity demand is set to double by 2050 due to the electrification of the UK. With the decommissioning of all of the UK's coal fired power stations by 2025 there will be an urgent need to replace these generators and double electricity generation. Solar farms are a proven source of safe, locally produced and sustainable power and accordingly the Government is calling for "five times more solar" to be delivered.

12.2.2 There is an acute and growing need for this scheme to help tackle climate change, help replace closing fossil fuel power stations, meet a two-fold increase in electricity demand and transition to home-grown energy to improve energy security and stabilise fuel prices.

12.2.3 Seventh Carbon Budget (2038 – 2042): *Our key messages are:*

12.2.4 *The Earth's climate is changing rapidly as human-induced warming is increasing at an unprecedented rate. Risks are increasing – extreme weather events show the impact that climate change is already having, both globally and in the UK. Every 0.1°C of additional warming creates increasing threats from climate change.*

12.2.5 *The science is clear that human activities have driven increases in greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere to levels not previously experienced by our species. Long-term human-induced warming now reaches around 1.3°C above pre-industrial levels and is rising at over 0.2°C per decade.*

12.2.6 *Net Zero CO₂ emissions as well as deep reductions in other GHG emissions globally are required to halt further global warming. While it is now almost inevitable that warming levels will exceed 1.5°C in the next ten years, it may still be possible to limit warming to 1.5°C in the longer term, provided deep global emissions cuts begin immediately.*

12.3 Benefits of the Proposals

- 12.3.1 The proposals would generate a significant amount of electricity (approximately 38.8MW) which would offset a significant volume of CO₂ (16,684 tonnes per annum and 834,200 tonnes over the lifetime of the scheme). Government policy and recent decision making on solar farm developments has clearly demonstrated the weighting of these environmental benefits in the planning balance. The carbon savings and environmental gains (including BNG) far outweigh the impacts resulting from the carbon footprint of the panels themselves. The economic benefits of the scheme have been detailed and are significant including an economic output of approximately £1.3m GVA over 14 months, £9,120 business rates generated per annum and £465,000 to the Council for the duration of the scheme, and significant spin-off benefits for the supply chain.
- 12.3.2 The proposed scheme would provide a significant amount of decentralised electricity to the area and support the transition to electric vehicles and heating. It would also help to reduce the UK's reliance on imported fossil fuels and help the UK gain more control over its energy provision and energy security, helping to stabilise domestic fuel bills.
- 12.3.3 Net additional benefits are not the only benefits. Benefits extend to the mitigation of impacts from climate change. The proposals will also help to minimise the economic and environmental cost of climate change including potential catastrophic impact to agriculture from a drier climate and economic impacts of climate change to the UK economy of up to £68 billion by 2100 in lost GDP.

12.4 Summary of Impacts

- 12.4.1 The potential impacts that could arise from the proposed development have been identified in Section 11 of this statement. The impacts include: Landscape and visual, Ecology, Cultural Heritage, Flood Risk and Drainage, Residential Amenity and Highways. All of these factors have been assessed in detail using evidenced based assessments undertaken by qualified professionals. No significant impacts have been identified and where minor impacts are identified, these have been satisfactorily mitigated. In some cases, a net benefit is achieved for example a net gain to biodiversity.

12.5 Compliance with Planning Policy and Planning Balance

- 12.5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Act, the determination must be in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 12.5.2 The previous section of this statement has demonstrated that the proposed development is compliant with the Development Plan and all relevant National and Local Planning Policy.
- 12.5.3 If it were to be concluded that there is some degree of conflict with the Development Plan when taken as a whole, there are material considerations that indicate that planning permission should be granted, which include the very significant benefits of the proposed development when applied in the planning balance, which further support the case for granting planning permission.
- 12.5.4 The weight to be applied to these benefits is a matter for the decision maker but reference should be made to a recent appeal which was determined by Public Inquiry where the Inspector comments specifically on the weight attached to the benefits associated with a solar farm development. The appeal is attached in Appendix C (Appeal ref: 22/330299 Fern Brook Solar Farm). The relevance of this appeal decision is based on the strong similarity in the type of development proposed, the benefits arising and the fact that the proposals were interrogated in detail through cross-examination during Public Inquiry. The Inspector attached moderate weight to the economic benefits, moderate weight to the benefits of a biodiversity net gain and in their concluding remarks stated: *“the public benefits ... particularly the importance of the provision of renewable energy and the need to tackle climate change, are **exceptionally weighty**.”* (bold added).
- 12.5.5 As detailed in the Planning History Section of this report, two other solar farm applications have recently been approved in the District Council area and relatively close to this site. This, too, provides evidence that solar farm development in this location and when considered against current planning policy is acceptable in principle.

12.6 Final Conclusions

- 12.6.1 Section 6, 8 and 12 of this report have already included excerpts from the Seventh Carbon Budget (2038 – 2042) but it is worth repeating at this stage the following quote:

“The science is clear that human activities have driven increases in greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere to levels not previously experienced by our species. Long-term human-induced warming now reaches around 1.3°C above pre-industrial levels and is rising at over 0.2°C per decade.

Net Zero CO₂ emissions as well as deep reductions in other GHG emissions globally are required to halt further global warming. While it is now almost inevitable that warming levels will exceed 1.5°C in the next ten years, it may still be possible to limit warming to 1.5°C in the longer term, provided deep global emissions cuts begin immediately.”

12.6.2 This is particularly pertinent when considered alongside a quote from the emerging Local Plan (2021 – 2041 – underline added):

“The issue for South Kesteven: The district of South Kesteven both contributes to the effects of climate change through carbon emissions and is impacted at a local level by a changing climate. At a local level, the main impacts projected for the East Midlands area include flooding, water stress and periods of prolonged overheating. It is clear we are already feeling the effects of a changing climate, both at home and further afield. The UK record for the highest ever temperature recorded was broken on 19th July 2022 at Coningsby, Lincolnshire, with a temperature of 40.3°C.”

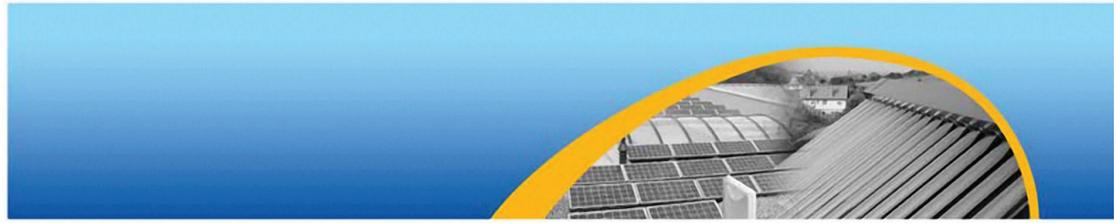
12.6.3 This report has demonstrated that the proposed development is compliant with the Development Plan and therefore all local and national policy. The public benefits of the proposal are ‘significantly weighty’ in favour of granting planning permission. The economic and biodiversity benefits also attract moderate weight in favour of granting planning permission. In conclusion, the planning balance is convincingly and demonstrably in favour of granting planning permission. Where this is the case, the NPPF (Paragraph 11) clearly directs that development should be approved ‘without delay’.

Appendices

Appendix A – site output calculations (household and CO₂ equivalents)

Based on figures provided by Solar Trade Association – see Appendix B:

- $38.8\text{MW} / 5\text{MW} = 7.76 \times 1,515 \text{ homes} = \mathbf{11,576.4 \text{ homes}}$
- $7.6 \times 2,150 \text{ tonnes of CO}_2 = \mathbf{16,684 \text{ tonnes of CO}_2 \text{ per annum}}$
- $16,684 \times 50 \text{ years} = \mathbf{834,200 \text{ tonnes of CO}_2 \text{ saved over the lifetime of the development}}$



Solar farms: A factsheet by the Solar Trade Association

What is a solar farm?

Solar farms, or solar parks, are the large-scale application of solar photovoltaic (PV) installations used to generate electricity. They often cover large areas of land (between 1 and 100 acres) and therefore they are usually developed in rural locations. Approximately 25 acres of land is required for every 5 megawatts (MW) of installation, enough to power 1,515 homes¹.

Solar farms go through a rigorous planning procedure to get approval. This takes into account the suitability of the site, any potential impact on the locality and relevant renewable energy targets.

The UK needs solar power to meet the 15% EU renewable energy targets by 2020, but it also creates investment and local green jobs, whilst reducing the reliance on overseas fossil fuel imports. As this valuable and rapidly deployable sector grows, solar will help businesses to manage their electricity costs while reducing their carbon emissions, and will provide a choice about where you obtain your power.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) considers that solar PV could contribute up to 20 gigawatts (GW) of generating capacity by 2020 if costs continue to fall towards grid parity. To support this at the large scale, solar farms are eligible for financial incentives under the Renewables Obligation (RO) scheme. Systems under 5MW can choose between the RO and the Feed-in Tariff Scheme (FITs).

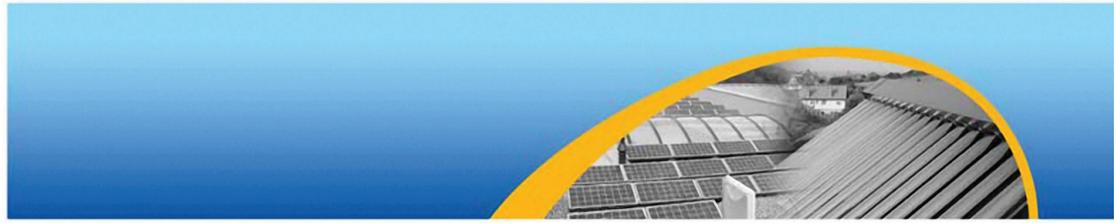
¹ Based on average annual consumption figures for a house of 3,300 kWh of electricity (source DECC, Ofgem).



Some facts about solar farms

1. They generate electricity locally and feed into the local electricity grid using a free source of energy (the sun) to generate electricity on bright cloudy days as well as in direct sunlight.
2. For every 5MW installed, a solar farm will power 1,515 homes for a year and save 2,150 tonnes of CO₂.
3. They represent time-limited, reversible land use and provide an increased, diversified and stable source of income for landowners.
4. They may have dual purpose usage with sheep or other animals grazing between rows, and can help to support biodiversity by allowing small animals access to otherwise fenced-off land, with bird and insect fodder plants and wildflowers sown around the modules.
5. If 10,000MW of solar was installed on the ground, it would only use 0.1% of UK land area, whilst being able to generate enough electricity for over 3 million homes.
6. There are no moving parts, and maintenance is minimal.
7. There is no by-product or waste generated, except during manufacturing or dismantling.
8. They have lower visual and environmental impacts than other forms of power generation.
9. Renewables give the customer the choice of buying green electricity and reduce reliance on scarce fossil fuels.

Find out more at www.solar-trade.org.uk



Questions and answers about solar farms

1. Do solar farms compete with food production? Solar farms are generally installed on brown field sites (e.g. disused airfields) or on areas that have been ranked under the Agricultural Land Classification as lower grade land, where the development of profitable food crops is unlikely. As such, they allow land owners to diversify their income, while animal grazing between the rows of installed panels is still possible or alternative practices such as bee keeping and pheasant rearing.
2. What impact do solar farms have on the UK landscape? A solar farm is normally granted planning permission for 25 years, after which it is required to be dismantled, unless it is granted an extension due to a re application at the end of term. A solar farm does not change the zoning classification of the land. A typical 5 MW solar farm could be dismantled and removed within weeks. The UK has 59m acres of land, 45m is in agricultural production, 11m in arable production of which up to 250k acres is proposed for growing biogas crops and 865k acres for perennial energy crops like willow and miscanthus. 10GW of solar would only use 60k acres or 0.1% of UK land area.
3. What is the impact of a solar park on property prices? To date there is no evidence to suggest that solar parks negatively affect property prices. With appropriate screening, the visual impact of a solar farm is negligible. It does not generate noise, and has commonly been accepted by the general public.
4. Will a site interfere with existing equipment? A solar farm does not emit energy radiation and therefore cannot interfere with equipment such as mobile phones, heart monitors, pace makers, hearing aids, or TV reception.
5. Do solar farms emit noise? There is hardly any noise emitted from a solar farm. Solar PV technology does not use any moving parts, and in many cases nature and solar complement each other, with insects, sheep and small wild animals living side by side. There are a number of 'inverters' on solar farms to convert DC into AC and these machines do emit a humming sound, but they are housed in sound-proofed boxing, making them unlikely to be heard.
6. Are CCTV cameras often used? While CCTV cameras are often used to secure solar farm projects, the cameras in solar farms are fixed - mounted to face inwards into the solar park and not outside.
7. Do solar farms emit any light? There are no visible lights on solar parks. Security lighting, as used for railway lines, generally uses only infra-red light.
8. Will the security fencing surrounding solar farms make them look industrial? Security fences are designed to protect the investment made within the solar farm and their construction, design, colour and height are all stipulated by the local planning authority in the decision notice. They are generally no more than 2.5 metres in height (8 ft 2 in, about one-third higher than a tall man).
9. Are there any increased flood risks? Flood risk does not usually increase with the installation of solar farms. The risk of flooding is influenced by factors such as an increase in surface area, a change in the composition of the ground surface, climate change, low levels of investment in flood mitigation maintenance, and building in flood plains. Developers may offer flood mitigation as part of their solar farm proposal. These measures include the use of modest/removable hard standing material which aims to avoid soil compaction during construction.
10. Will solar farms cause any glint or glare? Solar panels are designed to absorb light and not to reflect light. They pose little risk of glint or glare, and solar panels have been installed on Gatwick Airport, alongside major roads and beside sports car raceways such as the 'Top Gear' test track.





Appeal Decision

Inquiry held on 27 – 30 September and 5 October 2022

Site visits made on 26, 28 and 29 September 2022

by **Phillip J G Ware BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 13 February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/22/3300299

Land at Park Farm, Gillingham SP8 5JG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Fern Brook Solar Farm Ltd against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref P/FUL/2021/02046, dated 4 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 25 January 2022.
 - The development proposed is the construction of a solar photovoltaic farm, battery storage and associated infrastructure, including inverters, batteries, substations, security cameras, fencing, access tracks and landscaping.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the construction of a solar photovoltaic farm, battery storage and associated infrastructure, including inverters, batteries, substations, security cameras, fencing, access tracks and landscaping on Land at Park Farm, Gillingham SP8 5JG in accordance with the terms of the application Ref P/FUL/2021/02046, dated 4 June 2021, subject to the conditions set out in the Annex to this decision.

Procedural matters

2. The majority of the Inquiry was held in person, with other participants and observers on Teams. Closing submissions were delivered virtually.
3. The appellants put forward an amended landscaping scheme at the appeal stage. Although this was suggested to have an implication related to archaeology, both parties agreed that the appeal should proceed on that basis, and the archaeological matter was discussed at the Inquiry. I am satisfied that no interests would be prejudiced by that course of action and the Inquiry and this decision relate to the amended plans.

Main issues

4. There are two main issues in this case
 - The effect on the character and appearance of the landscape
 - The effect on the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets

5. There are two other matters, archaeology and noise, which although not forming part of the Council's reasons for refusal, appeared to generate some disagreement between the parties at the time of the CMC. It was agreed at the CMC that these matters could usefully be discussed further and, as a result, much of the dispute was resolved and a Supplementary Statement of Common Ground (SOCG) was prepared (September 2022). These matters will be dealt with separately below.

Reasons

The site, the surrounding area and the proposals

6. The appeal site is around 33 hectares in extent (slightly larger if the route of the cable connection is included). It comprises grazed pastureland bounded by managed species-poor hedges. The site is classified as Grade 4 (poor quality) agricultural land due to its heavy slowly permeable soils.
7. The surrounding area comprises similar fields, with a woodland to the north. It is around 600 metres east of the settlement of Gillingham. The area, aside from Gillingham, is generally rural in character, and the nearest residential property is Donedge Lodge Farm around 240 metres to the northeast.
8. There is a public bridleway running adjacent to and within the northern and north-western boundaries of the site. This bridleway forms part of the White Hart Link which connects Gillingham with Motcombe, and which connects with other footpaths.
9. The site is not within or adjacent to any national or international environmental, landscape or cultural heritage designations. The majority of the site is within Flood Zone 1, along with smaller areas of Flood Zones 2 and 3 along the western and southern boundaries.
10. The site known as the Gillingham Southern Extension (GSE) is located on fields to the west of the site – its closest point is around 70m from the western edge of the site.¹ Outline permission for a major development was given in 2021 – I will return to this later.
11. The Gillingham Royal Forest Project Area covers an area of approximately 13.7 square miles and includes the appeal site. The area around the appeal site is a non-designated heritage asset in its own right. The Area includes three Scheduled Monuments - Kings Court Palace Moated Site - approximately 600m to the west; the remains of East Haines House and the adjacent section of the Deer Park Pale - approximately 1km to the north-west; and the Gillingham Park Boundary Bank - approximately 500m to the east. Donedge Lodge Farm is a non-designated heritage asset.

¹ There is a disagreement between the parties as to how this proximity is best described, but this dispute is of no relevance to the decision.

12. The plan below shows the relationship between the appeal site and the heritage



13. The appeal proposal is described in general terms in the banner heading above. The details are shown on the submitted plans, and are described in the Planning, Design and Access Statement and the Council officer's report (P/FUL/2021/02046).

Policy context

14. The development plan comprises the saved policies of the North Dorset District Wide Local Plan 2003 (DWLP); the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 2016 (LP);

² Taken from Mr Sutton's evidence, and uncontested

and the Motcombe Neighbourhood Plan 2019 (NP). It is worth recording that there is no suggestion from any party that the most important policies in the development plan are out of date or that the so-called 'tilted balance' is engaged.

15. DWLP policy GRF1 deals with the Gillingham Royal Forest Project Area. It states that it is proposed to provide additional woodland planting to enhance the landscape, provide recreational facilities and provide interpretational material. Development in keeping with the character of the area and in accordance with these matters will be approved.³
16. LP policies 4, 5 and 22 deal with heritage, landscape and renewable energy matters. Policy 4 is a wide ranging policy dealing with the natural environment. Amongst other matters it seeks to protect the landscape character of the area. Policy 5 deals with the historic environment, and in particular the need to weigh any less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets against the public benefits of proposals, and deals with the approach to harm to non-designated heritage assets. Policy 22 deals with renewable energy proposals, and the need to weigh benefits against impacts. The effect on the landscape and the historic environment are two potential adverse impacts.⁴
17. In addition, LP Policy 21 deals with the GSE, as referenced above. It includes four main areas proposed for development and notes that the setting of Kings Court Palace, as a scheduled monument will need to be protected. It states that Gillingham Park is an ancient Deer Park, which was formerly surrounded by a 'park pale'.
18. NP policy MOT5 takes a similar approach to DWLP policy GRF1 in its support for woodland planting in the Royal Forest area and the promotion of the understanding of the area. MOT7 seeks to minimise adverse impacts on views from public rights of way over open countryside. It identifies views which are of particular significance, none of which relate to this proposal.

Landscape

19. The appeal site itself comprises agricultural fields and is entirely rural in appearance, as is much of the surrounding area. That said the influence of the edge of the settlement is apparent to varying degrees from parts of the site and the wider area. I will return below to the effect of the GSE allocation and permission. The site falls within the area of the Gillingham Royal Forest which is itself a non-designated heritage asset and is part of the setting for other assets (to which I will return below).
20. A useful starting point in dealing with the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area is to consider the way in which it is described in character appraisals. In terms of the National Character Area the site and the area are within NCA 133: Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour. This is described as a "...large expanse of lowland clay vale and the Upper Greensand terraces and hills that mark the southern and eastern boundary of

³ Other DWLP policies are listed in the SOCG at para 7.5. These are not reasons for refusal.

⁴ Other LP policies are listed in the SOCG at para 7.4. These are not reasons for refusal.

the NCA.” At a more local level the site is within the Clay Vale Landscape Character Type, which is described as “..a broken sweep across the north-western parts of the county beyond the western and northern edges of the chalk escarpment”.

21. The site is not within any landscape designated at either a national or local policy level. Although the above descriptions naturally do not specifically describe the appeal site and its immediate surroundings, it is clear to me that it is generally representative of the surrounding landscape.
22. The other point of note is that the predecessor authority to the Council had a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the area prepared in 2014. This assessment described the area as “..a flat or gently undulating landform..”, a description which reasonably describes the area. The Assessment also stated that the area is not inherently sensitive to solar PV development, and that from within the area the even topography means that solar PV development would be unlikely to be perceptible beyond its immediate surrounds.
23. The landscape reason for refusal stated that the site was within a “..valued landscape..” and that the development would lead to unacceptably adverse harm to its character. One of the key differences between the parties is whether the site and the surrounding area are a valued landscape for the purposes of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 174a. This states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.....in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan.
24. In this case it is clear that the landscape has no statutory status. The Council argued that DWLP policy GRF1 was a landscape designation (along with NP policy MOT5.) However this policy relates to the whole of the Royal Forest, does not identify the area to which it applies, nor identify the appeal site and does not refer to landscape quality. Instead it focusses on the objectives of the Royal Forest Project. This policy clearly does not identify the area for any landscape value. The relevant policy (NP MOT7) in the Motcombe Neighbourhood Plan does not identify any views of ‘particular significance’ over the Deer Park or appeal site. I do not consider that either policy has any direct bearing on the issue. On that basis the site and the surrounding area does not fall within either of the statutory or development plan matters referenced in NPPF 174a.
25. However the concept of a valued landscape is not defined in the NPPF. The leading court case on what constitutes a valued landscape is the Stroud judgement, as accepted by the parties.⁵ This deals with whether the countryside in question has demonstrable physical attributes (rather than just popularity) which would take the site beyond mere countryside. In other words, as accepted by the parties, whether the attributes take the landscape beyond the ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’.
26. Both parties considered this matter in the light of GLVIA 3 guidance, and although they used different terminology from each other, the approaches were

⁵ Stroud District Council v SSCLG and Gladman Developments Ltd. [2015] WL 849499

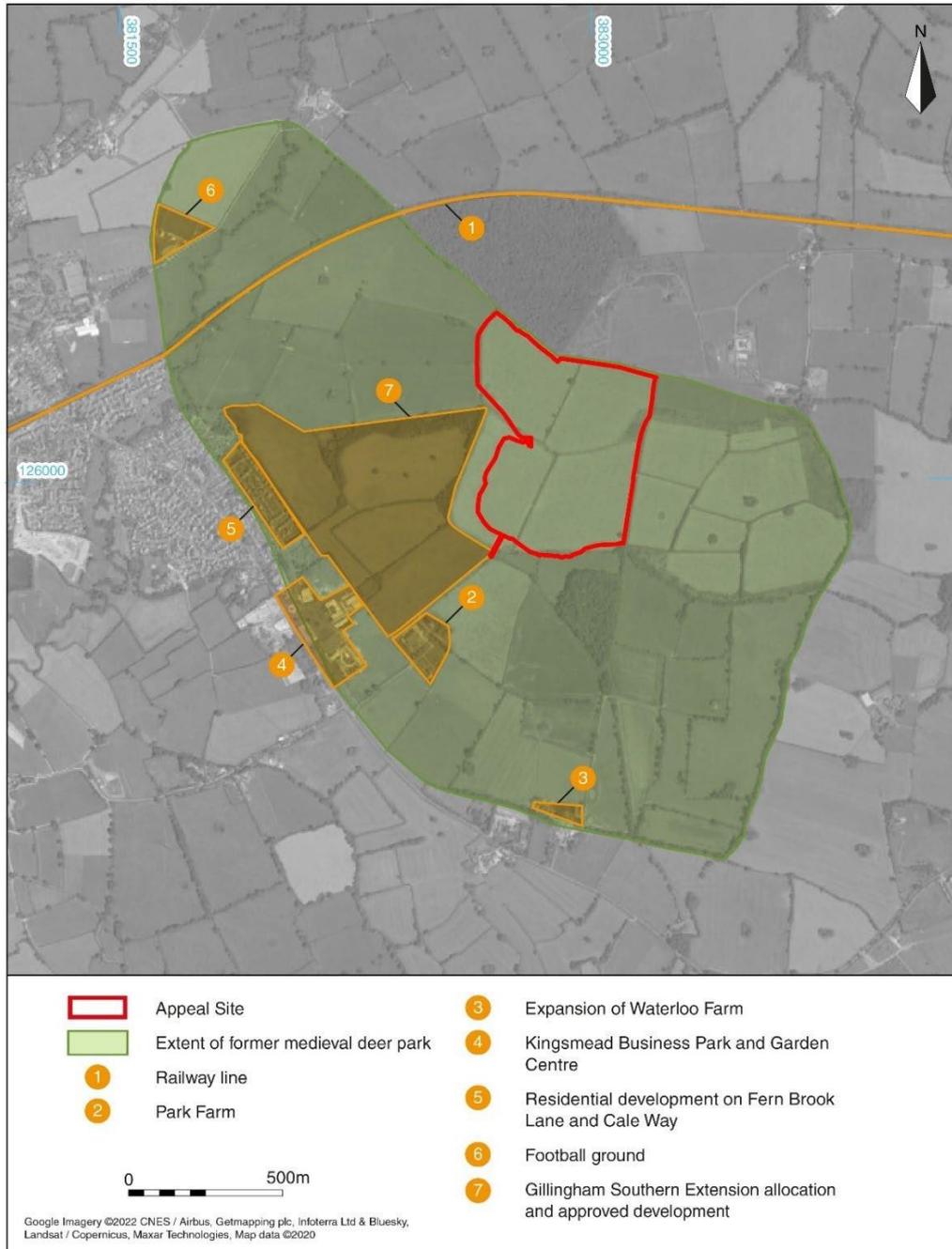
very similar. The assessment of the various factors which might lead to a conclusion that the landscape was valued in NPPF terms was the subject of debate at the Inquiry. However, bearing in mind the 'Stroud test' summarised above, it is notable that the Council's approach was that the site and its surroundings were 'representative' or 'typical' of the Blackmore Vale/Clay Vale landscape. That accords with what I saw on site and in the surrounding area and these descriptions do not raise the area to the level of a valued landscape in NPPF terms.

27. One specific point raised by the authority was reference to the fact that the appeal site is close to a long-distance trail – the White Hart Link. Whilst that may attract walkers to the area and increase the numbers who would be able to see the appeal proposal, I do not accept that this raises the landscape quality to the 'valued' level. The country is criss-crossed by walking routes of various types, and very many other less publicised but popular routes – proximity to such a route does not in itself raise the landscape to the 'valued' level .
28. It should also be noted that, as far as the Inquiry was told, there was no mention of the 'valued landscape' argument in the report leading to the grant of the outline permission for the GSE scheme. This casts further doubt on the Council's approach to landscape appraisal in the current case.
29. In summary, I do not consider that the landscape is a valued one in NPPF paragraph 174(a) terms, and I will shortly turn to consider the effect of the proposal on the area in the light of the development plan and NPPF paragraph 174(b) - which refers to the recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
30. Before turning to the effect on the landscape, it is of note that the reason for refusal did not specifically refer to visual impact, although naturally the view from the footpath adjacent to the site (N69/7) is of considerable relevance to considering landscape character. From my visit to the area, I am not surprised at the lack of reference to visual harm, as I consider that the visual impact, save from that footpath, would be limited and short range.
31. There was a difference between the parties as to the sensitivity of the landscape, with the authority assessing sensitivity significantly higher than the appellant. However the Council's position began with a district wide approach to sensitivity and concluded a higher level of sensitivity than it subsequently defended. Specifically when addressing the criteria for assessment as set out in the Sensitivity Study, the Council accepted that majority of factors would result in a low-medium sensitivity. My consideration of the evidence, including this position reached in cross-examination, supports the appellant's conclusion that the sensitivity of the site is low-medium.
32. It is clear that any development on open agricultural fields would conflict with the characteristics of the site and cause a loss of some open character at the site level. In terms of the magnitude of change, due to the landform and existing screening, along with the ability to undertake landscape mitigation, the magnitude of change would be localised - high on the site, medium at the Deer Park level, declining to low/negligible in the wider area. This change could be best appreciated from Viewpoints 1 and 2 (accepted by the Council as

the only locations where there would be a significant visual effect). In coming to that conclusion, I appreciate that the Council's position is that there would be a higher magnitude of change on the site and beyond, but to a large extent this stemmed from the initially higher assessment of sensitivity (which I do not accept) and was not an assessment supported by the answers in cross-examination.

33. There was an argument put forward by the appellant that the proposed solar farm would be inherently rural in nature. But although many solar farms are now located in rural settings, I do not consider that they are so common that they have come to be regarded as a form of development which is inherently rural. But nor do I accept the Council's assertion that they are industrial in visual terms, as they have little in common with industrial development and are becoming gradually accepted in rural areas.
34. Before concluding on this matter, it is also important to consider the effect on the landscape as it will be in future following the GSE allocation and consented scheme. Outline planning permission was granted in 2021 for development on land to the southwest of the appeal site in accordance with the GSE allocation. The permission was for up to 634 dwellings, a primary school, sports pitches with floodlighting, public open space, play facilities, access and internal estate roads, internal footpaths and cycleways, sustainable drainage system with ponds, landscaping, utility connections and associated groundworks and infrastructure.
35. The Council stated that the boundaries of the approved development and the appeal site do not directly adjoin each other, and that there is landscaping potential between the two. However given the scale of the consented development, the effect on the baseline landscape will be substantial. It is accepted that this major development does not, in itself, justify the appeal scheme. However it would be wrong to ignore the consequences of the allocation and consented scheme on the character of the area.
36. The plan below shows the relationship between the appeal site and the GSE allocation/consented development and other developments in the Deer Park area.⁶

⁶ Taken from Mr Sutton's evidence, and uncontested



37. Overall, I consider that there would be some limited harm to the character and appearance of the landscape and the proposal would therefore conflict with LP policies 4 and 22 as summarised above.

Heritage

38. The relevant heritage assets which may be affected by the proposal were agreed by the parties to be as follows:

- Gillingham Forest Deer Park and part of the Park Pale (non-designated heritage assets)
- King’s Court Palace Moated Site (scheduled monument)

- Remains of East Haimes House and adjacent Park Pale (scheduled monument)
- Gillingham Park Boundary Bank (scheduled monument)
- Donedge Lodge Farm (non-designated heritage asset)

All these are shown on the first plan above.

39. In all cases it is agreed that the harm would be less than substantial in NPPF terms – though the extent of the harm is not agreed. It was also agreed that scheduled monuments are assets of the highest significance and that any harm to them should be given great weight.
40. There would be no direct effect on any of the assets aside from that part of the Gillingham Forest Deer Park on which the proposal would be constructed. All the assets relate to the historic former Deer Park which formed part of the Gillingham Royal Forest. With the arguable exception of Donedge Lodge Farm, which will be discussed below, the other assets would not come into existence were it not for the Deer Park, and they have a clear historic relationship with each other.
41. Beginning with the Deer Park, each asset will be considered in turn in its own right and then the combined effect of all the assets will be assessed.

The Deer Park

42. The effect on the former Deer Park is the main focus of the Council's case, both as an individual asset and in combination with the other assets. Aside from Donedge Lodge Farm, the setting of all the other assets listed above is the Deer Park itself.
43. The Park is part of the former medieval Deer Park which lay to the east and south-east of Gillingham. At the turn of the 12/13th centuries the evidence is that it was one of about 60 deer parks in Dorset and one of four royal parks in the county. At that time the boundary of the park would have been enclosed by a barrier or 'park pale'. As part of the history of the area and its royal associations, the park as a whole has historic significance – although the parties agreed that the appeal site itself does not possess any particular significance beyond its location within the wider park area.
44. The park derives significance from its historic and, to a lesser extent, its physical presence. However the experience of the asset as a whole has changed substantially over time as its surroundings have evolved. In this context the Council's Statement of Case describes the Deer Park as a coherent and legible whole. I have to disagree with that assessment as what exists now is not an intact deer park (as can be seen in many other locations) but the remains of a former deer park.
45. The boundary of the former Deer Park now includes a considerable amount of modern development (as can be seen from the second plan above) and contains substantial modern development including the Kingsmead Business Park, retail stores, a petrol filling station, a garden centre, housing and a football club with floodlights, modern agricultural buildings and a railway line.

46. Of potentially even greater importance is the LP allocation of the GSE development and the grant of planning permission for redevelopment. It was confirmed at the Inquiry that the status of the Deer Park was not referenced in the report leading to the grant of permission for the GSE development, which intrudes into the central area of the former park. For the Council to now express concern on heritage grounds about the current proposal appears inconsistent. It was accepted at the Inquiry that these modern developments are part of the current understanding of the Deer Park. My overall conclusion is that the asset is of reduced importance given the current intrusions into its original area.
47. That said, it is still possible for the informed observer to appreciate the historic contribution which the appeal site makes to the Deer Park as a whole. The public experience of this contribution would be largely from the footpath to the north. However no important views of the former Deer Park would be obstructed by the proposal, no footpaths would be closed, and the boundaries of the park would be unchanged. Movement through and views of the park would obviously be different in that, in some locations, there would be views of the solar farm. The placing of a solar farm on part of the park, even for a finite period, would obviously change the experience of this asset to a degree. Whilst recognising the effect of the current proposal on the park, this would be appreciably less than other approved/built developments.
48. Overall, the Deer Park, as it stands today with all the incursions into it, has reduced heritage significance. However there is a persuasive argument that, even though the baseline has significantly changed, the area that remains is all the more important. The change from open rural farmland to a solar farm on part of the Deer Park would affect both visual and historic relationships.
49. However, due to its relatively limited scale, the proposal would cause only limited harm to this non-designated heritage asset. I will return below to the heritage balance.

Kings Court Palace

50. King's Court Palace is the site of a medieval royal hunting lodge and is a scheduled monument. The monument is now seen as a ditch, internal bank and partial external bank.
51. The history of the site dates substantially from around 1200 when King John ordered extensive alterations to an existing house. It is understood that he visited the site regularly thereafter. In 1369 Edward III ordered the demolition of the buildings and the sale of the materials, and then in the late 18th century the foundations of the building were dug up and the stone used for road repairs.
52. The remaining earthworks are crossed by a modern track which bridges the ditch and truncates the banks in two places. What remains today is only visible from close up and can best be appreciated from the footpath which runs through the site. These are the remnants of what was once two substantial building complexes and a large (probably) continuous bank. It is also reasonable to assume that the buried remains may hold evidence about medieval high society, the local economy and the landscape. An information

board along the footpath close to the site provides a useful summary and a interpretation of the former complex of buildings.

53. The setting of the monument includes most of the other assets listed at the start of this section, but most importantly the Deer Park itself. The history and function of the lodge is intrinsically linked to the existence of the Deer Park.
54. The appeal site is around 600 metres east of the scheduled monument. The area between the two is gently rolling topography, typical of the wider area, and there are several field boundaries and trees between the two. Standing within the earthworks there would be a very small further incursion of modern development into the setting of the asset in visual terms, which already includes modern development and the railway line.
55. However, historically the Deer Park is the *raison d'être* of the asset and makes a contribution to its understanding in historic terms, as described above. The proposal would, to a very limited extent, change the contribution which the setting makes to the appreciation or understanding of the asset. For these reasons, I conclude that there would be very limited harm to this heritage asset. This would be at the bottom end of 'less than substantial harm' in NPPF terms. I will return below to the heritage balance.

East Haines House

56. East Haines House is a scheduled monument lying just outside the boundary of the former Deer Park and beyond the park pale. The monument includes a part of the park pale.
57. It was once the residence of the fee forester, the principal park keeper, of the park during the medieval period. The asset is now a series of rectilinear earthworks (with the potential for buried archaeology). The park pale in this area is discernible in places as field boundaries and hedges, and in some sections, as an earthwork. Unlike the Palace, there is no information board to assist in the experience here. That said, the informed visitor could appreciate something of the historical associations of the asset.
58. As previously stated, the setting of East Haines House and the Park Pale includes the Deer Park, however the setting of the house and the pale is heavily influenced by the modern Gillingham Town FC pitches, buildings and floodlighting columns. These lie within the former Deer Park, located in between the asset and the appeal site. The railway line runs to the south and further separates this asset from the rest of the former Deer Park. There is no direct pedestrian access into the park from East Haines House and to get into the park it is necessary to walk away from it and then back into it
59. The appeal site lies over 1km from the East Haines House, and slightly closer to parts of the park pale. The Council's position is that there is partial intervisibility but from what I saw on my visit, even that is optimistic. The distance and limited intervisibility between the appeal site and the asset, combined with their current setting, means that the proposed change in character of the appeal site would be of extremely limited relevance to the visual experience of the asset. The ability to interpret and appreciate the buried archaeological remains and the pale would be scarcely affected.

60. However, as with Kings Court, East Haines House and the associated parts of the park pale would not have come into being without the Deer Park. Even a small diminution in the area of the park would slightly reduce the historical contribution which the setting makes to the appreciation of the asset.
61. Overall, I conclude that there would be very limited harm to this heritage asset. This would be at the bottom end of 'less than substantial harm' in NPPF terms. I will return below to the heritage balance.

Park Boundary Bank

62. The perimeter of the Deer Park would have originally been enclosed by a barrier or park pale, as discussed above. It would have potentially incorporated some natural topography, along with sections of a hedge atop a bank with a ditch, incorporating stakes and pales to increase its effectiveness. Part of the pale is linked to East Haines House and is considered above, but part on the east side of the former Deer Park is separately identified.
63. The earthworks of the park pale are the only substantial physical surviving remnants of the medieval landscape. In this context the asset has significance both as a landscape feature (with the potential to preserve archaeological remains) and as part of the history of the group of assets. The setting of the pale, i.e. the Deer Park itself, contributes to the significance of this asset.
64. Visually, at the closest point the appeal site is around 500 metres away from this part of the pale, and the two are separated by gently rolling land with field boundaries including dense hedgerows. For this reason the visual effect of the appeal proposal on the setting of the earthwork would hardly be affected.
65. However, as with other assets, the proposal would slightly reduce the legibility of the asset in its Deer Park setting, which forms part of the asset's significance.
66. Overall the proposal would scarcely change the historic significance of the asset as derived from its setting. I conclude that there would be very limited harm to the visual setting of this heritage asset. This would be at the bottom end of 'less than substantial harm' in NPPF terms. I will return below to the heritage balance.

Donedge Lodge Farm

67. The position in relation to Donedge Lodge Farm is unusual. The Council consider this is a heritage asset in NPPF terms.
68. The property is a 19th century house located on high ground with views over part of the appeal site and beyond. A 1624 map of the Gillingham Forest⁷ shows that there was a Donedge Lodge in the general location of the current building. This was apparently a keeper's lodge, but it no longer exists and there are no known remains.
69. The Council speculated at the Inquiry that the current house may conceal fabric from an earlier date or have been built over or close to remains of the historic

⁷ CD219

lodge. However there is no evidence to justify this. The authority advanced the idea that the location is the important factor, but it is the building which is the asset. The non-designated asset is therefore the 19th century house, and not any suspected remains of an earlier building.

70. The current building has relatively limited architectural interest, and though it is prominent in the landscape, this is not sufficient to justify non-designated status. Thus, the asset is of very limited value in heritage terms.
71. The surroundings of the building undoubtedly add to its setting, and views from the building would change with the development of a solar farm.
72. Overall, the proposal would have no effect on whatever very limited heritage significance the building possesses.

Cumulative heritage effect

73. I have concluded above that, leaving aside Donedge Farm, there would be less than substantial harm in NPPF terms caused to the heritage assets, and that this harm would be at the bottom end of the scale within that category. Nonetheless any harm to designated heritage assets must be given great weight as these are assets which the NPPF recognises to be of the highest significance.
74. In coming to this view I have taken full account of the views of Historic England⁸ as the Government's national statutory advisor on heritage matters. I do not depart from their views in principle although, after an extensive site visit and consideration of the appeal evidence, I differ in some instances related to the degree of harm.
75. Considered in visual terms, the proposal would have very limited effect on the contribution which the setting (i.e. the Deer Park) makes to the individual or group significance of the assets. However as a principal, the reduction in the undeveloped area of the Deer Park, almost regardless of distance, would cause some limited harm to the ability to conceptually link the assets together into an understanding of the whole.
76. Overall, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the proposal would cause limited harm to the setting of a number of heritage assets, and would conflict with LP policies 4, 5 and 22 as summarised above. I give this matter considerable importance and weight, and will return to the overall heritage balance below.

Conditions and planning obligation

77. Most of the conditions below were agreed by the parties at the Inquiry, and the reasons are given beneath each condition. Two conditions merit separate comment.
78. At the time of the Council's decision there was no archaeological objection raised by the authority. But, as referenced above, the Inquiry proceeded on the basis of revised plans and the Council raised archaeological concern in response to the revisions. The Supplementary Statement of Common Ground

⁸ 6 August 2021, summarised CD.114, pp.32-33

agreed a number of matters. However neither the geophysical survey or trial trenching raised any matters of interest. A condition has been put forward to deal with this matter, although the appellant's position is that this is unnecessary. However as the matter is not entirely free from doubt it is considered that the condition is necessary.

79. It was agreed at the CMC that a report would be prepared dealing with noise matters. This report proposed mitigation measures in the form of acoustic louvres and, on that basis, it was that agreed noise levels would remain below the existing background noise level. There was some residual concern by the Council regarding the proposed louvres being sited within the structures, but a condition has been agreed to ensure that noise levels would be acceptable.
80. In relation to the planning obligation there is a dispute regarding the Gillingham Forest contribution, which would be put towards the enhancement of the landscape through woodland planting and the promotion of countryside recreation and tourism activities. Although this contribution could be more precise, it is considered that it is necessary in the light of the effect on the Royal Forest area and is in line with LP policy GRF1. It meets the tests for planning obligations.

Heritage and planning balance

81. The proposal would cause harm, in varying but limited degrees, in relation to the two main issues in dispute in this case – landscape and heritage. This is set out above. I need to balance these harms against the benefits of the scheme, both in relation to heritage matters and the overall planning balance.
82. Before considering the potential benefits of the scheme, there is one matter which was referenced but not specifically argued by the appellant. That is the limited period (40 years) for which permission is sought. Whilst I acknowledge that the development would be reversible, this time period is a large part of an adult lifetime and I do not give that matter any significant weight.
83. The proposed development would generate a significant number of jobs directly related to the construction of the solar farm, along with others in the supply chain. The employment related to the operational phase would obviously be far lower. I consider that this economic benefit is of moderate weight in favour of the scheme.
84. There would be additional woodland planting in the north-east corner of the site, accepted by both parties as a benefit. The amount of this planting goes beyond that which would be required to simply partially screen the development, and would be a positive benefit. In addition there is the contribution through the s106 obligation towards off-site planting in connection with the Gillingham Forest Project⁹. I have already stated that this contribution could be clearer as to the specific project. However overall I consider that the direct and indirect planting would be a moderate benefit arising from the scheme.

⁹ It is also understood that the appellant offered bridleway improvements, but that this was rejected by the Council.

85. The scheme would deliver a measurable gain in biodiversity, and this would be a further moderate benefit arising from the proposal.
86. The appellant has offered to provide interpretation boards, ensured by condition, to provide information regarding the Deer Park. This would be a limited benefit arising from the proposal.
87. The energy and decarbonising credentials of the proposal are a very important factor in considering this appeal. I will deal with the local position first.
88. The Council recognises the need to provide energy from renewable sources in its area, and this is illustrated by its declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019 (updated that same year to a Climate and Ecological Emergency). In policy terms the appeal also gains some support from LP policy 22 which, whilst referencing the need deal with adverse impacts in the balance, deals with the benefits of renewable energy.
89. The appellant emphasised the need for additional renewable energy in the UK and specifically in Dorset if the country is to meet the 'net zero' target and budgets in order to tackle the global challenge of climate change. The appellant called expert and persuasive evidence on the question of urgent need and limited supply. The Council relied on their planning witness in this respect, and stated that they did not accept that there is an urgent need for the development. The approach by the authority was that the appellant had to pass an 'essential' test – but no policy basis for such a test was put forward. In any event this is directly contrary to NPPF paragraph 158 which provides that there is no requirement for the appellant to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy. Nor was any convincing evidence (even on a historical basis projected into the future) put forward to support the Council's suggestion that improvements in technology will significantly reduce demand for solar farms.
90. The Council also criticised the appellant's Alternative Site Assessment¹⁰ on a number of grounds. This Assessment set out a various constraints which, it was suggested, limited the availability of sites in the county. I agree with the Council's criticism to the extent that the Assessment only considered sites within a relatively limited radius of connection points. However the number of sites which could reasonably accommodate this type of development in flood zones, conservation areas or Green Belts (all of which were regarded by the authority to be potentially feasible) must be seriously limited due to the various additional constraints in such areas.
91. Overall, whilst the Assessment might be criticised on a number of grounds, it would have to massively underestimate the position before it could be demonstrated that there are sufficient sites in the area. From the evidence that is an untenable position. In addition the Council did not put forward any alternative site which might be more appropriate than the appeal site, and more importantly the LP does not identify sites or even broad areas of search for this type of development.

¹⁰ CD18

92. Turning to the national picture, it is unnecessary to recite the clearly stated national position related to renewable energy. For many years there have been a series of policies, statements and legal obligations which all seek to encourage renewable energy developments where they are appropriate. Particular reference should be made to the NPPF and the Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener. Furthermore it is clear that decarbonisation will rely very heavily on wind and solar power, and that the national need is significantly greater than the capacity of current projects.
93. In the light of the local and national imperative summarised above related to the provision of renewable energy, this matter weighs very heavily in favour of the proposal.
94. Turning to the overall heritage and planning balance, I have found that the proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of designated assets and limited harm to non-designated assets, to the extent set out above. This is a matter to which I attach considerable importance and weight.
95. But the public benefits summarised above, particularly the importance of the provision of renewable energy and the need to tackle climate change, are exceptionally weighty. I conclude that the public benefits of the proposal outweigh some non-compliance with policy on the basis of harm to landscape and heritage assets, and would be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the clear benefits of the scheme.

Conclusion

96. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

P. J. G. Ware
Inspector

APPEARANCES

FERN BROOK SOLAR FARM LTD

Mr Michael Humphries KC, instructed by DWD Property and Planning

He called:

Mr Si Gillett MSc	Humbeat
Mr Robert Sutton MCIfA	Cotswold Archaeology
Mr Will Gardner BSc(Hons) MSc CLMI	EDP
Mrs Sarah Price BA DipTP MRTPI	DWD Property and Planning

DORSET COUNCIL

Mr Mark Westmorland Smith of Counsel, instructed by the Head of Legal Services

He called:

Mrs Rachel Haworth IHBC	LUC
Mr Peter Radmall MA BPhil CMLI	Landscape Consultant
Mr Peter Grubb BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI	Lighthouse Development Consulting

INTERESTED PERSON

Mr G Clinton	Donedge Lodge Farm
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INQUIRY DOCUMENTS

Doc 1	Appellant's opening submissions
Doc 2	Council's opening submissions
Doc 3	Dark skies plan
Doc 4	ALC Grades (Defra)
Doc 5	Dorset Council Local Plan consultation January 2021
Doc 6	Unilateral Planning Obligation
Doc 7	Closing submissions by the Council
Doc 8	Closing submissions by the appellant

ANNEX

Land at Park Farm, Gillingham SP8 5JG

Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall not begin later than 3 years from the date of this permission.
2. The permission hereby granted shall expire 40 years from the date when electrical power is first exported from the solar farm to the electricity grid network, excluding electricity exported during initial testing and commissioning. Written confirmation of the first export date shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than one calendar month after the event.
Reason: The proposed scheme has a 40 year lifespan and to accord with the evidence at the Inquiry.
3. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the details shown on the following approved plans: Site Location Plan ref. LCS047-SP-01 and Development Zones Plan ref. LCS047- DZ-01 Rev 11 and Table 4-1 of Environmental Statement Chapter 4, except as controlled or modified by conditions of this permission.
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt.
4. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, full details of the final locations, design and materials to be used for the panel arrays, inverters, substation, control building, switch room, CCTV cameras and fencing shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Subsequently the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the development and the character of the area
5. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a detailed landscaping scheme, in accordance with the principles contained within the Landscaping Proposals Plan (Reference: Figure 6.9 including figure 6.9w – 6.9f Rev F), shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details shall include schedules of new trees, shrubs and hedgerows to be planted (noting species, plant sizes and numbers/densities), the identification of the existing trees and shrubs on the site to be retained (noting species, location and spread) and an implementation programme.

The scheme shall be implemented by no later than the first planting season following the first export date and thereafter be maintained in accordance with the approved scheme. In the event of any of the trees or shrubs so planted dying or being seriously damaged or destroyed within 5 years of the completion of the development, a new tree or shrub or equivalent number of trees or shrubs, as the case may be, of a species first approved by the

Local Planning Authority, shall be planted and properly maintained in a position or positions first approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: To ensure satisfactory landscaping in the interests of the character of the area.

6. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a Landscape Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) for the detailed landscaping scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LEMP shall include:
- a) Details of long term design principles and objectives.
 - b) Management responsibilities, maintenance schedules and replacement provisions for existing retained landscape features and any landscape to be implemented as part of the approved landscape scheme.
 - c) Summary plan detailing different management procedures for the types of landscape on site.

The schedule and plan shall be implemented in accordance with the agreed programme.

Reason: To ensure the landscaping contributes to the appearance of the area.

7. No development shall commence unless the Local Planning Authority has been provided with either:
- a) A licence issued by Natural England pursuant to Regulation 55 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) authorizing the specified activity/development to go ahead; or
 - b) A GCN District Level Licence issued by Natural England pursuant to Regulation 55 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) authorizing the specified activity/development to go ahead; or
 - c) A statement in writing from the Natural England to the effect that it does not consider that the specified activity/development will require a licence.

Reason: To avoid harm to habitats and species.

8. Notwithstanding the submitted details, no works or development shall take place until an Arboricultural Method Statement and scheme for protection of the retained trees/hedgerows has been agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. This scheme shall include:
- a) plan showing details and positions of the ground protection areas
 - b) details and position of protection barriers
 - c) details and position of underground service/drainage runs/soakaways and working methods employed should these runs be within the designated root protection area of any retained tree/hedgerow on or adjacent to the application site.
 - d) details of any special engineering required to accommodate the protection of retained trees/hedgerows (e.g., in connection with foundations, bridging, water features, hard surfacing).
 - e) details of construction and working methods to be employed for the installation of access tracks within the root protection areas of any retained tree/hedgerow on or adjacent to the application site.

- f) details of timing for the various phases of works or development in the context of the tree/hedgerow protection measures.

All works/development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved arboricultural method statement and tree/hedgerow protection scheme.

Reason: To ensure that no harm is caused to retained trees/hedgerows.

- 9. Prior to the commencement of the development (including vegetation clearance), a Construction Environmental Management Plan for Biodiversity (CEMP: Biodiversity) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The CEMP (Biodiversity) shall be based on the recommendations made in the Ecological Assessment Revision A September 2021.

- a) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities
- b) Identification of "biodiversity protection zones"
- c) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction (may be provided as a set of method statements).
- d) The location and timing of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features.
- e) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.
- f) Responsible persons and lines of communication.
- g) The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) or similarly competent person as necessary.
- h) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs.

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

Reason: To ensure that no harm occurs to the biodiversity of the area.

- 10. No development shall commence until a Biodiversity Net Gain Design Stage Report, in line with Table 2 of CIEEM Biodiversity Net Gain report and audit templates (July 2021), has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, using the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric 3.0 or any successor. The content of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report should include the following:

- a) Baseline data collection and assessment of current conditions on site;
- b) commitment to measures in line with the Mitigation Hierarchy and evidence of how BNG
- c) Principles have been applied to maximise benefits to biodiversity;
- d) Provision of the full BNG calculations, with detailed justifications for the choice of habitat types, distinctiveness and condition, connectivity and ecological functionality;
- e) Details of the implementation measures and management of proposals; and
- f) Details of the monitoring and auditing measures.

The proposed enhancement measures shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and shall be retained in that manner thereafter.

Reason: To ensure that the development gives rise to biodiversity net gain in line with the proposal.

11. The development permitted by this planning permission shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy May 2021 (or as otherwise amended).

Reason: To ensure the development does not increase flood risk.

12. Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), which shall include wheel washing facilities, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development. The approved CTMP shall be implemented prior to any works being carried out on site and shall be maintained throughout the course of the development. The CTMP shall state the times at which plant or material will be delivered to the site.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm highway safety and in the interests of the amenity of the area.

13. The development hereby approved shall accord with the acoustic measures as set out within the submitted Noise Assessment (Tetra Tech; 784-B041272) (or other method attenuation that may be agreed by the LPA pursuant to this condition). The development hereby approved shall not commence operation until:

i) precise specification and performance details of the acoustic louvres (or other method of attenuation), required as identified for the inverter units, and for all the battery storage units and DNO and Customer substations, are submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and;

ii) The agreed attenuation methods are implemented in full to ensure no increase in the background noise level (15 minute LA90) when measured at the proposed sensitive receptors detailed within the submitted Noise Assessment, and to remain within the WHO guidelines for noise intrusion at nearby properties.

Reason: To ensure the development does not cause harm by reason of noise.

14. Not less than 12 months before the cessation of the development hereby permitted, or following a period of one year in which the development has failed to produce electricity for supply to the grid a decommissioning method statement (DMS) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The DMS shall include details of the removal of the panels, supports, inverters, cables, buildings and all associated structures and fencing from the site, and a timetable for their removal. The DMS shall also include a traffic management plan to address likely traffic impacts during the decommissioning period and details of the proposed restoration of the site. The site shall be decommissioned in accordance with the approved DMS within 6 months of the expiry of the 40 year period from the date when electrical power is first exported from the solar farm to the electricity grid network, excluding electricity exported during initial testing and commissioning, or within 18 months of the site ceasing to produce electricity whichever is sooner.

Reason: To ensure the full decommissioning of the site in the interests of the character of the area.

15. Prior to the operation of the development hereby permitted, full details and siting of the fixed interpretation boards at locations agreed with the LPA containing information regarding the former Deer Park shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To assist with the public understanding of the Deer Park.

16. There shall be no permanent illumination on the site unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To protect the rural character of the area

17. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a mapped and photographic record of the historic character showing key features within the appeal site and immediate surrounds, and the relationships between them, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved record shall be deposited with the local Historic Environment Record (HER) or otherwise published to an appropriate public archive to be agreed by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To record aspects of heritage significance which may otherwise be lost or obscured by the development.

18. Prior to the commencement of any development hereby approved, including any excavation, a scheme that details a programme of investigative archaeological work (including trial trenching), to inform the appropriate and precise location and design of the planting scheme along the northern site boundary with the deer park pale (to avoid harm to archaeological evidence in this area), shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development, including the final agreed planting details, shall thereafter accord with the agreed scheme.

Reason: To ensure that no harm is caused to any buried archaeology.



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