

Heath Road Solar Farm

Alternative Site Assessment

69 Carter Lane, London, EC4V 5EQ

T: 020 7489 0213

F: 020 7248 4743

E: info@dwd-ltd.co.uk

W: dwd-ltd.co.uk

Disclaimer

This report has been produced by DWD, the trading name of Dalton Warner Davis LLP, a Limited Liability Partnership. Registered in England No. OC304838. Registered Office: 6 New Bridge Street, London, EC4V 6AB. The report is intended for the sole and exclusive use of the instructing client or party. The report shall not be distributed or made available to any third party or published, reproduced or referred to in any way without the prior knowledge and written consent of DWD. The report does not constitute advice to any third party and should not be relied upon as such. DWD accepts no liability or responsibility for any loss or damage to any third party arising from that party having relied upon the contents of the report in whole or in part.

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION1

 Overview 1

 Site Summary 1

2.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT4

 The Proposed Site 4

 The Proposed Development 5

3.0 PLANNING POLICY.....6

 Local Planning Policy 6

 National Planning Policy Framework 9

 National Planning Practice Guidance..... 9

 Leicestershire County Council Minerals and Waste Local Plan 9

 Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy Planning 10

 National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure 11

4.0 METHODOLOGY12

 Overview 12

 The Search Area 13

 Analysis of Previously Development Land 14

 Analysis of Lower Grade Agricultural Land 14

 Filtering of the Long-List 15

 Assessment of the Short-List 16

5.0 ASSESSMENT17

 Previously Developed Land..... 17

 Lower Grade Agricultural Land 17

 Long-List and Filtering..... 17

 Assessment of the Short-List 18

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS21

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: FIGURES 1 – 5 (GIS FIGURES)

Revision	Description	Originated	Checked	Reviewed	Authorised	Date
1	DRAFT	BS	CD	CD	CD	July 2025
DWD Job Number: 15981						

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Overview

- 1.1 This Alternative Site Assessment ('ASA') has been prepared on behalf of Renewable Connections Developments Ltd (the 'Applicant') in support of a planning application for the development of a solar photovoltaic farm and associated infrastructure, including two cable route corridors to the Point of Connection ('PoC').
- 1.2 The proposal is hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development'. The project is known as 'Heath Road Solar Farm'.

Site Summary

- 1.3 The Site comprises approximately 31.9 hectares ('ha'), however the 'Main Site' where the solar panels and associated infrastructure will be located is 26.9 ha. For assessment purposes, the Site will be considered as 26.9 ha as it represents the development area of the solar panels. The Site consists of agricultural land at Heath Road, Bagworth, hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Site'.
- 1.4 The Proposed Site also benefits from an agreed connection into the grid, with the PoC being an existing electricity pylon of approximately 23 metres ('m') in height, which is located west of the B585 road and east of Barlestone, and approximately 1 kilometre ('km') north west of the Proposed Site.
- 1.5 The Proposed Site includes two underground cable corridor routes to the PoC. The southern cable route extends east along Merrylees Road before turning north onto Heath Road where it eventually joins with the northern cable route. Both cable routes predominantly traverse the public highway before crossing third party land where the PoC is located.
- 1.6 The Proposed Site currently comprises three agricultural fields. The Proposed Site is located to the south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone and sits within the administrative area of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council ('HBBC' or the 'Council') and Leicestershire County Council ('LCC').
- 1.7 The submitted Agricultural Land Classification ('ALC') Survey finds that the Proposed Site comprises predominantly Grade 3b land (Moderate Quality) (93%), with a small amount of Grade 3a land (Best and Most Versatile ('BMV')) (6%) and non-agricultural land (1%). It is noted that the surrounding area in Hinckley and Bosworth and neighbouring authorities predominantly comprises Grade 3 land, with some areas of Grade 2 and subgrade 3a and 3b land, representing a mixture of moderate quality agricultural land and BMV agricultural land.

Renewable Connections Developments Ltd

- 1.8 The Applicant is one of the most experienced renewable energy developers in the UK having consented over 1 Gigawatts ('GW') of solar, battery and hydrogen projects nationally since 2010. The Applicant's work in partnership with HelioFidem, a renewable energy Developer with over 1GW of renewable assets in development worldwide.
- 1.9 The application has been submitted electronically via the Planning Portal and the requisite application fee has been paid to the Council.

Purpose and Structure of this Report

- 1.10 The assessment set out in this report seeks to identify potential alternative sites, taking into consideration:
- previously developed and or/non-agricultural land (hereafter referred to collectively as 'previously developed land'); or
 - lower grade agricultural land (i.e., Grade 4 and 5).
- 1.11 This assessment is carried out in support of the planning application and seeks to demonstrate that the Applicant has given due consideration to the benefits and constraints associated with the Proposed Site.
- 1.12 The Applicant has a grid connection point from the Distribution Network Operator (DNO), National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) to export electricity to the grid. The connection will be made into an existing electricity tower / pylon approximately 1 km north west of the Proposed Site, as directed by the DNO.
- 1.13 The ASA has applied a 3.5 km search radius from the existing PoC to identify alternative sites. The methodology is explained in detail in Section 4.
- 1.14 Further, the need for renewable energy, including solar, is so great that if any suitable alternative sites are identified in this assessment, they should also be bought forward in order to meet that demand. For example, the National Infrastructure Commission (official advisor to the Government on infrastructure) recommends a significant increase in installed solar capacity of up to around 9 x

more¹. More information on the scale of need for renewable energy, and in particular solar, can be found in the Planning, Design and Access Statement.

1.15 It should be noted that there is no statutory or defined national policy requirement to carry out an ‘alternative site assessment’ or similar as recognised in the Bramley appeal decision². The Applicant has adopted a policy to carry out an alternative site assessment for solar farm proposals when developing on greenfield sites in order to prove the Proposed site has been chosen with proper consideration of all relevant factors.

1.16 Commercial rooftops are not considered because (i) there are no known rooftops of sufficient size in the local area and (ii) it is considered that assessing the potential for development of multiple rooftops is not comparable to a ground-mounted solar PV farm. Furthermore, paragraph 013 (REF:5-013-20150327) in the Government’s National Planning Practice Guidance (‘NPPG’) states that in considering ground-mounted solar farms, the focus should be on the effective use of previously developed land and non-agricultural land. Rooftops are not mentioned.

1.17 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – key features of the Proposed Site and the proposed development;
- Section 3 – relevant planning policy;
- Section 4 – the methodology applied to identify and assess alternative sites;
- Section 5 – application of the methodology and assessment of alternative sites; and
- Section 6 – summary and conclusions.

¹ <https://www.nic.org.uk/publications/net-zero-opportunities-for-the-power-sector/>

² Bramley, Hampshire APP/H1705/W/22/3304561 (‘Bramley’) - 45MW solar farm and battery storage allowed 13th February 2023.

2.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Proposed Site

- 2.1 The Proposed Site comprises approximately 31.9 ha, however the area where the solar panels and associated infrastructure will be located is 26.9 ha of arable agricultural land comprising three fields set broadly within a rectilinear pattern, split across two parcels (northern and southern parcel). It is situated to the south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone. The Proposed Site sits within the administrative areas of HBBC and LCC.
- 2.2 The Proposed Site is bound by Heath Road to the north and Merrylees Road to the south. The northern parcel is bound to the east by an agricultural access track, which leads to a farmstead and agricultural dwelling situated between the two parcels. The remaining boundaries are largely comprised of hedgerows, with a dense belt of woodland to the west.
- 2.3 The surrounding area is characterised by agricultural fields interspersed by woodland, however the presence of existing solar farms, wind turbines, and the industrial use and claypits directly to the north-east of the Site provide a more urban/industrialised context. These are detailed further below. The topography of both the Site and nearby land is relatively flat.
- 2.4 The closest settlement is the village of Newbold Verdon situated approximately 1.2 km south-west of the Proposed Site. Further scattered properties and agricultural land are located to the west. The closest collections of residential properties are located approximately 400 m to the south-west on Merrylees Road and approximately 750m to the west on Bagworth Road. A school and further residential properties, some of which in a small cluster, are situated to the north-west. However, these properties are over 1 km from the Proposed Site boundary.
- 2.5 Renewable energy generation is already a prominent component in the area, as the Proposed Site is located 0.5 km to the north of an existing operational 5 MW solar farm (granted consent on 23 April 2015; LPA ref. 14/01270/FUL); 2.8 km northeast of a 10 MW solar farm (granted consent on 3 June 2015; LPA ref. 14/00660/FUL); 2.9 km south-east of a 5.9 MW solar farm (granted consent on 30 September 2015; LPA ref. 15/00823/FUL); 3.8 km west of a 5.3 MW solar farm (granted consent 10 December 2014; LPA ref. 14/00654/FUL); 3.85 km south of a 17.9 MW solar farm (granted consent on 10 July 2010; LPA ref. 15/00343/FUL); and 4.7 km southeast of a 4.9 MW solar farm (granted consent on 21 December 2018; LPA ref. 18/01595/FULM [North West Leicestershire District Council]).

- 2.6 There are also a number of wind turbines in close proximity to the Proposed Site. The nearest is 42m high located at the adjoining farmstead (granted consent on 23 September 2013; LPA ref. 13/00600/FUL). There is another 110m high wind turbine approximately 350m to the west (granted consent on 23 July 2014; LPA ref. 14/00381/FUL).
- 2.7 The Proposed Site is crossed by one Public Right of Way ('PRoW'), which runs along the northern boundary of the southern parcel and briefly enters the centre of the Proposed Site. A second public footpath intersects the underground cable route on Heath Road. There is also a PRoW runs parallel to the southern cable route to the east.

The Proposed Development

- 2.8 The Proposed Development comprises the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic ('PV') farm and associated infrastructure. The Proposed Development includes the following:
- Rows of solar panels;
 - Transformer / power stations;
 - String Inverters;
 - Substation compound, which includes the customer substation and DNO substation;
 - Internal access tracks and access gates;
 - Perimeter fence;
 - CCTV cameras;
 - Temporary construction compound;
 - Underground cabling to the PoC (an existing electricity pylon); and
 - Ecological and Skylark mitigation areas (no development, ecological mitigation).
- 2.9 The PoC to the electricity grid will be via the existing off-site electricity pylon / tower located 1 km north-west of the Proposed Site.
- 2.10 It is estimated that the solar panels would generate 21.5 megawatts ('MW'), enough to power approximately 7,581 homes and saving up to 3,856 tonnes of CO₂ per year.
- 2.11 The indicative Site Layout Plan (Reference: RCN1008-PL-01) that forms part of the planning application submission illustrates the indicative layout.

3.0 PLANNING POLICY

3.1 The Search Area described and used below is located predominantly within the local planning authority area of HBBC with a small section of North West Leicestershire District Council within the Search Area. Given the limited size of the spur, policy from North West Leicestershire District Council is not considered to be of relevance.

3.2 As such, the planning policy and guidance most relevant to the consideration of alternative sites in the context of this assessment is considered to comprise the following:

- Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Core Strategy Development Plan Document ('DPD') (adopted December 2009);
- Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Site Allocations & Development Management ('DM') Policies DPD (adopted July 2016);
- Draft Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Local Plan 2020 – 2041 (Regulation 18 Consultation Draft published July 2024);
- Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (up to 2031) (adopted September 2019);
- National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') (2024);
- National Planning Practice Guidance ('NPPG') (online resource);
- Overarching National Policy Statement ('NPS') for Energy Planning ('EN-1') (Most recent revision adopted 2024); and
- National Policy Statement ('NPS') for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (Most recent revision adopted 2024).

3.3 For further detail to the planning policy specifically relevant to the Proposed Site and the compliance of the Proposed Development with it, please refer to the Planning, Design and Access Statement that forms part of the application submission.

3.4 The specific guidance set out in each of the above documents is summarised below.

Local Planning Policy

3.5 Spatial Objective 12 (Climate Change and Resource Efficiency) of the Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Core Strategy DPD (adopted December 2009) seeks to *"increasing the use of renewable energy technologies and minimising pollution, including greenhouse gas emissions."*

3.6 Policy DM2 (Delivering Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Development) of the Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Site Allocations & Development Management ('DM') Policies DPD (adopted July 2016) states that *"Planning applications for the development of renewable energy and low carbon development installations at the domestic, community and commercial scales will be supported where:*

- a) All reasonable steps have been taken to avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts including, but not limited to, landscape, noise, visual and cumulative impacts; and*
- b) The proposed development accords with other policies of this plan, with specific regard to DM11 and DM12."*

3.7 This stance is upheld in draft Policy SP07 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy) in the Draft Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Local Plan 2020 – 2041 (Regulation 18 Consultation Draft published July 2024) ('Reg 18 Draft Plan') which states that *"Planning applications for the development of renewable energy and low carbon development installations at the domestic, community and commercial scales will be supported where:*

- a) All reasonable steps have been taken to avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts including, but not limited to, landscape, noise, visual and cumulative impacts; and,*
- b) The proposed development accords with other policies of this Plan.*

The impact of ancillary structures included as part of the proposed scheme will also be assessed."

3.8 Policy DM4 (Safeguarding the Countryside and Settlement Separation) of the DMP outlines that development in the countryside will be permitted where *"it relates to the provision of stand-alone renewable energy developments in line with Policy DM2".*

3.9 This stance is upheld in draft Policy SP26 (Development in the Countryside and Settlement Separation) in the Draft Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Local Plan 2020 – 2041 (Regulation 18 Consultation Draft published July 2024) ('Reg 18 Draft Plan') which states that *"Outside the existing, committed and allocated built form of Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell, Earl Shilton, Key Rural Centres and Rural Villages, but excluding Green Wedges, development will be permitted where it is required for the following purposes:*

- d) renewable energy production in line with Policy SP07.*

And where:

- i. *It does not have a significant adverse effect on the intrinsic value, beauty, open character and landscape character of the countryside in line with Policy SP27;*
- ii. *It does not undermine the physical and perceived separation and open character between settlements;*
- iii. *It does not create or exacerbate ribbon development;*
- iv. *The residual traffic and transport impacts are addressed, as necessary, in accordance with Policies SP29 to SP30;*
- v. *If within a Green Wedge, it protects its role and function in line with Policy SP21; and*
- vi. *If within the National Forest, it contributes to the delivery of the National Forest Strategy and the National Forest 25 Year Vision.”*

3.10 Further to this, draft Policy SP02 (Development Strategy) in the Reg 18 Draft Plan states that:
“Development in the borough will be in accordance with the spatial strategy set out below: ...

4. Development in the countryside and on designated open space within settlements will be restricted”.

3.11 Draft Policy SP05 (Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change) of the Draft Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Local Plan 2020 – 2041 (Regulation 18 Consultation Draft published July 2024) (‘Reg 18 Draft Plan’) which states that *“Proposals will be supported where they support Hinckley & Bosworth becoming carbon neutral by 2050; through where relevant:*

Minimising carbon emissions, including by:

...(b) Ensuring the most efficient use of land through good design principles;

(f) Integrating renewable and low carbon energy generation wherever possible.”

3.12 The local policy position is in favour of renewable energy as a means to tackle climate change with the Council declaring a Climate Emergency in July 2019 and a Biodiversity Emergency in July 2023. The Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy 2024 to 2028 states that HBBC will seek to utilise its land for carbon reduction and promote the use of renewable energy schemes, including new solar farms.

3.13 Agricultural land classification is seldom referenced in local policy.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.14 The NPPF was published in March 2012 and last updated in February 2025. The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are to be applied, including in respect of the development of agricultural land and renewable energy.
- 3.15 Paragraph 168 of the NPPF states that *“When determining planning applications for all forms of renewable and low carbon energy developments and their associated infrastructure, 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 benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the proposal’s contribution to a net zero future.”*
- 3.16 Paragraph 187 (b) states that local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Furthermore, where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

National Planning Practice Guidance

- 3.17 The policies contained within the NPPF are expanded upon and supported by the NPPG, which was originally published in March 2012 and has been updated periodically since.
- 3.18 With regards to the location of solar farms, Paragraph 013 (Ref: 5-013-20150327) cites the following factors that local planning authorities should consider:
- encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;
 - where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether 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.

Leicestershire County Council Minerals and Waste Local Plan

- 3.19 The current Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan was adopted in 2019 and covers up to 2031. The local plan sets out the County council’s policies surrounding minerals and waste development and how these are to be applied.
- 3.20 Policy DM6 (Soils) of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan outlines that *“Planning permission will be granted for minerals and waste development that would result in the significant loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) where it is demonstrated that:*

- i) There is an overriding need for the facility;
- ii) There is no suitable alternative site of lower agricultural quality that provides the same benefits in terms of sustainability; and
- iii) In the case of temporary uses, the land could be restored to its previous agricultural quality or better or another beneficial after-use can be secured which outweighs any loss.”

Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy Planning

3.21 The Overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy (EN-1) is a material consideration for planning applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and has been included because it is the only policy document that provides any practical guidance in terms of alternative site assessments for energy projects. On 24 April 2025, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (‘DESNZ’) announced a consultation on revised versions of NPS EN-1 and NPS EN-3. Draft NPS EN-1 (2025) and Draft NPS EN-3 (2025) have reinforced the government’s ambition to deliver Clean Power by 2030 and net zero. The consultation closed on 29 May 2025.

3.22 The principles set out at paragraph 4.3.22 of EN-1 provide useful guidance, including the following:

“Given the level and urgency of need for new energy infrastructure, the Secretary of State should, subject to any relevant legal requirements (e.g. under the Habitats Regulations) which indicate otherwise, be guided by the following principles when deciding what weight should be given to alternatives:

- *the consideration of alternatives in order to comply with policy requirements should be carried out in a proportionate manner; and*
- *only alternatives that can meet the objectives of the proposed development need to be considered.”*

3.23 Paragraph 4.3.23 adds that *“The Secretary of State should be guided in considering alternative proposals by whether there is a realistic prospect of the alternative delivering the same infrastructure capacity (including energy security, climate change, and other environmental benefits) in the same timescale as the proposed development.”*

3.24 Paragraph 4.3.24 states that *“The Secretary of State should not refuse an application for development on one site simply because fewer adverse impacts would result from developing similar infrastructure on another suitable site, and should have regard as appropriate to the possibility that all suitable sites for energy infrastructure of the type proposed may be needed for future proposals.”*

- 3.25 Paragraph 4.3.27 notes that *“Alternative proposals which mean the necessary development could not proceed, for example because the alternative proposals are not commercially viable or alternative proposals for sites would not be physically suitable, can be excluded on the grounds that they are not important and relevant to the Secretary of State’s decision.”*
- 3.26 With paragraph 4.3.28 adding, *“Alternative proposals which are vague or immature can be excluded on the grounds that they are not important and relevant to the Secretary of State’s decision.”*
- 3.27 The above principles are effective provisions in terms of scoping the alternative site assessment in this document; although, as stated, there is currently no statutory or specific planning policy requirement to consider alternative sites in relation to the development of best and most versatile (or other) agricultural land in EN-1 or in other planning policy documents.

National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure

- 3.28 National Policy Statement (NPS) for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) is a material consideration for planning applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and has been included because it provides some practical guidance in terms of alternative site assessments for energy projects.
- 3.29 NPS EN-3 contains a section on solar photovoltaic generation, including factors influencing site selection. It lists the factors influencing the key considerations involved in the siting of a solar farm as:
- Irradiance and site topography;
 - Network connection;
 - Proximity of a site to dwellings;
 - Agricultural land classification and land type;
 - Accessibility;
 - Public rights of way; and
 - Security and lighting.
- 3.30 The above principles are effective provisions in terms of scoping the assessment; although, as previously stated, it is important to note that there is no statutory or specific planning policy requirement to consider alternative sites in relation to the development of best and most versatile (or other) agricultural land in the NPS or in other planning policy document.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Overview

- 4.1 This section sets out the qualitative, sequential methodology utilised to carry out the assessment. It should be noted that this type of methodology has been utilised to support many planning applications relating to solar farms in the UK.
- 4.2 The assessment is split into two parts:
1. **Previously developed land** – to establish whether there are any potential alternative sites located on previously developed land that could be utilised (note: the Proposed Site is not previously developed land); and
 2. **Lower grade agricultural land** – to establish whether there are any potential alternative sites located on lower grade agricultural land that could be utilised (note: the Proposed Site is classed as Grade 3 for the purposes of this assessment, as it comprises predominantly Grade 3b land with some Grade 3a land and non-agricultural land).
- 4.3 As previously stated, commercial rooftops have not been considered because (i) there are no known rooftops of sufficient size in the area and (ii) it is considered that assessing the potential for development of multiple rooftops is not comparable or realistic when considered relative to a ground-mounted solar farm. Furthermore, as previously stated, the NPPG states that in considering ground-mounted solar farms, the focus should be on the effective use of previously developed and non-agricultural land. Rooftops are not mentioned.
- 4.4 The methodology utilised to carry out the assessment is sequenced as follows:
- definition of a search area from the PoC for which the Applicant has an accepted and urgent grid connection point;
 - analysis of previously developed land;
 - analysis of lower grade agricultural land;
 - establishment of a long-list;
 - long-list filtering to create a short-list of sites; and
 - assessment of the short-list.
- 4.5 The above are explained in turn in the remainder of this section.

The Search Area

- 4.6 It is important to identify a proportionate and appropriate area of search (hereafter referred to as the 'Search Area') from which potential alternative sites are identified for assessment.
- 4.7 There is no specific guidance in relevant planning policy documents to determine the geographic area that should be applied. The Search Area for this assessment has therefore been based on a requirement to connect the Proposed Development to the electricity distribution network (hereafter referred to as the 'Grid') and the parameters associated with this, because any solar farm without a feasible grid connection is not viable. This includes consideration of whether the Applicant has a grid connection point from the DNO, the urgency of the grid connection date, and identifying sites within a reasonable distance from that grid connection point, typically being 3.5 km. Figure 1 at Appendix 1 illustrates the Search Area.
- 4.8 The PoC into the electricity grid for the Proposed Development would be via an existing electricity pylon / tower which is located 1 km north-west of the Proposed Site and connects to the 132kV overhead power line (OPL). In this instance, the Applicant has an accepted grid connection point with NGED (the DNO) with a connection date expected to be achieved in 2027-2032. As such, the Proposed Development would utilise available grid capacity on this OPL, which is a short distance from the Proposed Site, and that connection could be brought online feasibly within 2 years/ a short timeframe (following a positive determination). Furthermore, the Applicant is applying for the National Energy System Operator (NESO)'s 'Gate 2' stage, which is a key step in the 'First Ready, First Connected' approach to managing grid connections wherein projects are assessed for readiness and strategic alignment to receive a connection date and queue position. As land rights have been secured, the receipt of a consented scheme would further contribute to securing an earlier connection date. It is very important to emphasise the benefit that this offers as limited opportunities currently exist for grid connections nationally and it is therefore considered to be a material consideration³.
- 4.9 The Search Area for alternative sites has therefore been defined to include an area of 3.5 km around the PoC – please refer to Figure 1 at **Appendix 1**, which illustrates the Search Area. It is considered that 3.5 km is the likely maximum distance a cable connection could stretch without the Proposed Development becoming unviable. Although, these connections are theoretical as there is presently

³ Bramley, Hampshire APP/H1705/W/22/3304561 ('Bramley') 3304561.

no opportunity to connect to any of the alternative sites identified and surveyed in this report. A closer site to the PoC is still preferred, even when within 3.5 km.

Analysis of Previously Development Land

- 4.10 Relevant publicly available data was reviewed to identify previously developed land within the Search Area that could potentially be available for the Proposed Development.
- 4.11 The data included what are considered to comprise the most up-to-date, relevant adopted and/or emerging Development Plan Documents ('DPD') produced by the Council. The following types of allocation/sites were added to a 'long-list' of potentially suitable sites;
- land allocated for renewable energy or other similar development; and
 - land allocated for employment, or another land use potentially compatible with energy development.
- 4.12 To further supplement the DPDs, the following were also reviewed:
- the Estates Gazette website (<http://propertylink.estatesgazette.com>) where a search for commercial/industrial land can be carried out within a defined search area;
 - the most recent version of the Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council brownfield land register, which is maintained on the Councils website in accordance with Government guidelines; and
 - The Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment ('SHELAA').

Analysis of Lower Grade Agricultural Land

Scope – Agricultural Land Classification grades considered in the assessment

- 4.13 The ALC system classifies land into five grades (1-5), with Grade 3 subdivided into sub-grades 3a and 3b. The BMV land is defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a and is the land, which is most flexible, productive, and efficient in response to inputs, and which can best deliver food and non-food crops for future generations.
- 4.14 The nationally available (or 'Provisional') ALC survey data obtained from Natural England does not distinguish between Subgrade 3a and 3b. There are small areas within the Search Area where the subdivision data is available from Natural England and, where available, this has been applied.
- 4.15 The Proposed Site comprises predominantly sub-grade 3b (93%) 'moderate quality' agricultural land, with a small amount of sub-grade 3a (6%) BMV land and non-agricultural land (1%) as

established by the ALC Report that forms part of the planning application submission. Therefore, the assessment set out in this report focusses on considering whether there are any potential alternative Grade 4 or 5 sites, i.e., lower grade agricultural land compared to the Proposed Site.

4.16 Figure 2, at Appendix 1, shows the ALC grades of the agricultural land located within the search area.

Site Identification Criteria

4.17 In order to identify potentially suitable sites, the identification process utilised Geographic Information Systems ('GIS') to map out and identify the different agricultural land grades of land within the search area, as per the Government's nationally available Provisional ALC data.

4.18 Land which was found to be of a lower land grade was then split into potential sites for assessment. The sites were defined through the application of professional judgement with the focus on viability and having regard to the following:

- irregular areas discounted;
- any urban/built up areas removed;
- clear and continuous area of land (e.g. avoiding woodland);
- avoiding sites split by roads, railway lines and water bodies, where possible; and
- boundaries defined by natural and man-made features (e.g. rivers, woodland, roads and properties).

4.19 Any identified sites were then added to the long-list.

Filtering of the Long-List

4.20 The long-list was then 'filtered' to move any sites below 26.9 ha (the approximate developable area of the Proposed Site). Any sites that did not meet this criterion were filtered out.

4.21 Multiple sites equating to a total of 26.9 ha were not considered in the assessment, because a scheme comprising of multiple sites is not considered to represent a comparable alternative. This is because in comparison to a single, continuous site, multiple sites would have other potentially limiting factors, including, but not limited to, legal agreements with multiple landowners; the complexity of connecting multiple sites to the electricity distribution network; and the potential for intensified disruption associated with the development of multiple sites.

4.22 For the above reasons, the consideration of multiple sites is not considered proportionate, realistic or deliverable as an alternative when considering, amongst other things, the principles set out in paragraph 4.3.22 of NPS EN-1.

Assessment of the Short-List

4.23 The remaining sites were added to a ‘short-list’ and assessed against a range of viability criteria (determined with reference to relevant planning policy), as follows:

- Is the land likely to be available, e.g. on the market or proposed for another use?
- Distance from the potential point of connection – is the potential point of connection on site or further away?
- Are there obstacles between the site and potential point of connection?
- Shape of the site – is it regular/irregular?
- Is the land clear and developable?
- Flood risk areas – Flood Zone 1 favoured.
- Any other relevant considerations?

4.24 The assessment of the short-list determined whether there are any potential feasible alternative sites. The assessment utilised professional experience and judgement to draw conclusions.

4.25 It should be noted that the consideration of some criteria is repeated at the short-list stage, in order to apply the criteria to sites generated by the search of previously developed land or non-agricultural land, as these sites were not subjected to the GIS exercise utilised by the search for lower or equal grade agricultural land (where these criteria has previously been applied).

5.0 ASSESSMENT

5.1 This section sets out the following parts of the assessment:

- Previously development land search;
- Lower grade agricultural land search;
- Long list and filtering; and
- Assessment of sites on the short-list.

Previously Developed Land

5.2 The Council’s Development Plan Documents and supporting evidence base documents produced by the Council were reviewed to search for previously developed land for the long-list. The respective brownfield land registers and the Estates Gazette were also reviewed.

5.3 **Eleven sites** were added to the long-list following analysis of previously developed land

Lower Grade Agricultural Land

5.4 The GIS exercise set out in Section 4 was used to set out ALC grades in the search area and if relevant divide lower grade agricultural land into alternative sites. The sequential application of the GIS criteria is illustrated in Figures 1-5 of Appendix 1 of this report. Figure 5 shows the location of unconstrained land in the Search Area.

5.5 **Zero sites** were added to the long-list following the analysis of lower grade agricultural land as all land identified within the search area was Grade 2 or 3, i.e., higher or equal grade to the Proposed Site.

Long-List and Filtering

5.6 The long-list (with application of the filtering criterion) is set out in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Long-list and Filtering

Site Reference	Site Address	Approx. Area (ha)	Source	Filtering – 26.9 ha or above?
AS36	Thornton Nurseries and Land South of Reservoir Road, Thornton	0.85	Brownfield Land Register	No – insufficient size
LPR130	Barlestone Road, Bagworth	2.15	SHELAA	No – insufficient size
AS1	Land adjacent 78 Main Street, Bagworth	0.8	SHELAA	No – insufficient size
AS435	Land South of Verdon Sawmills, Newbold Verdon	0.63	SHELAA	No – insufficient size
AS615B	Land at Church Farm, Washpit Lane, Barlestone (Site B)	0.43	SHELAA	No – insufficient size

Site Reference	Site Address	Approx. Area (ha)	Source	Filtering – 26.9 ha or above?
LRP161	Land north of Bagworth Road, Nailstone	7.5	SHELAA	No – insufficient size
LPR130	Land at Barlestone Road, Bagworth	2.52	SHELAA	No – insufficient size
THO18	Merrylees Industrial Estate, Merrylees Road	8.10**	Site Allocations & DM Policies DPD	No – insufficient size
NEW27	Verdon Sawmills, Bagworth Road, Newbold Heath	0.90**	Site Allocations & DM Policies DPD	No – insufficient size
NAI13PP	Land at Nailstone Colliery	15.00**	Site Allocations & DM Policies DPD	No – insufficient size
N/A	258 Station Road, Bagworth, Coalville, Leicestershire, LE67	0.02	Estates Gazette	No – insufficient size

*Area when measured on GIS. Area in SHELAA text was lesser.

**Estimates

Assessment of the Short-List

- 5.7 As shown in Table 5.1 above, none of the sites included in the long-list are suitable for the Proposed Development due to being of an insufficient size. Therefore, a short-list could not be created.
- 5.8 The criteria set out in Section 4 of this report are applied to the Proposed Site to provide context and demonstrate suitability and would be applied to short-listed sites if any had been identified. The assessment was desk-based; carried out with reference to, amongst other things, available aerial imagery, and Figures 1-5 Appendix 1.

The Proposed Site

- 5.9 The Proposed Site comprises of 26.9 ha of arable agricultural land comprising two parcels split across three fields located south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone.

Table 5.2: Assessment of the Proposed Site

CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT
Is the land likely to be available, e.g. on the market or proposed for another use?	The Proposed Site is available to the Applicant, is ready for development and is not subject to any other proposed uses or allocations that might be considered incompatible.
Is the topography favourable?	The Proposed Site benefits from favourable topography for the purposes of a solar farm.

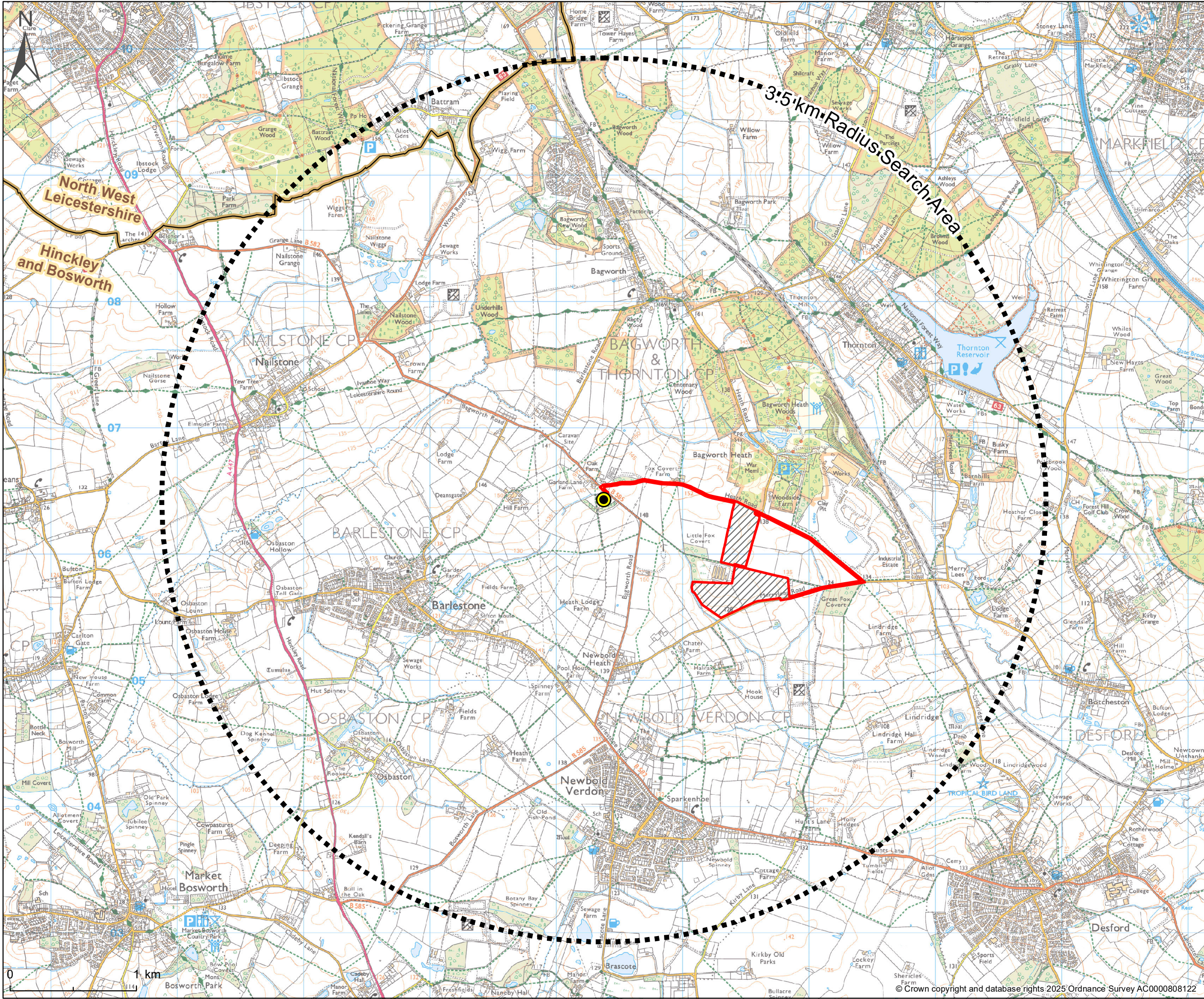
Distance from the potential point of connection – is the potential point of connection onsite or further away?	The point of connection is located approximately 1km north west of the Proposed Site and is therefore likely to be viable.
Are there obstacles between the site and point of connection?	The proposed cable route runs along approximately 3.0 km of land comprised almost entirely of public highway land with a short distance traversing private / third party land (approx. 500 m). As such, the route is largely unobstructed, allowing any further damage or impact on agricultural land to be minimised.
Shape of the site – is it regular/irregular?	The Proposed Site consists of a number of agricultural fields which are considered to be of optimum shape for a solar farm, with the Site consisting of three parcels of land of a rough rectangular shape.
Is the land clear and developable?	The land is clear of built development and considered to be developable.
Are there any PRoWs crossing the site?	The Proposed Site is crossed by one PRoW, which runs along the northern boundary of the southern parcel and briefly enters the centre of the Proposed Site. A second public footpath intersects the underground cable route on Heath Road. There is also a PRoW runs parallel to the southern cable route to the east.
Flood risk areas – Flood Zone 1 – favoured.	The Proposed Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1.
Any other relevant considerations?	An Agricultural Land Classification survey found that the majority of the Proposed Site is Grade 3b at 93%, with the remainder being Grade 3a (6%) and non-agricultural land (1%).

5.10 **Summary and discussion:** The Proposed Site complies with the main criteria, including that it has a viable connection within an approximately 1 km radius of the Proposed Site for which a connection agreement is secured; the Site is immediately available to the Applicant for the development of a solar farm; and the Site is clear, developable and of regular shape. Further to this, the Site is regular in shape, has favourable topography, is entirely clear and developable, and is entirely within Flood Zone 1. It benefits from close proximity to the PoC, with the cable route minimising any further impacts on agricultural land. As shown in Figure 2 in Appendix 1, the wider surrounding area is Grades 2 or 3 (with some known patches of subgrades 3a and 3b), being higher or equal grade agricultural land. The closest collections of residential properties are located approximately 400m to the south-west on Merrylees Road and approximately 750m to the west on Bagworth Road. There is an existing solar farm located approximately 500m to the south of the Proposed Site, but due the modest size of both along with existing and proposed landscaping it is not considered likely for the two sites to share any significant cumulative impacts.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The Search Area is constrained due to proximity to the PoC. It is very important to emphasise that limited opportunities currently exist for grid connections nationally, however, in this case the Applicant benefits from an accepted grid connection point with NGED with a connection date expected to be achieved between 2027-3032. The fact that the Proposed Development would utilise available spare grid capacity on this OPL, which is a short distance from the Proposed Site, and that the connection could be brought online feasibly within 2 years (if a positive determination is received) is considered to be a material consideration.
- 6.2 The Site-Specific ALC survey for the Site found it to be predominantly Subgrade 3b (non-BMV) with a small portion of Grade 3a (BMV land) and non-agricultural land. The Search Area is constrained due to the agricultural land being a mixture of Grade 2 and Grade 3 (both of which are BMV) according to the Government's Provisional ALC Survey data, with some areas of known subgrade 3a and 3b land, all of which are of a higher or equal grade to the Proposed Site. As a result, no alternative agricultural sites could be identified on lower grade agricultural land and none were added to the long-list or short-list.
- 6.3 With regards to brownfield sites, 11 sites were identified after careful review of the Council's brownfield register, SHELAA, Site Allocations Document and other external sources and were subsequently added to the long-list. However, none of these were of an appropriate size and therefore did not make the short-list.
- 6.4 It is therefore concluded that there are no sites which comprise a more feasible alternative to the Proposed Site. With regard to this, the Applicant believes that the need for the development along with the conformity and support of local and national planning policy means this type of development is considered acceptable, subject to appropriate mitigation. Paragraph 168(a) of the NPPF (2024) outlines that renewable energy and low carbon projects do not require justification by the applicant and that developments of this nature should be approved if the impacts are acceptable.
- 6.5 This ASA has systematically assessed all previously developed land and lower grade agricultural land within a 3.5 km radius of the PoC. It is concluded that there are no reasonable alternative locations of lesser agricultural and environmental value on which the Proposed Development can be located, notwithstanding it meets all the tests of it being suitable, available and achievable.

APPENDIX 1: FIGURES 1 – 5 (GIS FIGURES)

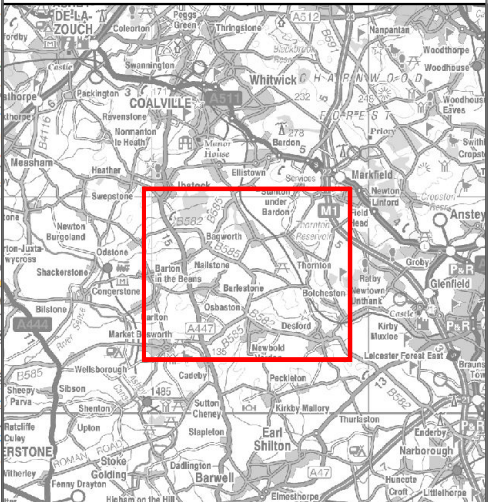


PROJECT NAME:

Heath Road

KEY:

- Point of Connection (PoC)
- Search area (3.5 km from PoC)
- ▨ Planning Application Boundary
- ▭ Local Authority Boundary



TITLE:

Figure 1
Search Area

DATE: 03/06/2025

DRAWN BY: CH

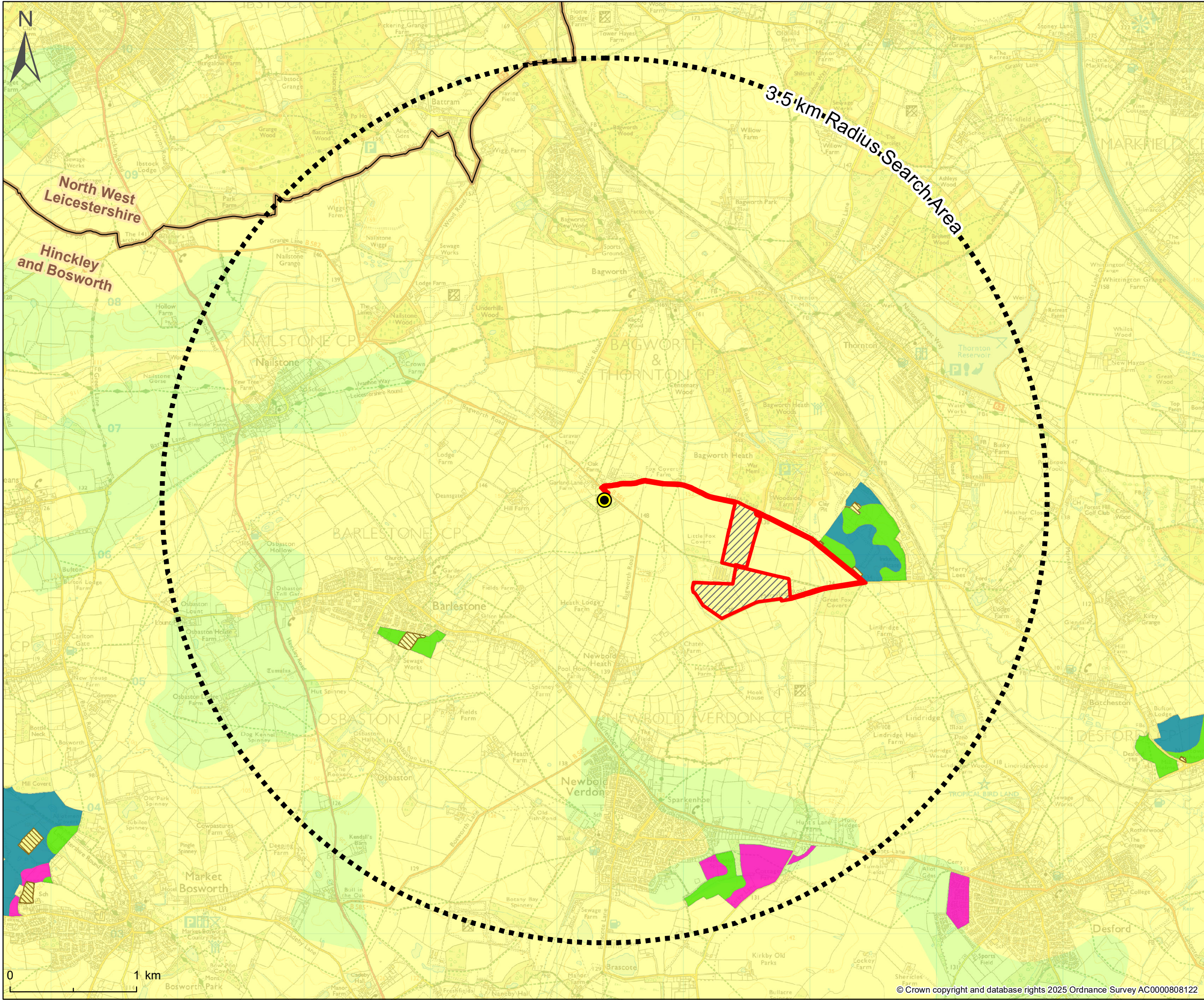
SIZE: A3

CHECKED BY: CH

SCALE: 1:27,500

CO-ORD SYSTEM: BNG

© Crown copyright and database rights 2025 Ordnance Survey AC0000808122



PROJECT NAME:

Heath Road

- KEY:
-  Point of Connection (PoC)

 Search area (3.5 km from PoC)

 Planning Application Boundary

 Local Authority Boundary

ALC Grade - Post 1988:

 Grade 1

 Grade 2

 Grade 3a

 Grade 3b

 Grade 4

 Grade 5

 Not Surveyed

 Other

ALC Grade - Provisional:

 Grade 1 - Excellent Quality

 Grade 2 - Very Good Quality

 Grade 3 - Good to Moderate Quality

 Grade 4 - Poor Quality

 Grade 5 - Very Poor Quality

 Non Agricultural

 Urban

Note: This map features nationally available ALC data. © Natural England copyright. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2025.



TITLE:

Figure 2
Agricultural Land Classification

DATE: 03/06/2025	DRAWN BY: CH
SIZE: A3	CHECKED BY: CH
SCALE: 1:27,500	CO-ORD SYSTEM: BNG