

DWD

Planning, Design and Access Statement

Heath Road Solar Farm

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF PLANS

APPENDIX 2: RECENT AND RELEVANT APPEAL DECISIONS

Revision	Description	Originated	Checked	Reviewed	Authorised	Date
1.0	DRAFT (CLIENT ISSUE)	OW	CD	CD	RB	June 2025
DWD Job Number: 15981						

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Renewable Connections Developments Ltd is seeking planning permission from Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council ('HBBC') for the construction, operation and subsequent decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic farm and associated infrastructure on land at Heath Road, Bagworth (the 'Site'), located south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone. It is estimated that the solar panels would generate 21.5 megawatts of renewable energy, enough to power approximately 7,581 homes annually and displacing up to 3,856 tonnes of CO2 per year. Note, the Site includes two cable route corridors to the point of connection into the electricity grid however the proposals do not include a Battery Energy Storage System ('BESS'). The proposal is referred to collectively as the 'Proposed Development' and the project known as 'Heath Road Solar Farm'.

The primary purpose of this Planning, Design and Access Statement (this document) is to set out the planning case for the Proposed Development, with reference to local and national planning policy. This Statement should be read in conjunction with the other documents that comprise the planning application submission, including the numerous environmental and technical reports that have been produced to satisfy policy requirements and allow officers at HBBC to provide a comprehensive review of the application.

The Applicant devised a comprehensive engagement plan to consult as widely as possible with the local community. The Applicant was able to engage effectively with the community and stakeholders through a combination of innovative digital engagement, and traditional methods which are set out in the Consultation Report submitted with this application.

The Proposed Development complies with relevant planning policy and there are significant benefits associated with it. This includes substantial biodiversity gains of +66.86% habitat units and +47.06% hedgerow units and creation of 3.5 ha of skylark and mitigation area with skylark plots and 1.5 ha of ecological mitigation area for skylark and other farmland birds. The environmental and technical reports that form part of the planning application submission demonstrate that there would be no unacceptable environmental impacts.

These factors, when combined with the significant need for renewable energy, mean that the planning balance (and, in particular, when considered in the context of the tests under Section 38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) is weighted significantly in favour of the Proposed Development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Overview

- 1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement ('PDAS') has been prepared in support of an application for full planning permission submitted to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (the 'Council' or 'HBBC') under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) on behalf of Renewable Connections Developments Ltd (the 'Applicant').
- 1.2 The Site is located to the south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford, and east of Barlestone.
- 1.3 The Site covers approximately 31.9 hectares ('ha'), comprising the main site of 26.9 ha agricultural land where the solar panels and associated would be located (hereafter referred to the 'Main Site') and two cable route corridors to the Point of Connection (PoC) into the electricity grid. The PoC into the electricity grid is at the existing electricity pylon/ tower located 1 kilometre ('km') north-west of the Main Site (at its closest point). 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 underground cable corridor routes extend from Heath Road onto the B585 (Bagworth Road) for a short distance before crossing third party / private land where the PoC is located. Both cable route corridors predominantly traverse the public highway and would be located within the carriageway of the public highway.
- 1.4 The Proposed Development benefits from an agreed PoC a short distance from the Main Site enabling it to provide a significant contribution to UK targets. 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 consideration. Further to this, 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.
- 1.5 The proposal comprises the construction, operation and decommissioning of a ground-mounted solar farm with associated infrastructure, including a cable route corridor to the PoC, inverters, substation compound, security cameras, fencing, access tracks and landscaping. The proposal is referred to collectively as the 'Proposed Development' and the project is known as 'Heath Road Solar Farm'. It is estimated that the solar panels would generate up to 21.5 megawatts ('MW') of

renewable energy – enough electricity to power approximately 7,581 homes annually and displace up to 3,856 tonnes of CO₂ per year..

- 1.6 The Proposed Development does not include a Battery Energy Storage System ('BESS'). Planning permission for a 40 year operational lifespan is sought.
- 1.7 Furthermore, the Proposed Development would deliver substantial biodiversity gains of +66.86% habitat units and +47.06% hedgerow units, as well as the creation of 3.5 ha of skylark mitigation area with skylark plots and 1.5 ha ecological mitigation area for skylark and other farmland birds.

The Applicant

- 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.

Pre-Application Consultation

- 1.9 The Applicant has carried out a comprehensive and meaningful pre-application consultation exercise in respect of the Proposed Development, primarily focused on the local community, but also including consultation with the Council and other key consultees.
- 1.10 The local community consultation included a newsletter mailout, emails, an online consultation website, and an in-person consultation event.
- 1.11 The consultation period ran for approximately 4 weeks from 27 May 2025 until 27 June 2025. An in-person village hall meeting was held on Tuesday 17th June 2025 from 16:00 – 19:00 at Bagworth Community Centre, Station Rd, Bagworth, Coalville LE67 1BH for all members of the public and was attended by 4 people and around 3 pieces of feedback were left via the feedback form. The full details of the consultation methods and events can be found in the Consultation Report that accompanies this application.
- 1.12 As set out in the Consultation Report, feedback received was generally positive and respondents acknowledged the need for renewable energy, the suitable location and proposed site layout, and the landscaping and biodiversity enhancement initiatives being proposed. Concern was raised regarding the replacement of arable land for crops and construction traffic.
- 1.13 The Applicant considered the points raised by consultees during the engagement process. The Applicant considers that information provided in the Transport Report, Construction Traffic Management Plan, Alternative Site Assessment and Planning, Design and Access Statement suitably

addresses the concerns raised regarding loss of arable/cropland and construction traffic. Further to this, the majority of feedback received was positive and as a result no changes or additions are deemed to be necessary.

Environmental Impact Assessment

- 1.14 The Applicant submitted a request for an Environmental Impact Assessment ('EIA') Screening Opinion from the Council on 6 June 2025 (Reference: 25/00179/EAS) which considers that the Proposed Development would not be EIA Development. At the time of writing, the Council is yet to issue its Screening Opinion.

Planning Application Submission

- 1.15 The application submission consists of the following documents:
- Application Cover Letter;
 - Application Form and Certificates;
 - Community Infrastructure Levy ('CIL') form;
 - Planning, Design and Access Statement ('PDAS'; this document);
 - Consultation Report;
 - Alternative Site Assessment ('ASA');
 - Plans (the full list of plans is itemised at **Appendix 1** of this report);
 - Ecological Appraisal and Biodiversity Net Gain ('BNG') Report;
 - Landscape and Visual Assessment ('LVA');
 - Landscape Strategy Plan;
 - Agricultural Land Classification ('ALC') Report;
 - Cultural Heritage Assessment ('CHA');
 - Geophysical Survey;
 - Flood Risk Assessment ('FRA') and Drainage Strategy;
 - Mineral Resource Assessment;
 - Transport Statement;
 - Construction Traffic Management Plan ('CTMP');

- Tree Survey and Plan, and Arboricultural Impact Assessment ('AIA');
- Noise Assessment; and
- Glint and Glare Assessment.

1.16 The application has been submitted electronically via the Planning Portal and the requisite application fee has been paid to the Council.

The Purpose and Structure of this Document

1.17 The primary purpose of this PDAS is to demonstrate how the design of the Proposed Development is a suitable response to the Site and its setting, and to demonstrate that it can be adequately accessed. Furthermore, how the Applicant has taken account of relevant planning policy and the extent to which the Proposed Development is compliant with the Statutory Development Plan.

1.18 In doing so, this PDAS draws upon and cross-refers, where relevant, to the other documents that form part of the planning application submission.

1.19 The PDAS has been prepared in accordance with Article 9 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. Article 9 requires that all applications for major development, such as the Proposed Development, are accompanied by a 'design and access statement' that should:

- explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development;
- demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how the design of the development takes that context into account;
- explain the policy adopted as to access, and how policies relating to access in relevant local development documents have been taken into account;
- state what, if any, consultation has been undertaken on issues relating to access to the development and what account has been taken of the outcome of any such consultation; and
- explain how any specific issues which might affect access to the development have been addressed.

1.20 The above details are primarily set out in Sections 5 and 6 of this document.

Structure

1.21 The remainder of this document is structured as follows:

Table 1.1: Structure

SECTION	TITLE	OVERVIEW
Section 2	Need	Sets out the significant need that exists for solar and other renewables.
Section 3	The Site and Surrounding Area	Describes the Site and its key features, the planning history of relevance that relates to it, any local planning designations and allocations that apply, and the Applicant's site selection process.
Section 4	Proposed Development	Provides an overview of the Proposed Development, including use, amount, layout, appearance and access.
Section 5	Design Approach	Outlines the approach that the Applicant has taken to the design of the Proposed Development and how the design has evolved through the pre-application process.
Section 6	Design Components	Outlines the design and access details of the Proposed Development, including layout, use, amount, scale, appearance, access and landscaping.
Section 7	Planning Policy Context	Sets out the legislative and policy framework for the determination of the planning application.
Section 8	Assessment of the Proposed Development	Provides an assessment of the Proposed Development against relevant policy at national and local level.
Section 9	Summary & Conclusion	Sets out the conclusions of this PDAS in terms of the overall acceptability of the Proposed Development.

2.0 NEED

- 2.1 There is a significant and quantifiable need for the deployment of solar farms and other renewable and low energy generation, which is being driven by government at local and national level in the UK.
- 2.2 In November 2024, the Government announced a new UK target to reduce emissions by 81% by 2035 at COP29 in Azerbaijan¹. It was outlined that tackling the climate crisis is essential to national energy security, economic growth, and efforts to protect current and future generations.
- 2.3 They also reiterated that decarbonising the power sector is integral to achieving this goal and requires major investment in proven technologies, such as solar and battery storage.
- 2.4 More recently, in December 2024, the Government released their Clean Power 2030 Action Plan² to deliver at least 95% of Great Britain's generation through clean power by 2030; reducing the carbon intensity of the UK's generation from 171 Grams of carbon dioxide equivalent per kilowatt-hour of electricity ('CO₂e/kWh') in 2023 to well below 50gCO₂e/kWh in 2030.
- 2.5 The report recognises that solar plays a key role in this target, and there is currently 16.6 Gigawatts ('GW') of solar capacity in the UK with 23.8GW within committed projects or being constructed. The Government expect at least a further 21.2GW in deployment within just 6 years to reach their target of 45-47 GW, by 2030. The above requires a monumental increase in installed capacity within a very short timeframe.
- 2.6 The Clean Power Action Plan also supports the UK Government's aim to decarbonise the wider economy by 2050. By 2050, annual electricity demand is likely to at least double as the UK pursue the electrification of heat in buildings, transport, and industry. The deployment of renewable energy projects at pace, such as solar, is vital to fulfil this increased demand.
- 2.7 The UK Government adopted a revised suite of Energy National Policy Statement ('NPS') in January 2024. EN-1 (Overarching NPS) sets out strong policy support for Carbon Capture and Storage ('CCS'), hydrogen infrastructure and other forms of low carbon generation, including solar development.
- 2.8 Whilst the Aldermaston Solar Farm project does not constitute an National Significant Industrial Project ('NSIP'), it is worth noting that for the appeal for Land at Cruxton Farm

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-shows-international-leadership-in-tackling-climate-crisis>

² <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675bfaa4cfbf84c3b2bcf986/clean-power-2030-action-plan.pdf>

[APP/D1265/W/23/3317593], the Inspector concluded that NPS EN-1 and EN-3 are material considerations for projects consented under the Town and Country Planning Act regime (See Paragraph 28 of the Judgement). Part 3 of EN-1 identifies the urgent 'need' for energy infrastructure, including solar. It also recognises at point 3.3.20 that *"a secure, reliable, affordable, net zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar"*.

- 2.9 Furthermore, paragraph 4.2.4 states that the Government has concluded that there is a 'critical national priority' (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure. Paragraph 4.2.5 confirms that this includes *"all onshore and offshore generation that does not involve fossil fuel combustion"*.
- 2.10 Paragraph 4.2.6 states *"The overarching need case for each type of energy infrastructure and the substantial weight which should be given to this need in assessing applications, as set out in paragraphs 3.2.6 to 3.2.8 of EN-1, is the starting point for all assessments of energy infrastructure applications."*
- 2.11 NPS EN-1 also features more specific information on the role of storage and states that it *"...has a key role to play in achieving net zero and providing flexibility to the energy system, so that high volumes of low carbon power, heat and transport can be integrated"* (paragraph 3.3.25).
- 2.12 EN-3 (Renewable technology specific NPS) includes a specific section (section 2.10) on 'Solar Photovoltaic ('PV') Generation'. It outlines that *"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 by 2050. As such solar is a key part of the government's strategy for low-cost decarbonisation of power"*. The section also recognises that solar is one of the most established renewable electricity technologies in the UK; can be quickly built out; and the cheapest form of electricity generation. It also supports the co-location of solar with battery storage.
- 2.13 The revised draft of the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'), which was adopted in December 2024, also demonstrates the Government's recognition of the urgent need to tackle climate change and their strong support for technology, which will assist with this aim.
- 2.14 Paragraph 168a now outlines that the Council must *"give significant weight to the proposal's contribution to renewable energy generation and a net zero future"*.
- 2.15 In addition to the need at a national level, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and made a pledge for the borough to become a net zero carbon council by 2030 and borough by 2050. The Council declared a biodiversity emergency in July 2023.

A Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy 2024-2028 for the Council sets out key areas for action to achieve the Council's priorities for climate action across the district for 2024-2028. One of these key areas for action is to *"Promote the use of renewable energy/energy reduction and investigate opportunities for carbon capture and storage"*. This includes a commitment to: *"develop the Local Plan to include policies for climate change mitigation and adaptations to relevant developments, and support, where appropriate, the potential installation of new solar farms and renewable energy schemes"*.

3.0 THE SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 3.1 This section describes the location and key features of the Site and surrounding area, identifies any relevant planning and environmental designations, and explains the Applicant's site selection process.

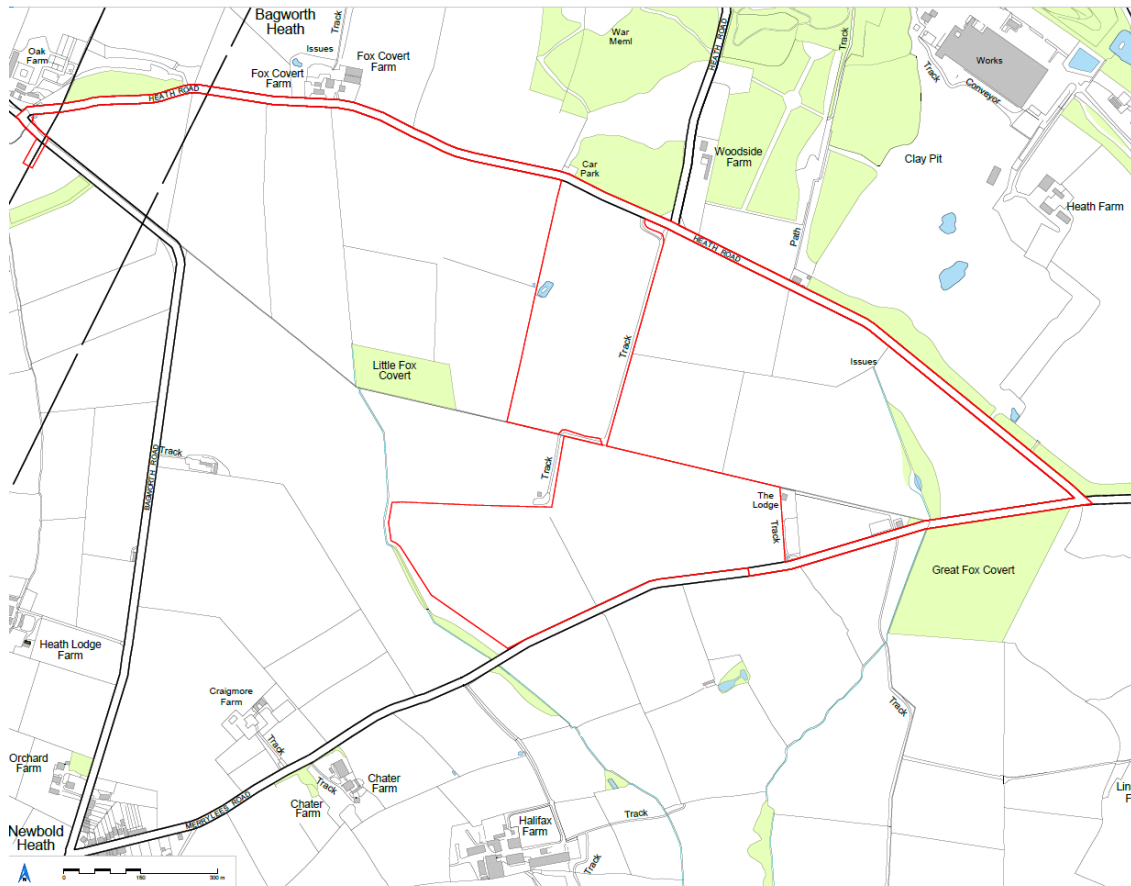
Location, Description and Use

- 3.2 The Site covers approximately 31.9 ha of land, which includes the Main Site where the solar panels would be located comprising 26.9 ha of arable agricultural land comprising two parcels split across three fields set broadly within a rectilinear pattern and two cable route corridors to the PoC. It is situated to the south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone. The Site is within the administrative area of HBBC and Leicestershire County Council ('LCC'). The Site is shown in Figure 3.1 below and in the submitted Site Location Plan (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-SP-01).
- 3.3 The Main 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.
- 3.4 The two cable route corridors extend northwards to the PoC, an existing electricity pylon approximately 1 km north-west of the Main Site (at its closest point). The southern cable route extends along Merrylees Road before turning north onto Heath Road where it eventually joins with the northern cable route. Both cable routes extend from Heath Road onto the B585 (Bagworth Road) for a short distance before entering private land where the PoC is located. Both cable route corridors would be located within the carriageway of the public highway.
- 3.5 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/quarry directly to the north-east of the Site, and the 2019 approved quarry expansion (HBBC ref. 2018/0669/04; LCC ref. 2018/CM/0110/LCC) which will directly adjoin the Site to the east, provide a more urban/industrialised context. These are detailed further below. The topography of both the Site and nearby land is relatively flat.
- 3.6 The closest settlement is the village of Newbold Verdon situated approximately 1.2 km south-west of the Site. The closest residential properties are located approximately 250 m to the north at Woodside Farm, along Merrylees Road approximately 400 m to the south-west, and along

Bagworth Road approximately 750 m to the west. Further scattered properties and agricultural land are situated to the west. A school and residential properties, some of which are in a small cluster, are situated to the north-west. However, these properties are over 1 km from the Main Site boundary.

- 3.7 Renewable energy generation is already a prominent component in the area, as the 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]).
- 3.8 There are also a number of wind turbines in close proximity to the Site. The nearest is 42 m high located at the adjoining farmstead (granted consent on 23 September 2013; LPA ref. 13/00600/FUL). There is another 110 m high wind turbine approximately 350 m to the west (granted consent on 23 July 2014; LPA ref. 14/00381/FUL).
- 3.9 Part of the operational claypit and industrial estate situated approximately 500 m to the east / north- east is designated as an employment site. In addition, there are designated open spaces and country parks in proximity, namely: Centenary Wood and Royal Tigers adjacent to the north of the Site on the opposite side of Heath Road; Bagworth Heath Country Park approximately 110 m to the north of the Site; Woodland, The Hollow approximately 1.2 km north; and Laurel Farm Wood approximately 1.35 km northwest.
- 3.10 The Main 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 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.

Figure 3.1: Site Location

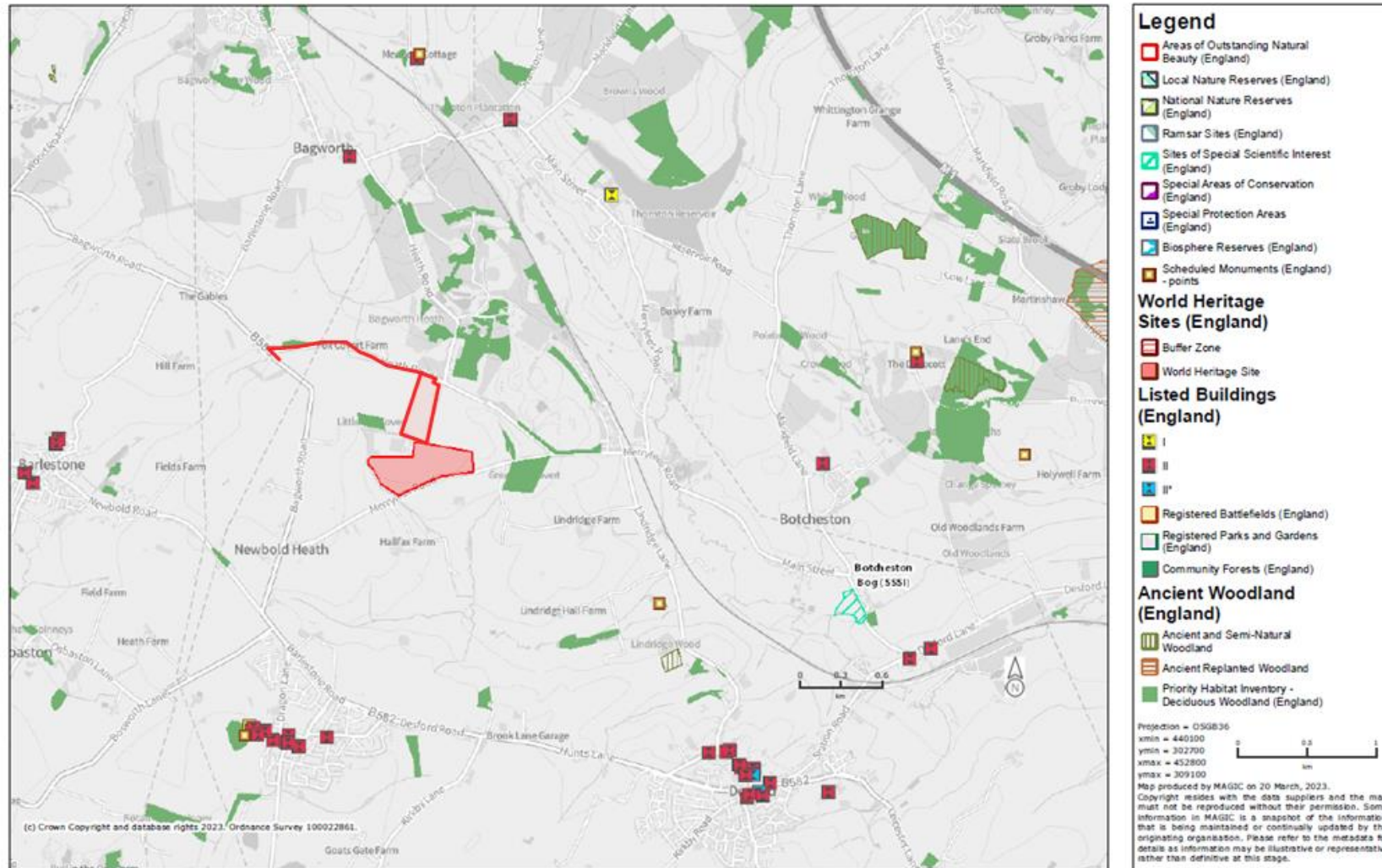


Planning, Heritage, and Environmental Designations

- 3.11 The MAGIC Map in Figure 3.2 confirms that the Site is not covered by any national or international designations or assets that relate to biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage or other e.g. Special Protection Areas, Scheduled Monuments or National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The nearest designations to the Site are two pockets of Priority Habitat (Deciduous Woodland), one located to the immediate north of the underground cable route on the northern side of Heath Road and another 85 m to the west of the northern parcel.
- 3.12 In the general vicinity of the Site, Botchesdon Bog Site of Specific Scientific Interest ('SSSI') is situated over 2.7 km to the southeast. A number of designated National Forests are situated to the north of the Site on the other side of Heath Road. The National Forest is a project to regenerate land previously known for coal mining and heavy industry across 200 square miles of the Midlands.
- 3.13 With regard to heritage assets, a number of listed buildings are located within 2 km of the Site, primarily Grade II but also including the Grade I Listed Newbold Verdon Hall and its designated Conservation Area, which is 2 km south-west of the Site. Two Schedule Monuments (moated sites) are also located within 2 km of the Site: one being the 'Moated Site south of The Hall' (Asset 1,

1009198) which is 2 km south-east at Newbold Vernon and the other being the 'Moated Site 440m south-west of Lindridge Fields Farm' (Asset 2, List Entry 1017053) which is 1.7 km south-east of the Site.

Figure 3.2 Environmental and Heritage Designations



3.14 The Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1, the area at lowest risk of flooding, as shown in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.3 Environment Agency Flood Risk Map for Planning Extract

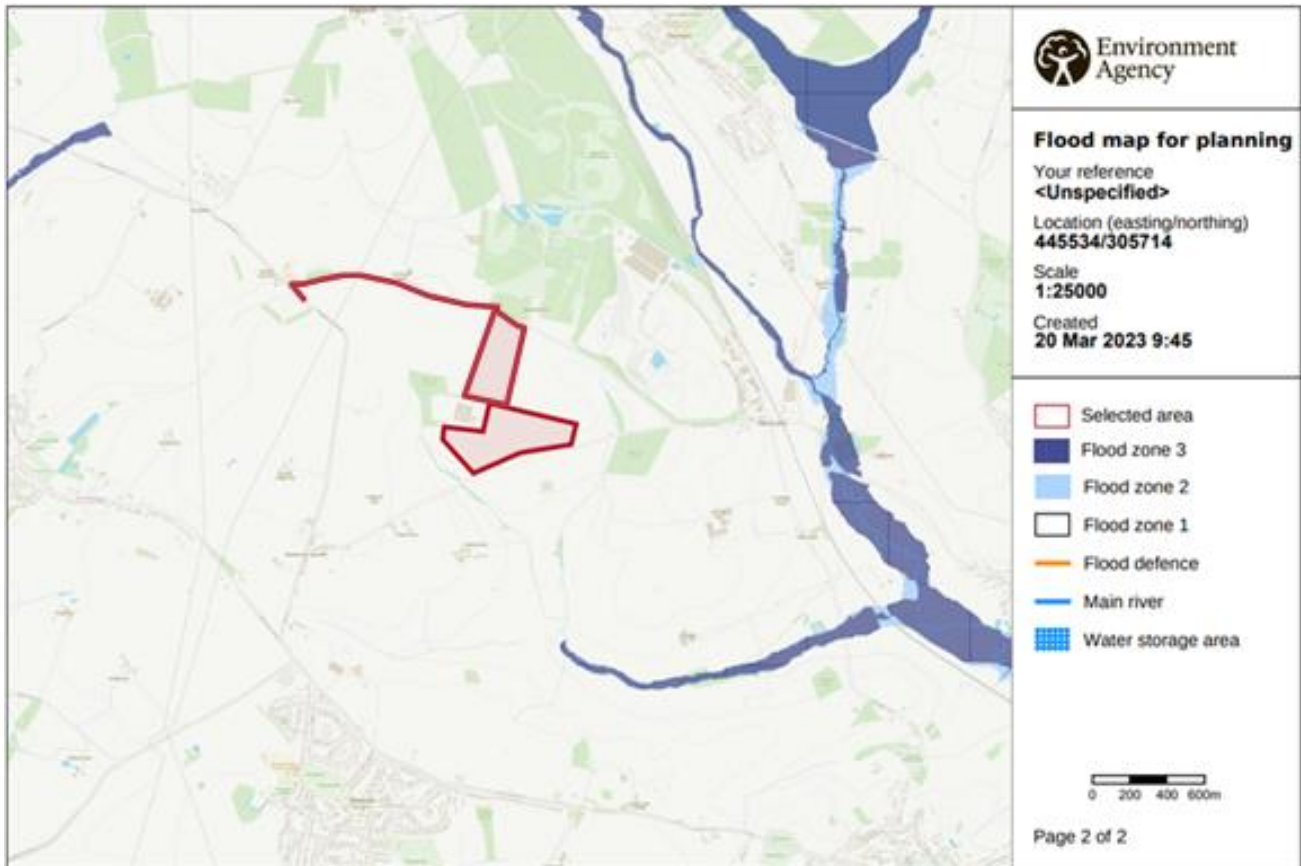
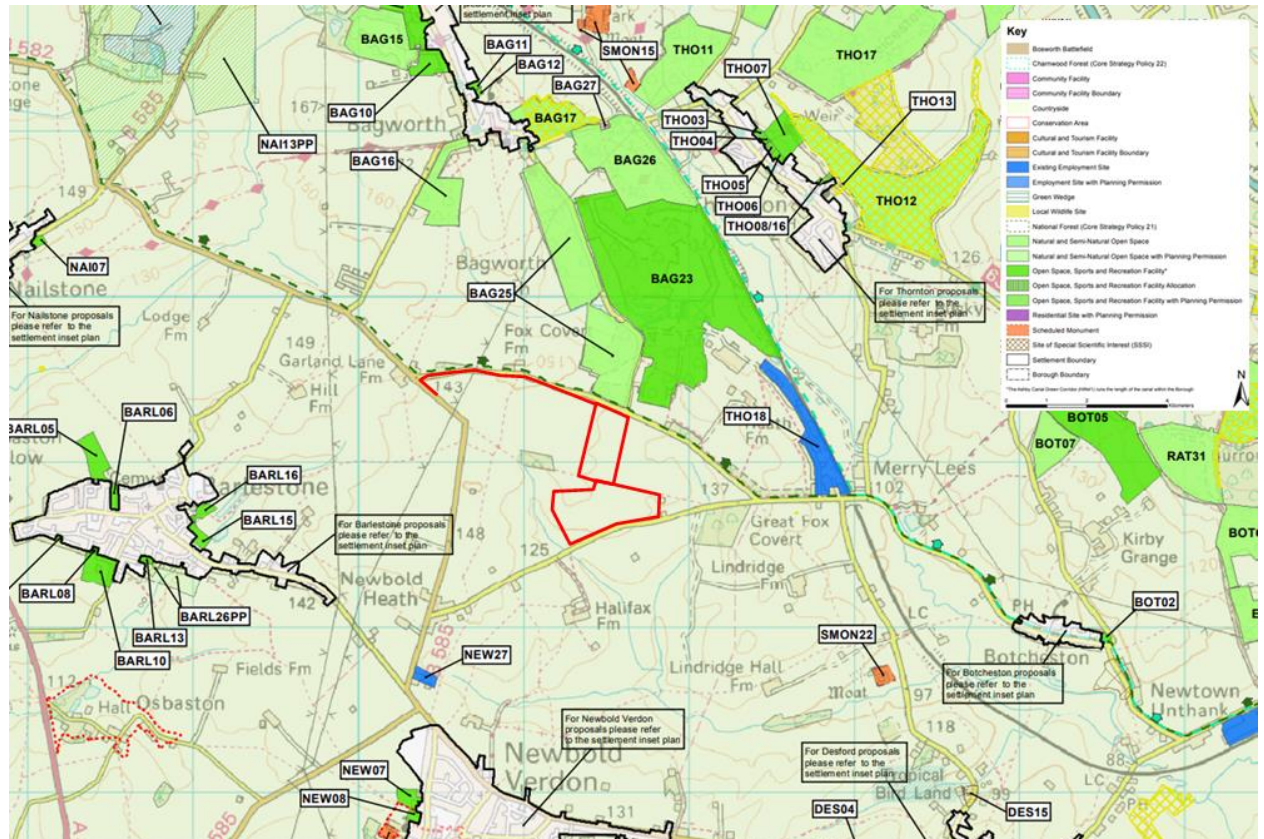
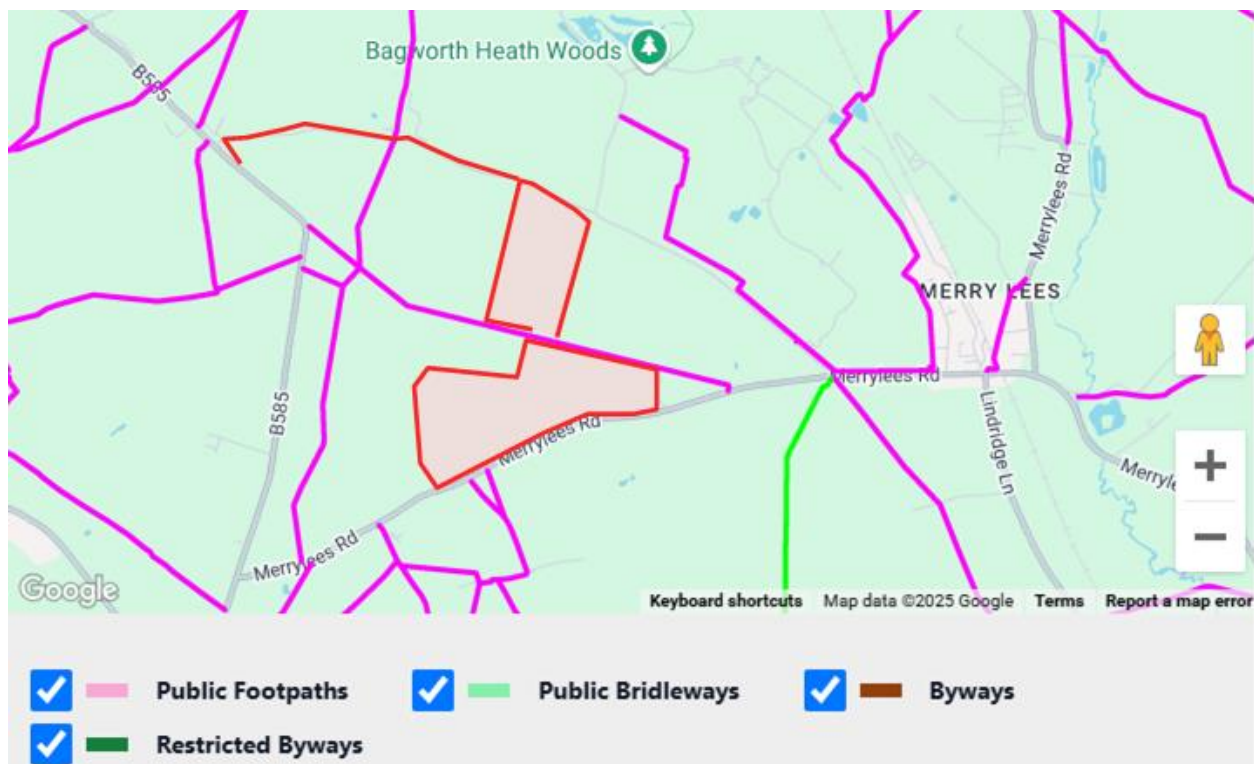


Figure 3.4 Local Plan Policy Map Extract



- 3.16 There are several PRoWs within the environs of the Site (see Figure 3.5 overleaf). A public footpath (S14) runs along the northern boundary of the southern parcel, briefly entering the centre of the Site. A second public footpath (R60) intersects the underground cable route on Heath Road. Further PRoWs are adjacent to the south of the Site, on the opposite side of Merrylees Road, and to the west of the cable corridor.

Figure 3.5 LCC Public Rights of Way map extract



Relevant Planning History

- 3.17 There is limited planning history on the Site itself, with no record of applications within the two main parcels. There are a number of applications at the adjacent farmstead, where some of the boundaries intersect the centre of the Site, the most notable being the aforementioned wind turbine. Several other applications have utilised the access track along the eastern boundary of the northern parcel and there are a few adjoining applications. These are listed below:

Table 3.1: Site Planning History

Ref no.	Address	Proposal	Decision	Location
2024/EIA/ 0081/LCC	Land at Desford Brickworks, Heath Road, Desford, Leicestershire LE67 1DL	To continue the development of Desford Brickworks and Quarry by amending the provisions of Condition 2 of Planning Permission 2018/0669/04, in so far as it relates to the phasing of mineral extraction. This application seeks to amend the chronological order the quarry phases are worked, promoting one phase to be worked at an earlier stage in the quarry development programme	Pending decision	Quarry expansion adjoins eastern parcel. Existing quarry located opposite Site on north/eastern side of Heath Road
HBBC Ref. 2018/0669/04 LCC Ref. 2018/CM/ 0110/LCC	Land at Desford Brickworks, Heath Road, Leicestershire and land North of Heath Road, near Desford Brickworks, Leicestershire.	Construction and operation of new Brickworks with ancillary development, extension to quarry workings and amendments to the approved working and restoration scheme for the existing quarry workings	Approved 20 June 2019	As above

19/00191/FUL	Snippery Farm Heath Road Bagworth Heath Bagworth Coalville Leicestershire LE67 1DG	Construction of a pair of semi-detached agricultural workers dwellings	Approved 18 July 2019	Adjoins west of southern parcel
18/00510/FUL	Snippery Farm Heath Road Bagworth Heath Bagworth Coalville Leicestershire LE67 1DG	Retention of existing agricultural building.	Approved 27 July 2018	Within RLB
18/00511/FUL	Snippery Farm Heath Road Bagworth Heath Bagworth Coalville Leicestershire LE67 1DG	Retention of existing agricultural storage building.	Approved 26 July 2018	Within RLB
14/00381/FUL	Land East Of Bagworth Road Newbold Heath Newbold Verdon Leicestershire	Installation of 1 No. wind turbine (up to 110 metres in tip height) and associated infrastructure	Approved 23 July 2014	350 m west of southern parcel
13/00600/FUL	Land North Merrylees Road Thornton Leicestershire	Installation of a wind turbine (30m hub height, 42m blade tip height).	Approved 23 September 2013	Within RLB
13/00514/FUL	Land North Merrylees Road Thornton Leicestershire	Installation of a wind turbine (30m hub height, 42m blade tip height).	Withdrawn 12 July 2013	Within RLB

97/00575/FUL	Land Adj Little Fox Covert Merrylees Road Newbold Heath Leicester LE9 9NR	10 POULTRY HOUSES AGRICULTURAL DWELLING ANCILLARY BUILDINGS PLANTING AND CREATION OF ACCESS	Refused 29 April 1998	Adjoins southern parcel
94/00919/FUL	Royal Tigers Wood Heath Road Bagworth Coalville Leicestershire LE67 1DG	CONSTRUCTION OF CAR PARK	Approved 23 December 1994	Adjacent to northern parcel
91/01053/4	Land Off Heath Road Bagworth	USE OF LAND FOR SUNDAY MARKET INSTALLATION OF TOILET BLOCKS AND CREATION OF 2 ACCESSES	Refused 21 January 1992	Adjacent to northern parcel
90/00343/4	Fox Covert Farm Heath Road Bagworth Heath Bagworth Coalville Leicestershire LE67 1DF	CONTINUED USE OF LAND FOR THE TAKE OFF FLYING AND LANDING OF MODEL AIRCRAFT	Approved 22 May 1990	Adjoins northern parcel
88/01448/4	Land Op Nos 0041 2834 0017 And 2600 Heath Road Bagworth	CHANGE OF USE FROM AGRICULTURAL LAND TO SITE FOR TAKE OFF FLYING AND LANDING OF MODEL AIRCRAFT	Approved 24 January 1989	Adjoins northern parcel
77/01549/4	Garlands Lane Farm Newbold Verdon	ERECTION OF FARMHOUSE WITH GARAGE	Refused 24 January 1978	Adjoins southern parcel

3.18 As shown in the table above, development at and adjoining the Site is fairly limited to agricultural or renewable energy uses. Furthermore, several of these applications are over 25 years old.

Site Selection

3.19 The identification of the Site is the result of a methodical site selection exercise undertaken by the Applicant. This applied a number of important criteria, including technical feasibility, such as proximity to the grid connection point, which is dictated by the Distribution Network Operator ('DNO'), in this case National Grid Electricity Distribution ('NGED'), as well as environmental and planning constraints, and land availability.

3.20 Securing an appropriate grid connection is of key importance in the location of a development. It is very important to emphasise that limited opportunities currently exist for grid connections nationally and many renewable energy projects are being held up by constraints of the national grid which can take years to resolve. In this case, the Applicant benefits from point of connection a short distance from the Main Site, allowing an imminent grid connection. The fact that the Proposed Development would utilise spare grid capacity a short distance from the Site (less than 1 km), and that the connection could be brought online in – 2 years (if the application were to be approved), thereby making a contribution to national energy targets is considered to be a material consideration when selecting a site and determining a planning application.

3.21 Once a grid offer and connection date were identified, the site selection process within proximity to that PoC was broadly intended to be split into the following sequence of activities:

- A site survey to determine the specific ALC grade/s of the Site;
- Definition of a search area which is considered suitable and feasible based on the capacity of the solar farm;
- Analysis of previously development land;
- Analysis of lower grade agricultural land, being Grades 4 and 5, including land in Fenland District Council and some land in South Holland District Council;
- Establishment of a long-list;
- Long-list filtering to create a short-list of sites; and
- Assessment of the short-list.

- 3.22 The Alternative Site Assessment ('ASA') report that forms part of the planning application submission demonstrates the process that the Applicant applied to identify the Site. The overall aim of the assessment is to demonstrate that the Applicant gave due consideration to the benefits and constraints associated with the Site when selecting it for development, which includes the viability and availability of grid connection.
- 3.23 The Search Area for the ASA is based on the requirement to connect the Proposed Development to a local electricity distribution network and the parameters associated with this, because any solar farm without a feasible grid connection is not viable. This requirement places a locational restriction on site selection that limits the number of appropriate sites for a development of this nature. In this instance, the Search Area was defined as a 3.5 km radius from the PoC which is considered suitable for connection for a solar farm of this capacity. The Search Area covered the administrative areas of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.
- 3.24 The Proposed Development would connect into an existing pylon / tower approximately 1 km to the north west of the Site which connects to the 132kV OPL (the 'Point of Connection'). In this instance, the Applicant has an accepted point of connection 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 (if a positive determination is received). 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.
- 3.25 The Site comprises of 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%). The Search Area comprised predominantly Grade 3 agricultural land, with a small pocket of Grade 2 and small pockets of confirmed subgrade 3a and subgrade 3b land. Eleven alternative sites were identified during the previously developed land search. These were inserted into the long-list but didn't make the short-list due to their insufficient sizes. Due to the majority of the Search Area comprising a mixture of Grade 2 and Grade 3 agricultural land, with some areas of known subgrades 3a and 3b,

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

all of which are higher grade or equal grade to the Proposed Site, no alternative sites were identified through the agricultural land search.

- 3.26 In summary, the ASA ultimately concludes that within the defined search area from the PoC, there are no alternative sites which are suitable and available to provide a proposal which would make a comparable contribution to renewable energy and which would comprise a more feasible alternative to that of the Site.

4.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 This section provides a description of the Proposed Development, including its main components as well as the construction, operation and decommissioning phases.

Development Summary

4.2 The proposal is for the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a ground mounted solar farm with a maximum export capacity of 21.5 MW laid out across various field enclosures across the Site in addition to other ancillary infrastructure. An operational lifespan of 40 years would be sought. The Proposed Development would include the following equipment (approximate):

- Rows of solar photovoltaic ('PV') 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).

4.3 The PoC to the electricity grid is an existing electricity pylon off-site to the north-west. An on-site substation will be required to facilitate this connection via the underground cables.

4.4 The two cable route corridors extend northwards to the PoC. The southern cable route extends along Merrylees Road before turning north onto Heath Road where it eventually joins with the northern cable route. Both cable routes extend from Heath Road onto the B585 (Bagworth Road) for a short distance before entering private land where the PoC is located. Both cable route corridors would be located within the carriageway of the public highway.

4.5 It is estimated that the solar panels would generate 21.5 megawatts of renewable energy, enough to power approximately 7,581 homes annually and displace up to 3,856 tonnes of CO₂ per year.

- 4.6 The indicative Site Layout Plan (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-PLE-01) that forms part of the planning application submission illustrates the indicative layout.

Design Flexibility

- 4.7 Construction work on the Proposed Development, assuming planning permission is granted, would not commence until a final investment decision has been made by the Applicant and a contractor appointed. Following the award of the contract, the appointed contractor would carry out a number of detailed studies to inform the technology selection for the Proposed Development and in order to optimise its layout and design before starting work on Site.
- 4.8 It follows that it has not been possible for the Applicant to fix all of the design details of the Proposed Development at this stage. Advances in technology and panel efficiency between now and construction are also a distinct possibility. The Applicant has therefore sought to incorporate sufficient design flexibility. This relates to the dimensions and layout of structures forming part of the Proposed Development, including the precise layout of the Site and the height of the solar panels.
- 4.9 In order to ensure a robust assessment of the likely environmental effects of the Proposed Development, the assessments that form part of the planning application have been undertaken adopting the principles of the 'Rochdale Envelope'.
- 4.10 This approach involved assessing the maximum (and where relevant, minimum) parameters for the elements where flexibility is required, in order to assess a worst case scenario. For example, the solar panels have been assessed for the purposes of landscape and visual impact as being a maximum of 3-4 m in height, with the upper figure used in areas at highest risk of flooding, however it is actually possible that the majority of panels could be lower. As a general design principle for the ground mounted solar, the layout would be based on bifacial panels fixed onto a fixed mounting system, running east to west and orientated to the south.
- 4.11 The approach also involved defining development zones, rather than having a defined layout. This would allow the future contractor to optimise the layout of the solar farm following any grant of planning permission, rather than being bound to a precise layout.
- 4.12 The zones are shown in the Development Zones Plan (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-DZ-01) that forms part of the planning application submission. The plan is reproduced in Figure 4.1 below.

4.13 The zones define where certain infrastructure should be located within the Site, but there is flexibility in terms of the layout within each zone. The key infrastructure that is permitted to only be located within each zone is as follows:

- Development Zone 1-3: Solar panels, inverters and power stations/transformers; and
- Development Zone 4: DNO and customer substations.

4.14 Outside of these development zones, the Site area includes skylark mitigation area in the north, ecological mitigation area in the south-east for skylark and other farmland birds, and the land with an existing pylon for the point of connection and underground cabling connecting the Site to it.

Figure 4.1: Development Zone Plan



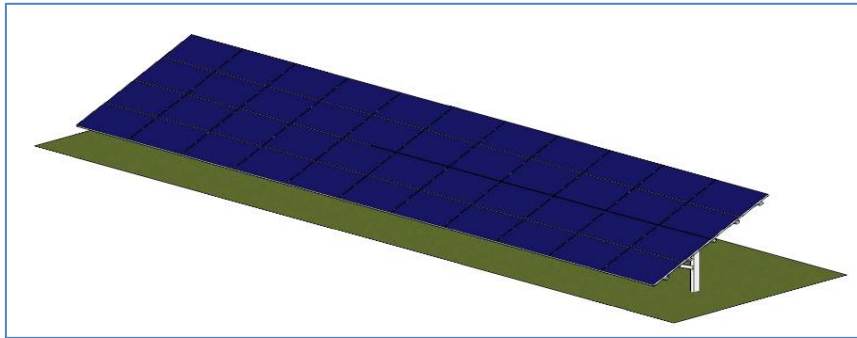
Main Components

Solar PV Panels

- 4.15 The solar panels would be laid out in rows running from east to west across the Site. There would be a gap of approximately 3 m between each row. The panels would be mounted on a frame, to be installed using piled foundations of approximately 1.5 m deep.
- 4.16 The panels are typically mounted in two portrait rows, with one row fixed directly above the other, and angled at the optimum position for absorbing year-round solar irradiation.
- 4.17 At the lowest edge the arrays would be approximately 0.8 m from the ground and up to approximately 3.0 m at the highest edge.

- 4.18 An example of a row of solar panels is shown in Figure 4.2 overleaf. Indicative dimensions of the panels and frame are shown in the 'Solar Panel Elevation Maximum Height' (Drawing reference RCN1008-200) which shows the panels at their standard height of approximately 3.0 m at its upper edge, and 800 mm at its lower edge.

Figure 4.2: Example row of solar panels



Inverters and transformers (power stations), Substation and Point of Connection

- 4.19 The inverters would comprise 'mounted' inverters (also known as 'string' inverters) which would be mounted on the mounting structure, beneath the panels. The inverters would convert the direct current ('DC') generated by the solar panels into alternating current ('AC').
- 4.20 The inverters could be distributed all around the Site, depending on the string connection. Each inverter would measure approximately 1590 mm wide, by 2292 mm high and 365 mm deep, as shown on the 'Inverter Mounting Details' (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-202). The inverters could be mounted by one of three options: between the frame poles, on one frame pole with an additional pole only for the inverter, or separate poles for the inverter.
- 4.21 Transformers (power stations) convert the low voltage output from the inverters to high voltage suitable for feeding into the local electricity distribution network. The transformers would be contained in separate containers with each measuring approximately 6.06 m long, 2.44 m wide and 2.62 m high. Each unit would be placed on a hardcore base and an example cabin is shown in Figure 4.3. Indicative elevations and dimensions of the transformer substations are shown on the 'Power Station Details' (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-223).

Figure 4.3: Example Cabin



- 4.22 The Point of Connection into the electricity grid would comprise of an existing electricity pylon approximately 1 km northwest of the Site, which would be connected to the Site via an underground cable along Heath Road. An on-site customer and DNO substation will be required to facilitate this connection. The DNO substation would measure approximately 5.6 m long, 5.1 m wide and 3.9 m high (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-220). The customer substation would measure approximately 6.06 m long, 2.44 m wide and 2.9 m high (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-221). Both would comprise a crushed stone base which is considered to be permeable. The structure would either be clad in brick or wood to comply with local vernacular, or coloured green (or in any other colour) to minimise any visual impact.
- 4.23 The solar panels would feed DC electricity into the inverters. This would be converted to AC electricity to be transferred through the switchrooms, through the meters and to the substation before stepping up the voltage to feed into the grid via a cable which runs to the Point of Connection.
- 4.24 The substation, inverters and solar panels would be connected by electrical cables either positioned in shallow underground trenches or suspended in trays alongside the arrays.

Access

- 4.25 The Site access points during construction and operation would be via an existing private road / farm access located off Heath Road, approximately 60 m west of the priority T junction of Heath Road. This access point can already accommodate agricultural and large vehicles and therefore is envisaged to be suitable for HGVs.

- 4.26 Site access tracks would be utilised to facilitate movement within the Site for construction and maintenance. It is envisaged that topsoil layers would be excavated to expose a suitable base on which to build the track. The track would then be built up by laying crushed stone, rolled in layers. It is envisaged that the tracks would utilise existing access points between field and crossing points over ditches, where possible.
- 4.27 A public footpath (S14) runs along the northern boundary of the southern parcel, briefly entering the centre of the Site. Another public footpath (R60) intersects the underground cable route on the northern end of Heath Road. A public footpath (R70) runs parallel to the east of the southern underground cable route on the southern end of Heath Road.
- 4.28 During the construction phase, fencing and signage will be erected along the Site boundary to prevent users inadvertently entering the Site. Should any construction movements need to occur across the byway, gates will be erected, and a banksman present to open the gates and ensure the safety of these users, however, it is not anticipated to occur.

Security

- 4.29 The Proposed Development would need to be secure. It is envisaged that deer fencing (mesh with wooden posts or similar) to a height of approximately 2.1 m (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-231) would be installed along the outer edges of the Site in order to restrict access, with wooden supporting posts placed at intervals of approximately 4.0 m.
- 4.30 This would be sited inside the outermost hedges/ trees/ vegetation, ensuring that the fence is visually obscured, and access is available for hedge trimming and maintenance. The minimum distance between the edge of the arrays and the fence would be 3 m. Gates would be installed at the access point for maintenance access. These would be the same design, material and colour as the fencing. Badger friendly/ small mammal access points would be prescribed at various locations along any fencing to allow the passage of badgers and hedgehogs across the Site.
- 4.31 The perimeter of the Site would be protected by a system of CCTV cameras and/ or infra-red cameras, which would provide full 24-hour surveillance around the entire perimeter. An intelligent sensor management system would manage the cameras. The cameras would be on poles up to a height of approximately 3 m (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-215), spaced at intervals along the security fence. There would be no lighting within the Site at night-time.

Landscaping and Biodiversity

- 4.32 The Proposed Development has been designed to respect the character of the landscape and use the strong field boundaries to integrate the scheme into the landscape as far as practicable. Existing

landscape features would be protected and strengthened and all trees and hedgerows on or around the Site would be retained where possible. Additional planting would also be provided where necessary, to fill gaps in the existing boundary planting to retain field enclosures.

4.33 The robust landscape strategy will deliver an overall Biodiversity Net Gain ('BNG') of +66.86% habitat units and +47.06% hedgerow units, well in excess of the mandatory 10%. Key landscaping proposals include:

- Creation of a 3.5 ha skylark mitigation area in the north of the Site, which will comprise arable habitat and skylark plots, to ensure this species is not significantly impacted by the Proposed Development;
- Creation of a 1.5 ha ecological mitigation area in the south-east which will be sown with a suitable wild bird seed mix for skylark and other farmland birds;
- The on-site pond and dry ditch will be retained and enhanced where possible;
- Utilising existing hedgerow gaps, field gateways and ditch crossings, where feasible, for access, to minimise any watercourse/ grassland/ tree damage/ losses, where possible;
- Retention and buffering of trees and the woodland block, including trees identified as having bat roosting suitability;
- Enhancement and strengthening of the existing hedgerows through gaps and tree planting of native species, which will increase diversity;
- Sowing areas with species rich grassland in areas between solar panels and in the margins with shade tolerant species sown under the solar panels; and
- Using native species only.

4.34 It is important to note, that all trees, tree groups and hedgerows, the woodland pocket, the pond and dry ditch would be retained on Site due careful design of the Site layout. Access tracks would avoid Root Protection Areas (RPAs), where possible. Any tracks within RPAs would utilise 'no dig' cellular confinement construction methods. The underground internal cabling has been designed to avoid RPAs, where possible. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment ('AIA') submitted with the application confirms that there would be no negative impact on retained trees, provided the AIA is implemented carefully, with the potential to increase tree canopy cover across the Site over the long term.

Construction

- 4.35 The primary construction phase of the Proposed Development is expected to last for approximately 24 weeks. During this period, initial site setup works including access, maintenance and improvements would be undertaken where considered to be beneficial to the use of the access, followed by construction of the internal access route(s), ground works, the installation of the solar panels and other infrastructure.
- 4.36 The Site does benefit from access via a track via an existing private road / farm access off Heath Road associated with the adjoining northern property in the north. The private road already accommodates heavy goods vehicles ('HGVs') and the use of any tracks to the Site and access itself may need improvements to create a suitable access point onto the Site. Consideration of construction routing options to main arterial roads within the district will be required via the Construction Traffic Management Plan ('CTMP') to ensure the least disruption to neighbouring settlements and neighbouring amenity.
- 4.37 A temporary construction compound would be provided which would be removed and replaced with landscaping once construction is completed, as shown on the submitted Landscape Strategy Plan (Drawing Reference: edp7530_d014d). The temporary construction compound is shown in Appendix D of the Transport Report and Appendix C of the CTMP.
- 4.38 Facilities would be provided on site for construction workers, including provision of a site office and welfare facilities (including toilets, changing and drying facilities, and a canteen). Fencing would be installed around the perimeter of the Site, as discussed, and temporary parking would be provided for the construction workers.
- 4.39 During the construction period, it is proposed that construction working hours would be as follows:
- 07:00 – 18:00 Monday to Friday; and
 - 08:00 – 14:00 Saturday.
- 4.40 Should work be required to be undertaken outside of these times, this would be agreed in writing in advance with the Council.
- 4.41 At the end of each day, mobile plant would be returned to a secure overnight plant storage, where drip trays can be utilised under the various types of plant, if required.

Operation

- 4.42 Once operational, occasional maintenance of the solar panels and other infrastructure would be required. The solar panels would also need to be periodically cleaned, most likely using simple soap and water, to ensure the efficient running of the system.
- 4.43 It is expected that, under normal circumstances, only a very small number of cars/vans would visit the Site (generally less than 1 a week). It is estimated that 1 HGV trip may occur per annum to replace items/ equipment, with no abnormal loads anticipated.
- 4.44 The Site would be retained in agricultural use for the life of the Proposed Development. The majority of the Site would be planted with a combination of grassland / meadow, which would enable grazing (sheep). This would include land between and underneath panels.

Decommissioning

- 4.45 At the end of the operational lifespan (circa 40 years), the solar panels and other infrastructure would be removed, and the Site restored back to full agricultural use. The small quantity of foundations, hard surfacing and heavy infrastructure, in combination with retaining the majority of the Site as grassland, means that the land would be easier to restore than other more intrusive development, e.g. large buildings requiring significant foundations. Electrical infrastructure will be recycled as appropriate.
- 4.46 The restoration process would ensure that the land is restored to the same quality as it was previously, and it is envisaged this would be secured through a suitable condition attached to any planning permission.

5.0 DESIGN APPROACH

5.1 This section sets out the approach that the Applicant has taken to the design of the Proposed Development and how the design has evolved through the pre-application process.

Design Principles

5.2 The main design principles adopted by the Applicant are set out below:

- Design Principle 1: position the main components to minimise environmental impact;
- Design Principle 2: seek opportunities for the management and enhancement of biodiversity;
- Design Principle 3: provide a functional design that makes the best use of the location and provides for efficient generation of electricity;
- Design Principle 4: seek to assimilate the Proposed Development into the local landscape as far as possible;
- Design principle 5: ensure safe and efficient access to the public highway; and
- Design Principle 6: ensure the approach to design is inclusive.

5.3 These principles are referenced where applicable in the remainder of this section.

Design Approach

5.4 The approach taken to the design of the Proposed Development has been informed by the context within which it would be situated, in addition to the opportunities and constraints presented by the Site.

5.5 As described in Section 2 previously, the skyline surrounding the Site is broken up by the many electricity pylons which cross the landscape and nearby wind turbines, with renewable energy generation is being already a prominent component in the area, including large scale solar PV farms.

5.6 The surrounding area is predominantly agricultural, with settlements to the north, south and west of the Site and scattered clusters of residential properties and individual farmsteads to the northwest and west. The Site is surrounded by public highways of Heath Road, Merrylees Road Bagworth Road on all sides. In terms of topography, the Site slopes gently southwards.

5.7 An operational claypit and industrial estate are situated approximately 500 m to the east / north-east, part of which is designated as an employment site. In addition, there are designated open spaces and country parks in proximity, namely: Centenary Wood and Royal Tigers adjacent to the north of the Site on the opposite side of Heath Road; Bagworth Heath Country Park approximately

110 m to the north of the Site; Woodland, The Hollow approximately 1.2 km north; and Laurel Farm Wood approximately 1.35 km northwest.

5.8 Given the Site's largely agricultural context, the Proposed Development has been designed to be sympathetic to its surroundings (in accordance with Design Principles 1, 2 and 4), whilst being practical in terms of technical and engineering considerations (in accordance with Design Principles 3 and 5).

5.9 Key elements of the design approach have included the following:

- preserving existing trees and hedgerows, and maintaining suitable stand-offs from sensitive ecological features within the Site, e.g. ditches/ponds and woodland belt (in accordance with Design Principle 2);
- utilising existing farm entrances and tracks to access the Site and existing electricity pylons to connect into the electricity grid so as to minimise the introduction of new infrastructure (in accordance with Design Principles 1, 3 and 4);
- orientating the rows of solar panels to benefit from maximum solar irradiation (in accordance with Design Principle 3);
- locating and designing the essential infrastructure to ensure it remains operational during a 1000-year plus climate change flood risk uplift event (in accordance with Design Principle 1);
- providing additional screen planting to reduce potential visual impact, including where there are gaps, or no hedgerows exist (in accordance with Design Principle 4);
- consideration of multiple construction traffic routes and choice of a longer construction route to avoid the village of Bagworth to minimise disruption to the local community during construction whilst also providing safe and efficient access to the strategic road network (Design Principle 1 and 5); and
- providing significant habitat improvements within the Site, including conversion of arable to higher value grassland/ pasture and the provision of new hedgerow and trees (in accordance with Design Principle 2).

5.10 The infrastructure related to the Proposed Development is functional in appearance and has been situated in such a way to avoid any environmentally sensitive areas and mitigation has been included to reduce any other impacts. The approach that has been taken to the design of the

Proposed Development is considered appropriate given its context and purpose – to generate and export electricity to the local distribution network.

Design Evolution

- 5.11 The design process for the Proposed Development has been an iterative one. As part of the design process a number of options have been considered for the design and layout of the Proposed Development, as set out in the 'Design Approach' section of this report. The approach and options considered are not repeated here.
- 5.12 The main changes to the Proposed Development, in terms of design, include the following, some of which were also informed by the consultation process.

Design through Consultation

- 5.13 The Applicant carried out a comprehensive pre-application consultation exercise in respect of the Proposed Development (in accordance with Design Principle 6). This included emails to key consultees and local stakeholders (for example, Borough Councillors, Parish Councillors), a mailout to residential and businesses in the surrounding area; a consultation website; and a consultation, and emails to Parish councils, parish ward members and HBBC members.
- 5.14 The consultation period ran for approximately 4 weeks 27 May 2025 until 27 June 2025, although the Applicant was happy to accept public comments up until submission. An in-person village hall meeting was held on Tuesday 17th June 2025 16:00pm – 19:00pm Bagworth Community Centre, Station Rd, Bagworth, Coalville LE67 1BH to allow local people to learn more about the proposals, ask the project team questions and make comments.
- 5.15 The objective of the consultation was to introduce the Proposed Development, including elements of the design approach and proposed management measures. Examples of the consultation materials produced, including leaflets and extracts from the website, are appended to the Consultation Report that forms part of the planning application submission.
- 5.16 The Applicant considered the points raised by consultees during the engagement process. The Applicant considers that information provided in the Transport Report, Construction Traffic Management Plan, Alternative Site Assessment and Planning, Design and Access Statement suitably addresses the concerns raised regarding loss of arable/cropland and construction traffic. Further to this, the majority of feedback received was positive and as a result no changes or additions are deemed to be necessary.

6.0 DESIGN COMPONENTS

6.1 This section describes the key design components of the Proposed Development. This includes in relation to the Site's use, the quantum of development (amount), the proposed layout, the scale of the main structures, the appearance and the approach taken to landscaping.

Use

6.2 The Proposed Development is for a solar farm and associated infrastructure (no battery storage). The Main Site currently comprises agricultural land (arable) within a predominantly rural setting to the south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone. The Main Site is split into 4 development zones across three agricultural fields. The on-site dry ditch, pond, woodland belt on the western boundary and other vegetation are located outside of the developable area of the development zones, with appropriate setbacks applied to these features.

6.3 In order to maintain the agricultural use, it is intended to graze the Site once the Proposed Development is operational, thereby retaining agricultural use in conjunction with the generation of renewable electricity. It is intended to maintain the grazing use for the lifetime of the Proposed Development, after which time it is envisaged that all infrastructure associated with the Proposed Development would be removed and the land returned to its previous state. At all times then, apart from the brief construction period, the Site would be used for agricultural use as well as for the generation of renewable energy.

6.4 Given the Site's largely agricultural context, the Proposed Development has been designed to be sympathetic to its surroundings (including a comprehensive landscaping and biodiversity scheme), whilst being practical in terms of technical and engineering considerations and retaining agricultural use as per above. It is therefore considered that, on balance, the Proposed Development is compatible with the surrounding area.

Amount

6.5 The Proposed Development would consist primarily of solar panels mounted on a treated metal (aluminium or similar) framework. The Proposed Development includes the following equipment:

- Rows of solar photovoltaic ('PV') panels;
- Transformer/ power stations;
- String Inverters;
- DNO and customer substations;

- Internal access tracks and access gates;
- Perimeter fence;
- Temporary construction compound;
- Underground cabling to the existing electricity pylon (the POC);
- CCTV cameras; and
- Ecological and Skylark mitigation areas (no development, ecological mitigation).

6.6 There is no BESS being proposed.

6.7 This is considered the minimal level of development necessary to ensure that the Site performs effectively with regard to its main purpose of generating renewable electricity. A landscape scheme with native planting has been designed to establish new planting and reinforce existing perimeter planting in addition to species rich grassland / enhanced low-intensity grazed pasture in and around the panels.

Layout

- 6.8 The solar panels and associated infrastructure would be set within the existing field pattern, with field margins, boundary vegetation, drainage ditches and the woodland pocket retained. The fencing around the Site would be situated inside the outer-boundary vegetation, ensuring that access is available for hedge trimming and maintenance and the fencing is not outwardly visible.
- 6.9 String inverters would be mounted in boxes on the framework within the rows of panels to minimise visual impacts. The point of connection is located on Site which feeds directly into two existing electricity pylons in the south-east of the site area, and therefore would not introduce any additional above-ground infrastructure to secure connection to the electricity grid.
- 6.10 The initial design was assessed by planning and environmental specialists in terms of, amongst other matters, hydrology, landscape and visual, cultural heritage, ecology, and traffic considerations. Each specialist appraised the Site and identified the presence or absence of potential environmental constraints and opportunities.
- 6.11 The constraints and opportunities analysis then informed various meetings attended by environmental specialists, planners and design engineers. Although there are factors that limit the extent to which the layout and design of the solar farm and battery can be adjusted, these design iterations have ensured that the Proposed Development minimises impacts on the local environment as far as possible. Furthermore, the protection and enhancement of existing

landscape features and valuable habitat areas has been a central consideration in the preparation of the layout.

- 6.12 The approach involved defining development zones, to ensure that, amongst other matters, the field pattern is adhered to and appropriate setbacks from sensitive features are maintained. The zones are shown in the Development Zones Plan (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-DZ-01) that forms part of the planning application submission. The plan is reproduced in Figure 4.1 earlier in this report. The zones define where certain infrastructure should be located within the Site, but there is flexibility in terms of the layout within each zone.
- 6.13 The Indicative Site Layout Plan (Drawing Reference: RCN1008-PLE-01) that forms part of the planning application submission illustrates an example layout.

Scale

- 6.14 The scale of development at the Site has been determined by the equipment necessary to generate electricity sufficiently.
- 6.15 All of the buildings at the Site would be single storey, ensuring that they would not be significantly visible from most viewpoints outside of the Site. Even when viewed from nearby vantage points, the scale of development would not be overbearing due to its low profile. This would be further improved when proposed screen planting matures, which, in addition to the significant existing screening around the Site, would effectively assimilate the Site into the local landscape over time.
- 6.16 The highest structures associated with the Proposed Development would comprise infrastructure within the Customer and DNO substation compound which would reach a maximum height of approximately 2.9 (Drawing Ref. RCN1008-221) and 3.9 m (Drawing Ref. RCN1008-220). It is proposed that the majority of the other structures, including the solar panels, would be no more than 3.0m high; the height of a mature hedgerow. It is therefore considered that the scale of the Proposed Development is appropriate to the location.

Appearance

- 6.17 The most visible components of the Proposed Development would be the solar panels, and a small area of the Customer and DNO substations. The solar panels would be mounted on metal frames and constructed from non-reflective glass. The substation would be appropriately coloured or clad to minimise any visual impact and comply as far as practicable with the local vernacular.
- 6.18 It is notable that the solar panels are designed to absorb sunlight, therefore there would be no residual significant issues associated with glint and glare which is substantiated by the submitted

Glint and Glare Assessment, subject to appropriate mitigation measures. This includes screen planting to a height that would obstruct views from one road-based receptor on Broad Drove West, which have been considered as part of the Landscape Strategy submitted with this application.

- 6.19 The metal frame is treated to avoid any significant issues associated with glint and glare. The metal frame is necessary because it is durable and is sufficiently strong to hold the panels in position; a functional design requirement.
- 6.20 It is envisaged that the containers/ cabins and other small buildings would be appropriately coloured or clad to minimise any visual impact and comply as far as practicable with the local vernacular. The structures would however be functional in appearance, reflecting their purposes, which is for the generation of electricity.
- 6.21 The Point of Connection is an existing electricity pylon (approximately 23 m) located to the north-west of the Site and therefore no new structures are proposed in terms of overhead lines and pylons.
- 6.22 Cabling between rows of panels, transformers, batteries, inverters and the grid connection point would be underground at a prescribed depth, meaning that there would be no requirement for over ground cabling and/ or additional pylons, and therefore there would be no visual impact associated with this approach (following initial construction).

Access

- 6.23 The Applicant has outlined the Site access point for construction and operation within the Transport Report, which has considered them in terms of safety and efficiency.
- 6.24 The Site access points during construction and operation, detailed in Section 4 above, would be via an existing private road / farm access located off Heath Road, which is a single lane carriageway road with one lane in each direction and subject to a 60 mile per hour (mph) speed limit.
- 6.25 The construction and operational access point, which is an existing private road / farm access, can safely accommodate HGVs. The required visibility splays are achievable within land under the control of the applicant or the publicly maintained highway, as indicated in the submitted Transport Statement and CTMP. Any widening or improvement works would be subject to further detailed design and would be discussed and agreed with the local highway authority, if needed.
- 6.26 Within the Site, an internal access road will be provided for construction vehicles, including appropriate turning areas and areas of hardstanding for vehicle manoeuvring, allowing HGVs to

leave the Site in forward gear, and parking, to ensure construction traffic do not parking on the public highway.

- 6.27 One PRoW (S14) runs along the northern boundary of the southern parcel, briefly entering the centre of the Site. A second public footpath (R60) intersects the underground cable route on Heath Road. Another footpath (R70) runs parallel with the eastern part of the cable route adjacent to Heath Road. These would be retained and protected throughout construction and operation with appropriate fencing. Should any construction movements need to occur across a PRoW, gates will be erected and a banksman present to open the gates and ensure the safety of PRoW users

Landscape and Biodiversity

- 6.28 A Landscape and Visual Appraisal ('LVA') has been produced by EDP Landscape and form part of the planning application submission. The LVA considers the effects of the Proposed Development on both the landscape (landscape impact) and on representative viewpoints from around the Site (visual impact), including from residential, road and PRoW receptors.
- 6.29 The Proposed Development has been designed to respect the character of the landscape and uses the strong field pattern/ boundaries denoted by ditches to integrate the scheme as far as practicable. Existing landscape features would be protected and strengthened and all trees, tree groups and hedgerows on or around the Site, and the woodland belt in the west would be retained as well as the pond in the north. Additional planting would also be provided where necessary, to fill gaps in the existing boundary planting to retain field enclosures.
- 6.30 Furthermore, appropriate 'no development' buffers are provided to the dry ditch and pond which are characteristic of the Site.
- 6.31 It is important to note, that all trees, tree groups and hedgerows, and the woodland belt would be retained due to careful design of the Site layout. Access tracks would avoid RPAs, where possible. Any tracks within RPAs would utilise 'no dig' cellular confinement construction methods. The underground internal cabling has been designed to avoid RPAs, where possible. The AIA confirms that there would be no negative impact on retained trees, following implementation of the measures set out in the submitted AIA.
- 6.32 Furthermore, the Proposed Development would secure additional canopy coverage across the Site over the long term by implementing new trees and hedgerows. The robust Landscape Strategy will deliver an overall BNG of +66.88% habitat units and +47.06% hedgerow units, well in excess of the mandatory 10%.

6.33 Key landscaping proposals include:

- Creation of a 3.5 ha skylark mitigation area in the north of the Site, which will comprise arable habitat and skylark plots, to ensure this species is not significantly impacted by the Proposed Development;
- Creation of a 1.5 ha ecological mitigation area in the south-east which will be sown with a suitable wild bird seed mix for skylark and other farmland birds;
- The on-site pond and dry ditch will be retained and enhanced where possible;
- Utilising existing hedgerow gaps, field gateways and ditch crossings, where feasible, for access, to minimise any watercourse/ grassland/ tree damage/ losses, where possible;
- Retention and buffering of trees and the woodland block, including trees identified as having bat roosting suitability;
- Enhancement and strengthening of the existing hedgerows through gaps and tree planting of native species, which will increase diversity;
- Sowing areas with species rich grassland in areas between solar panels and in the margins with shade tolerant species sown under the solar panels; and
- Using native species only.

6.34 The landscaping and planting proposals associated with the Proposed Development would result in significant ecological benefits when compared to the current situation on Site by bolstering the existing hedgerow network with associated ecological/ connectivity benefits and including species that enhance biodiversity.

6.35 For more detail, please refer to the LVA which includes an indicative Landscape Strategy Plan and Ecology Appraisal submitted as part of the planning application.

7.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

7.1 This section provides a brief overview of the relevant planning policy and guidance at local and national level. The design of the Proposed Development has been influenced by these policies and the proposals are assessed against them in Section 8 of this report.

7.2 The planning application will be determined in accordance with Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), which states that in dealing with applications, local planning authorities shall have regard to the provisions of the statutory development plan and to other material considerations.

Statutory Development Plan

7.3 The Statutory Development Plan comprises:

- HBBC Core Strategy DPD (adopted December 2009);
- HBBC Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD (adopted July 2016);
- Draft Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Local Plan 2020 – 2041 (Regulation 18 Consultation Draft published July 2024); and
- Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (up to 2031) (adopted 2019).

7.4 The following policies and objectives from the HBBC Core Strategy ('CS') DPD are considered to be of most relevance:

- Spatial Objective 9 - Identity, Distinctiveness and Quality of Design;
- Spatial Objective 10 - Natural Environment and Cultural Assets;
- Spatial Objective 12 - Climate Change and Resource Efficiency;
- Policy 20 - Green Infrastructure;
- Policy 21 - National Forest;
- Policy 22 - Charnwood Forest; and
- Policy 24 - Sustainable Design and Technology.

7.5 The following policies from the HBBC Site Allocations and Development Management Policies ('DMP') DPD are considered to be of most relevance:

- Policy DM1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development;
- Policy DM2 – Delivering Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Development;

- Policy DM4 – Safeguarding the Countryside and Settlement Separation;
- Policy DM6 – Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geological Interest;
- Policy DM7 – Preventing Pollution and Flooding;
- Policy DM9 – Safeguarding Natural and Semi-Natural Open Spaces;
- Policy DM10 – Development and Design;
- Policy DM11 – Protecting and Enhancing the Historic Environment;
- Policy DM 12 – Heritage Assets;
- Policy DM13 – Preserving the Borough’s Archaeology; and
- Policy DM17 – Highways and Transportation.

7.6 The following policies from the Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (up to 2031) (adopted 2019) are considered to be of relevance:

- M11 – Safeguarding of Mineral Resources; and
- M12 – Safeguarding of Existing Mineral Sites and Associated Minerals Infrastructure.

7.7 The following Supplementary Planning Documents (‘SPD’) are considered to be of relevance:

- The Good Design Guide SPD (2020);
- Green Infrastructure Strategy (2020);
- Heritage Strategy 2018 – 2023;
- Renewable Energy Capacity Study (December 2014); and
- Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy 2024 to 2028.

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy

7.8 The National Planning Policy Framework (‘NPPF’) was adopted in March 2012 and was most recently updated in December 2024. It sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are to be applied. The policies contained within the NPPF are expanded upon and supported by National Planning Practice Guidance (‘NPPG’), which was first published in March 2014 and has been periodically updated since.

7.9 NPPG considered most relevant to the Proposed Development includes:

- Climate Change;
- Historic Environment;
- Natural Environment;
- Open Space, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space;
- Flood risk and coastal change;
- Renewable and low carbon energy; and
- Strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal.

7.10 As explained in Section 2 of this Document, the NPSs make up the planning policy framework for examining and determining Nationally NSIPs. As the Proposed Development is not a NSIP, the NPSs are not directly relevant; however, they do form material considerations in the determination of the planning application.

7.11 The following NPSs are relevant:

- Overarching NPS for Energy (EN-1); and
- NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3).

7.12 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.

Emerging Planning Policy

7.13 HBBC is in the process of reviewing the Local Planning Policy by preparing a new plan. The Draft Local Plan (June 2021-August 2021) has completed its initial Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 Consultation, and a further round of Regulation 18 Consultation in July 2024-September 2024. The Local Development Scheme (LDS) (March 2025) indicates that a further round of Regulation 18 and 19 consultations will need to be programmed in late 2025-early 2026 to allow for changes arising from the new NPPF, NPPG and standard housing method introduced in December 2024. The Local Plan submission to the Secretary of State (Regulation 22) is anticipated for late 2026 and in late 2027 for adoption. As such, any future local plan may form a material consideration in the determination of the planning application.

7.14 The following emerging HBBC Draft Local Plan (2020-2041) (July 2024) policies are considered relevant to the application but carry less weight:

- Policy SP01 – Sustainable Development;
- Policy SP02 – Development Strategy;
- Policy SP05 – Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change;
- Policy SP06 – Flood Risk;
- Policy SP07 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy;
- Policy SP08 – High Quality Design;
- Policy SP10 – Preventing Pollution;
- Policy SP20 – Green Infrastructure;
- Policy SP24 – Protecting Biodiversity;
- Policy SP25 – Enhancing Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity;
- Policy SP26 – Development in the Countryside and Settlement Separation;
- Policy SP27 Landscape Character; and
- Policy SP29 – Transport, Movement and Access.

Neighbourhood Plans

7.15 The following neighbourhood plans, which are being progressed, are relevant:

- Newbold Verdon Regulation 14 Draft Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2039 (October 2021); and
- Bagworth, Thornton & Stanton-under-Bardon Regulation 15/16 Neighbourhood Plan 2023-2039 (July 2023).

Other

7.16 In June 2019 the Government raised the UK's ambition on tackling climate change by legislating for a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target for the whole economy by 2050. Decarbonising the power sector is integral to achieving this goal and requires major investment in proven technologies, such as solar, which are supported by planning policy at local and national level.

7.17 The National Infrastructure Commission ('NIC'), official advisor to the Government on infrastructure, has recommended that in order to meet the 2050 target the energy generation mix

is up to around 90% renewables, including 56-121 GW of solar, which is up to 9 times that currently installed.

7.18 In addition, whilst not planning documents, the following, also form material considerations:

- Climate Change Committee Progress Reports (Climate Change Committee) published annually (2024);
- Clean Power Action Plan (2024);
- National Grid's Future Energy Scenarios published annually (2024);
- Renewable Energy Planning Database, HM Government (2024);
- Powering up Britain: The Net Zero Growth Plan (HM Government) (2023);
- Delivering a reliable decarbonised power system (Climate Change Committee) (2023);
- Independent Review of Net Zero: Mission Zero (2023);
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Sixth Assessment Report (IPCC) (2022);
- British Energy Security Strategy (2022);
- Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy (BEIS) (2021);
- HM Government Net Zero Strategy, Build Back Greener (2021);
- Solar Energy UK – Lighting the way making net zero a reality with solar energy (2021);
- The Committee on Climate Change ('CCC') – Reducing UK emissions Progress Report to Parliament (2021);
- UK Government's press release of acceleration of carbon reduction to 2035 (2021);
- Energy White Paper; Powering our Net Zero Future (2020);
- Climate Change Committee The Sixth Carbon Budget: The UK's path to Net Zero (2020);
- UK Government's National Infrastructure Strategy (2020);
- National Infrastructure Commission – Net Zero Opportunities for the Power Sector (2020);
- UK Parliament's declaration of an Environmental and Climate Change Emergency (2019);
- Department of Energy and Climate Change – UK Solar PV Strategy Part Two: Delivering a Brighter Future (April 2014); and

- Department of Energy and Climate Change – Solar PV Strategy Part One: Roadmap to a Brighter Future (October 2013).

7.19 There are also numerous documents produced by National Grid and others that are relevant in terms of the need that exists for the Proposed Development and proposals of its kind.

7.20 Furthermore, on 4 November 2021 the UK signed the Statement on International Public Support for the Clean Energy Transition at the United Nations Climate Change Conference UK 2021 (COP26) which committed to prioritising support fully towards the clean energy transition.

7.21 Most recently, the UK Government released the British Energy Security Strategy in April 2022 which outlines the continued support for the effective use of land for ground based solar development to be designed to avoid, mitigate, and where necessary, compensate for the impacts of using greenfield sites. Furthermore, it encourages the support for solar development that is co-located with other functions (e.g., agriculture) to maximise the efficiency of land use.

8.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

8.1 This section of the statement provides an assessment of the application proposals, in order to demonstrate how the Proposed Development has been influenced by and is compliant with relevant planning policy. The key assessment topics are as follows:

- Principle of development;
- Site selection;
- Scale, appearance and design;
- Land-use and development in the countryside;
- Landscape and visual;
- Cultural Heritage;
- Biodiversity;
- Flood Risk;
- Traffic and transport; and
- Amenity and impact on local community.

8.2 The above topics have been influenced by a review of the local planning policy and a review of the site's designations.

Principle of Development

Policy Summary

8.3 The NPPF sets out its support for renewable energy development in Chapter 14 (Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change). Paragraph 161 states that: *"The planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050. It should help to...support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure"*.

8.4 Paragraph 168 goes on to state:

"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."*

- 8.5 The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's Overarching NPS for Energy (EN-1) states in paragraph 3.3.20 that analysis shows that a secure, reliable, affordable, Net Zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar.
- 8.6 The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's NPS for Renewable Energy infrastructure (EN-3) paragraph 2.10.9 states that *"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 by 2050. As such, solar is a key part of the government's strategy for low-cost decarbonisation of the energy sector."* Section 2.10 'Solar Photovoltaic Generation' of NPS EN-3 goes into detail regarding the potential impacts of solar power relating to biodiversity and nature conservation, landscape, visual and residential amenity, glint and glare, cultural heritage and construction including traffic and transport noise and vibration. It also sets out how mitigation can be applied to reduce the impacts to an acceptable level.
- 8.7 Support for the principle of solar development and the urgent need for it to be deployed rapidly was reiterated in the recent Government Climate Change Strategy. In December 2024, the Government released their Clean Power 2030 Action Plan to deliver at least 95% of Great Britain's generation through clean power by 2030. The report recognises that solar plays a key role in this target, and there is currently 16.6 GW of solar capacity in the UK with 23.8GW of committed projects or being constructed. The Government expects at least a further 21.2GW in deployment within just 6 years to reach the target of 45-47GW by 2030. This requires a monumental increase in installed capacity within a very short timeframe.
- 8.8 Further to this, 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 Hinckley and Bosworth Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy 2024 to 2028 states that the Council aims to be carbon neutral by 2030 (direct council emissions) and to ensure the borough is net zero by 2050. One of the key areas for action is to *"Promote the use of renewable energy/energy reduction and investigate opportunities for carbon capture and storage"*. This includes a commitment to: *"develop the Local Plan to include policies for climate change mitigation and adaptations to relevant developments, and support, where appropriate, the potential installation of new solar farms and renewable energy schemes"*. Page 3 of the Strategy states: *"We will continue to support, where possible, the installation of solar farms"*.
- 8.9 Policy DM1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development) of the DMP outlines that *"Planning applications that accord with the policies in the Local Plan (and, where relevant, with*

policies in neighbourhood plans) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.”

- 8.10 Policy DM2 (Delivering Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Development) of the DMP provides support for mitigating against climate change and reducing carbon emissions, stating that HBBC is *“committed to reducing its environmental impact through carbon reduction measures and through the support of appropriately designed and sited renewable energy and low carbon developments.*
- 8.11 It continues by noting 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.”*
- 8.12 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”*, subject to having no significant adverse impacts.
- 8.13 Spatial Objective 12 (Climate Change and Resource Efficiency) of the CS seeks to increase the use of renewable energy technologies and minimise pollution.
- 8.14 Policy SP07 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy) and Policy SP26 (Development in the Countryside and Settlement Separation) of the emerging Local Plan provide further support, reiterating Policy DM2 and Policy DM4 respectively.

Assessment

- 8.15 It is estimated that the solar panels would generate 21.5 megawatts of renewable energy, enough to power approximately 7,581 homes annually and displace up to 3,856 tonnes of CO₂ per year thereby helping to address energy security, electricity prices and emission reductions, and helping to achieve Net Zero, by generating clean and renewable energy without the need for subsidies.
- 8.16 In addition, the proposal benefits from an agreed PoC a short distance from the Main Site via an underground line with a secured grid connection, enabling it to provide a significant contribution to UK targets. 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

consideration. Further to this, 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.

- 8.17 Further to this, the remainder of this Section demonstrates that the Proposed Development would not have significant adverse impacts on landscape and heritage assets, residential and visual amenity, noise impact, highways safety, biodiversity and high quality agricultural land, as required by local policy.
- 8.18 It is clearly evident that the principle of the Proposed Development is heavily supported by both local and national policy which advocates for the presumption in favour of sustainable development and renewable energy development where its impacts are or can be made acceptable, and recognises the urgent deployment of renewable energy generation. This requires major investment in proven technologies, such as solar and wind, which is supported by planning policy at local, county and national level.
- 8.19 As set out within the NPPF, significant weight should be provided to these benefits. Further to this, there are a number of recent Appeal decisions which indicate that Inspectors place 'very significant', 'significant' and 'substantial' weight to the contribution of renewable and low carbon energy generation to achieving Net Zero targets, and in some cases the provision of low cost and secure energy nation-wide. A comprehensive list and summary of these Appeal decisions is in **Appendix 2** of this document.
- 8.20 It is noted that the Site is in the 'Countryside', outside the Development Limits of the Local Plan Spatial Strategy thereby being 'greenfield development' however there are no other policy designations which apply to the Site. It is notable that at this moment in time, the adopted or emerging local plans documents do not allocate any suitable sites/ areas for renewable energy developments that would offer a more suitable or favourable location for the Proposed Development, i.e., sites within brownfield land or preferred greenfield areas.
- 8.21 The remainder of this section demonstrates that there are no unacceptable impacts associated with the Proposed Development and that the planning balance weighs heavily in its favour. It is therefore considered that the principle of the Proposed Development complies with relevant planning policy.

Land Use, Development in the Countryside and Agricultural Land Quality

Policy Summary

- 8.22 Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment (inter alia) by *“(b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland”*.
- 8.23 EN-3 states at paragraph 2.10.29 that: *“While land type should not be a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location applicants should, where possible, utilise suitable previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land. 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. ‘Best and Most Versatile agricultural land is defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.”*
- 8.24 Policy DM2 (Delivering Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Development) of the DMP states that renewable energy developments at the commercial scale will be supported where *“All reasonable steps have been taken to avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts including, but not limited to, landscape, noise, visual and cumulative impacts.”*
- 8.25 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”, and:*
- i. “It does not have a significant adverse effect on the intrinsic value, beauty, open character and landscape character of the countryside; and*
 - ii. It does not undermine the physical and perceived separation and open character between settlements; and*
 - iii. It does not create or exacerbate ribbon development;*
 - iv. If within a Green Wedge, it protects its role and function in line with Core Strategy Policies 6 and 9; and*
 - v. If within the National Forest, it contributes to the delivery of the National Forest Strategy in line with Core Strategy Policy 21.”*

- 8.26 This support is also reflected in Policy SP26 (Development in the Countryside and Settlement Separation) of the emerging Local Plan.
- 8.27 Agricultural land classification is seldom referenced in local policy and BMV land is not mentioned in the emerging Local Plan.
- 8.28 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.

Assessment

- 8.29 The Site is located in the countryside and is currently used for arable agricultural purposes. Despite the Proposed Development being located in the countryside, Policy DM4 of the Local Plan outlines direct support for renewable energy projects in these locations. The same support is shown in Policies SP07 and SP26 of the emerging Local Plan.
- 8.30 The site specific ALC Survey undertaken found that the 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%). It follows that the Site is farmed as a unit of Grade 3b land, and is classed as Grade 3 (which includes sub-grade 3a and 3b) for the purposes of site selection. The BMV land is defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a and is the land that is most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs, and which can best deliver food and non-food crops for future generations. Therefore, the Proposed Development uses only a small portion of BMV land. It should be noted that the surrounding areas within 3 km of the Site are a mixture of Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land. They are therefore of equal or higher agricultural quality than the Site, which is predominantly subgrade 3b, with some subgrade 3a, making the search area around the available Point of Connection reasonably constrained for alternative sites.
- 8.31 The ASA report that forms part of the planning application submission demonstrates the process that the Applicant went through to identify the Site. This included the consideration of previously developed land and brownfield sites, and equal and lower grade agricultural land, whilst also ensuring proximity to the Point of Connection for which the Applicant benefits from an accepted grid connection point. However, it is noted that NPS EN-3 states that land type should not be the predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location. The overall aim of the assessment is to demonstrate that the Applicant has given due consideration to the benefits and constraints associated with the Site when selecting it for development, which includes the viability and availability of grid connection.

- 8.32 The ASA concludes that within the defined search area from the Point of Connection, there are no alternative sites that are available and more suitable than the Site for the Proposed Development which would make a comparable contribution to renewable energy, and which would comprise a more feasible alternative to that of the Site. It is notable that at this moment in time, no suitable sites for Renewable Energy Developments have been identified by the Council in any Plans. Please refer to 'Site Selection' in Section 3 of this report for further detail. The site selection also included consideration of other environmental constraints, such as avoiding areas subject to a higher risk of flooding, as required by national and local planning policy.
- 8.33 It is noted that the NPPF national policy specifies a preference for the use of previously developed land and brownfield sites but does not preclude development on greenfield land. It is also notable that in recent years there have been a number of constructed and approved solar farms on greenfield land, including land that is also subject to Green Belt designation (which nevertheless does not apply in this instance). Thus highlighting the overarching need for renewable energy generation particularly where its impacts on landscape and rural character can be mitigated by robust landscape strategies, the agricultural land quality preserved, and its agricultural use restored at the end of the life of the development.
- 8.34 Securing an appropriate grid connection is of key importance in the location of a development. It is very important to emphasise that limited opportunities currently exist for grid connections nationally and many renewable energy projects are being held up by constraints of the national grid which can take years to resolve. In this case, 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. The fact that the Proposed Development would utilise spare grid capacity a short distance from the Site (less than 1km), and that the connection could be brought online in the short-medium term (if the application were to be approved), thereby making a contribution to national energy targets is considered to be a material consideration when selecting a site and determining a planning application. This is supported by NPS EN-3 Paragraphs 2.10.22 and 2.10.24 which acknowledge the critical importance of availability of network connection and distance to the distribution network in technical and commercial feasibility of a solar farm.
- 8.35 It is important to note that the Site is intended to be grazed throughout the lifetime of the solar farm thereby retaining its 'greenfield land' quality and allowing for the continued agricultural use

of the Site, albeit for pasture rather than arable production. The continued opportunities for continued agricultural practices through potential grazing whilst the solar farm is in operation would diversify the farm's operations, thereby representing a form of rural diversification. The benefits of this were noted in a recent appeal decision in Cornwall on 18 July 2024 (Appeal Ref: 3334658), whilst emphasising that solar farms do not result in the loss of agricultural uses: *"...the proposal does not replace the agricultural use of the site... There was nothing in the evidence to suggest that the presence of the panels would limit the ability of the land to provide adequate grazing. Moreover, whilst horticulture is the major land use in the wider area, sheep grazing is not an alien form of agricultural activity."*

- 8.36 The UK Food Security Report 2024 analyses land use change and concludes that *"food production levels could be maintained or moderately increased alongside the land use change required to meet out Net Zero and Environment Act targets and commitments."* Footnote 62 of the NPPF was amended in December 2024 and now omits the consideration of the availability of land for food production. The Written Ministerial Statement of 15th May 2024 refers to food production and restates the Government's objective of broadly maintaining current levels of production. The Agricultural Considerations Report also outlines that the potential reduction of food production from the Site would be negligible when viewed in the context of UK food production. It is of note that part of the Site is already in use as conservation grassland. During a recent appeal in Cornwall on 18 July 2024, the Inspector found that the proposed solar farm would have *"very limited impact"* upon local horticulture, noting that the *"UK's food supply chain remains highly resilient."*
- 8.37 Further to this, the Proposed Development would be temporary in nature and at the end of the 40 year operational period the Site would be restored to its current use and condition with all equipment removed. This will be dealt with by a suitably worded planning condition. Further evidence of the reversible nature of solar farms is shown in the Bramley appeal on 5 February 2023 (Appeal Ref: 3304561), which stated: *"the agricultural land would not be permanently or irreversibly lost, particularly as pasture grazing would occur between the solar panels. This would allow the land to recover from intensive use, and the soil condition and structure to improve. The use of the soils for grassland under solar panels should serve to improve soil health and biodiversity."*
- 8.38 Another factor in the NPPG and local planning policy when considering the acceptability of the location of solar farms, is avoiding detrimental environmental impacts and providing biodiversity and landscape benefits/ mitigation. The impact on the local landscape and other environmental impacts is considered later in this section, and it is ultimately concluded that on balance there

would be limited impacts, and these should be balanced with the benefits of the proposals, including the significant landscape mitigation and biodiversity enhancement measures that are proposed.

- 8.39 The significant benefits are considered to outweigh the limited impacts of the Proposed Development which have been mitigated to a reasonable level. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development complies with relevant planning policy relating to site selection and agricultural land quality.

Mineral Safeguarding

Policy Summary

- 8.40 NPPF Paragraph 225 states that *“Local planning authorities should not normally permit other development proposals in Mineral Safeguarding Areas if it might constrain potential future use for mineral working”*.
- 8.41 The Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (MWLP) (2019) includes strategic objectives:
- *To make sufficient provision of minerals in the County of Leicestershire to meet national and local requirements.*
 - *To safeguard mineral resources, mineral sites and associated infrastructure, and waste management facilities from inappropriate development.*
 - *To ensure that land with a temporary use is subsequently restored, managed and maintained to an after-use of high quality at the earliest opportunity which respects the local area’s character, provides a net gain in biodiversity and allows greater public access whilst affording opportunities for recreational economic and community gain in mitigation or compensation for the effects of development where possible.*
- 8.42 The MWLP Policy M11 (Safeguarding of Mineral Resources) seeks to protect mineral resources in safeguarded areas from permanent sterilisation by other development. It states that planning permission for incompatible development within an MSA will be permitted provided it can be demonstrated that the mineral concerned is no longer of any value; the mineral can be extracted prior to incompatible development taking place; the development is of a temporary nature that would not inhibit later extraction; and there is an overriding need for the incompatible development.
- 8.43 Further to this, Policy M11 stipulate that: *“Planning permission for mineral extraction that is in advance of approved surface development will be granted where the reserves would otherwise be*

permanently sterilised provided that operations are only for a temporary period. Where planning permission is granted, conditions will be imposed to ensure that the site can be adequately restored to a satisfactory after-use should the main development be delayed or not implemented”.

- 8.44 Policy M12 (Safeguarding of Existing Mineral Sites and Associated Minerals Infrastructure) states that: *“Significant infrastructure that supports the supply of minerals in the County will be safeguarded against development that would adversely affect operations at an existing mineral site and the use of associated mineral infrastructure by creating incompatible land uses nearby”.*

Assessment

- 8.45 The Site is located within a Mineral Safeguarding Area (‘MSA’) for the protection of Sand and Gravel as aggregate minerals. A Mineral Assessment submitted in support of the planning application which clarifies that only two small sections of the Site are underlain by sand and gravel deposits.
- 8.46 The Mineral Assessment notes that mineral extraction and coal mining has been undertaken in the surrounding area, especially to the northeast of the Main Site. There is an active clay quarry approximately 450m northwest of the Main Site, part of the Desford Brick Works Ltd, located on the opposite of Heath Road from the Proposed Development. An expansion to the clay quarry was approved in 2019 and cover the area directly bordering the Main Site to the north-east/east. It should be noted the original quarry and extension cover a larger area of glaciofluvial sand and gravel deposits, and whilst the Site is in an MRA for Sand and Gravel extraction, it is not safeguarded for clay extraction.
- 8.47 The Mineral Assessment notes that the Leicestershire Aggregate Assessment (2022) acknowledges that production capacity in the County is theoretically sufficient stating at Paragraph 4.7: *“In 2022 existing sites had a total potential production capacity of around 1.45million tonnes per annum, which meant that they were theoretically capable of producing sufficient material to satisfy the level of provision identified in the adopted Minerals and Waste Local Plan. However, it should be noted that since 2021 there has been a decrease in production capacity.”*
- 8.48 The Site is unlikely to be economically workable for sand and gravel extraction given that only approximately 6.4% of the Site is potentially underlain by such deposits.
- 8.49 The Proposed Development is ‘non-mineral development’ and would not be ‘incompatible development’ under Leicestershire MWLP Policy M11. However, the Proposed Development comprises a solar farm that would neither permanently sterilise any minerals resources that could be present, nor facilitate incidental extraction of any potential mineral reserves. The Proposed Development also has a limited lifespan of 40 years, after which time the Site would be returned to

its former use, and therefore would not constraint future potential use for mineral working. This could be secured by a suitably worded planning condition.

- 8.50 Further to the above, Section 2 of this PDAS explains the overriding significant and quantifiable need for the deployment of solar farms and other renewable and low energy generation to meet the UK's net zero targets, which is being driven by government at local and national level in the UK.
- 8.51 On balance, the Proposed Development is considered to be satisfactory with regards to national, London Plan and local policies relating to non-mineral development in MSAs.

Scale, Appearance and Design

Policy Summary

- 8.52 The NPPF is clear at paragraph 131 that *"The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve."* Paragraph 135 asserts that planning decisions should (inter alia) ensure that development: will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development; is visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping; and is sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.
- 8.53 Policy DM10 (Development and Design) of the DMP sets out that development will be permitted providing that:
- a) *"It would not have a significant adverse effect on the privacy and amenity of nearby residents and occupiers of adjacent buildings, including matters of lighting, air quality (including odour), noise, vibration and visual intrusion;*
 - b) *The amenity of occupiers of the proposed development would not be adversely affected by activities in the vicinity of the site;*
 - c) *It complements or enhances the character of the surrounding area with regard to scale, layout, density, mass, design, materials and architectural features;*
 - d) *The use and application of building materials respects the materials of existing, adjoining/neighbouring buildings and the local area generally;*
 - e) *It incorporates a high standard of landscaping where this would add to the quality of the design and siting;*

- f) It maximises opportunities for the conservation of energy and resources through design, layout, orientation and construction in line with Core Strategy Policy 24;*
- g) Where parking is to be provided charging points for electric or low emission vehicles are included where feasible;*
- h) An appropriate Sustainable Drainage Scheme is submitted to and approved by the relevant Authority. Schemes should incorporate wildlife areas, ponds, swales and permeable paving where appropriate;*
- i) It maximises natural surveillance and incorporates the principles of Secured by Design and has considered the incorporation of fire safety measures.”*

8.54 It caveats that *“In exceptional circumstances where outstanding, innovative design is demonstrated (particularly where high levels of sustainability are an integral feature), applications will be considered favourably, even where this may result in some limited conflict with the above criteria.”*

8.55 Policy DM2 (Delivering Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Development) of the DMP notes that appropriately designed and sited renewable energy developments will be supported.

8.56 Spatial Objective 9 (Identity, Distinctiveness and Quality of Design) of the CS states that: *“To ensure development contributes to the local distinctiveness of the borough, and enhances both settlement identity and the environment through the quality of sustainable design. Design and other measures will be used to develop strong community identities and neighbourhood pride.”*

8.57 Draft Policy SP08 (High Quality Design) of the emerging Local Plan outlines that *“development will be supported where the following requirements are met:*

- a) The development is supported by a Design and Access Statement having regard to the site survey, respecting existing site constraints and design assessment in the Hinckley & Bosworth Good Design Guide SPD, which demonstrates the understanding and implementation of local context, distinctiveness and character, including the local pattern of development, building form and landscape character, style details and materials, and the archaeology, history and culture of the local area;*
- b) The amenity and privacy of nearby residents are not materially adversely affected, including by matters of lighting, air quality, odour, noise, vibration and visual intrusion*

- c) The amenity of the proposed users of the development would not be materially adversely affected by activities in the near vicinity of the site, including by matters of lighting, air quality, odour, noise, vibration and visual intrusion*
- d) The development complements or enhances the character of the surrounding area with regards to scale, layout, density, massing, design, high quality materials and architectural features;*
- e) All elements of the development are designed with climate change in mind, maximising opportunities for active travel and sustainable transport methods to help reduce car dependency, renewable and low/net-zero carbon energy technologies, including electric vehicle charging points, use of sustainable and low-carbon materials where feasible, building in flexibility to respond to change, and mechanisms for reducing energy consumption within buildings;*
- f) Appropriate sustainable drainage solutions have been implemented within the design, including but not limited to wildlife areas, ponds, green roofs, swales, permeable surface materials, rain water harvesting, and tree planting and landscaping;*
- g) Development encourages ease of movement for all users, including people with disabilities, by providing legible, accessible, efficient and safe connections and green infrastructure linkages within the development but also to surrounding streets, communities and neighbouring development;*
- h) The development encourages active design for healthy communities, including both physical health and the well-being of residents, in line with Policy SP09;*
- i) It is designed with logical, legible and inclusive layouts which support active street frontages where appropriate, improves the public realm for all, and provides distinction between public and private space;*
- j) Provides an appropriate level of well-designed and well-located high quality landscaping, including all new streets to be tree-lined where appropriate, and the implementation of green and/or blue infrastructure in line with, in particular, Policies SP20 and SP28;*
- k) Creates safe, secure and manageable environments which help to reduce opportunities for crime and minimise the fear of crime by providing natural surveillance and functional accesses;*

- l) Ensures a sufficient level of vehicle parking, recycling and waste management that is well-integrated and not the main visual element and*
- m) Residential development shall be provided with an appropriate level of private amenity space having regard to the Good Design Guide SPD or its equivalent replacement.”*

Assessment

- 8.58 The Proposed Development has been designed so as to practically fulfil its purpose of generating electricity. However, it has also been designed as far as possible to avoid adverse impacts by ensuring sensitive siting and layout which is compatible within its location, together with improving the quality of the area by introducing landscape and biodiversity enhancements, including the arable land for skylark mitigation, retaining and strengthening existing hedgerows, retaining and bolstering existing woodland, and introducing of new boundary hedgerows and areas of species-rich grassland. Details of this can be found in the submitted LVA and Landscape Strategy Plan (Drawing Reference: edp750_d014d). The ‘Design Approach’ and ‘Design Components’ associated with the Proposed Development are covered in more detail in Sections 5 and 6 of this Document, respectively.
- 8.59 The Proposed development is high quality, safe and a provides a contribution to helping to solve the issue of climate change. Furthermore, the Applicant has taken every opportunity to mitigate the impact of the Proposed Development on the landscape character, flood risk, and built and historic environment, and where possible, enhance these environments, detailed throughout this Section 8.
- 8.60 It is envisaged that the containers/ cabins and other small buildings would be appropriately coloured or clad to minimise any visual impact and comply as far as practicable with the local vernacular. Furthermore, cabling between rows of panels, inverters and the grid connection point would be underground at a prescribed depth, and as a result there would be no requirement for over ground cabling and/ or additional pylons, and no visual impact associated with this approach.
- 8.61 Whilst the DNO and customer substations would introduce the tallest elements within the Proposed Development of approx. 3.9 m and 2.9m above ground level, respectively, the remaining infrastructure would be a maximum of 3.0 m above ground level, thereby avoiding introducing large, bulky and overly obtrusive built form.
- 8.62 The Proposed Development would connect into the electricity grid via underground cabling to the existing electricity pylon/ mast to the north-west of the Site and therefore no new towers/ pylons would be required.

- 8.63 Specific mitigation measures have been proposed to reduce anticipated impacts to an acceptable level in all elements of the proposal, such as creation of skylark and ecological mitigation areas, panel set-backs to ecological features such as ditches/ponds and woodland belts and introducing vegetation screening to screen sensitive residential, PRoW and road receptors.
- 8.64 For these reasons, the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable and complies with planning policy in terms of scale, appearance and design.

Landscape and Visual

Policy Summary

- 8.65 Paragraph 135 in the NPPF states that decisions should ensure they “...c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change...”. The NPPF also asserts, at Paragraph 187, that decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (inter alia) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.
- 8.66 Spatial Objective 10 (Natural Environment and Cultural Assets) of the CS seeks to “*deliver a linked network of green infrastructure, enhancing and protecting the borough’s distinctive landscapes, woodlands, geology, archaeological heritage and biodiversity and encourage its understanding, appreciation, maintenance and development.*”
- 8.67 Policy DM2 (Delivering Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Development) of the DMP states that commercial renewable energy developments will be supported where “*All reasonable steps have been taken to avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts including, but not limited to, landscape, noise, visual and cumulative impacts.*”
- 8.68 Policy DM4 (Safeguarding the Countryside and Settlement Separation) of the DMP notes that stand-alone renewable energy developments will be supported where they do not have a “*significant adverse effect on the intrinsic value, beauty, open character and landscape character of the countryside.*”
- 8.69 Policy DM10 (Development and Design) of the DMP outlines that developments will be permitted if they have, among other things, incorporated “*a high standard of landscaping where this would add to the quality of the design and siting.*”
- 8.70 Draft Policy SP28 (Landscape Character) of the emerging Local Plan outlines that “*Proposals will be required to:*

- a) Where appropriate, incorporate and implement the landscape strategies and/or guidance set out in the most up to date Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Sensitivity Study;*
- b) Protect and enhance the character and qualities of the local landscape through appropriate design and management;*
- c) Make provision for the retention and enhancement of features of landscape importance;*
- d) Where appropriate, provide landscape mitigation; and*
- e) Where significant landscape impacts are likely to occur a Landscape and Visual impact Assessment (LVIA) should be submitted.”*

Assessment

- 8.71 This planning application is accompanied by a Landscape Strategy Plan, photomontages and LVA as part of this submission.
- 8.72 The evolving design of the Proposed Development has been subject to significant input from a chartered landscape architect. This has involved a review of national and local planning policies (to identify any landscape designations or sensitive locations), a field survey to gather photography from selected viewpoints and a computer generated 'zone of theoretical visibility' (ZTV) map to identify locations with potential views of the development.
- 8.73 The Site comprises three intensively managed arable and improved grassland field parcels, one of which is rectangular in shape and the other two are of an irregular shape. Due to the undulating topography and well treed character of the landscape the Site is moderately well enclosed. Its structure is broadly intact with some historic hedgerow loss and a depleting existing hedgerow in its southern parcels. There is a PRow which passes through the Site between the northern and southern parcels. There is a woodland belt on the western boundary and a dry ditch running centrally north-south between the two southern parcels.
- 8.74 The Site's sensory character is of an open rural landscape with clear human influence found in the high voltage pylons and wind turbines in the surrounds, and is considered to be representative of the Local Character Area ('LCA'). The LVA generally considers that the Site is indistinguishable from surrounding fields due to its lack of unique identifying features. It is considered that the most valuable elements afforded by the Site includes a row of mature trees along the north-east boundary and the small pocket of woodland in the northern part of the Site, which are proposed to be retained, bolstered and enhanced as part of the proposed landscape strategy. Further to this,

its agricultural use would be retained, albeit changing from arable to pasture/ grazing, through the operational lifetime of the Proposed Development and restored to its current state once decommissioned.

- 8.75 The receptors most likely to experience elevated effects are the Site and immediate Landscape Character Area ('LCA') during construction and operation, and visual receptors within close proximity to the Site.
- 8.76 During construction, the impact of the Proposed Development on the Site itself and immediate LCA would be 'major / 'moderate adverse' due to movement of site traffic and noise. However, such effects would be temporary and limited to the duration of the construction period.
- 8.77 The area immediately surrounding the Site will be subject to the greatest change to the defined LCA and this is predicted to diminish with distance due to intervening vegetation and features. During operation (Years 1 – 15), the landscape effects to the immediate LCA would decrease from 'moderate adverse' to 'minor neutral' as proposed planting matures. For the wider host and non-host LCA the effects would be 'minor / negligible adverse' at Year 1 and 'Minor / negligible neutral' at Year 15.
- 8.78 The elevated level of effects on the character of the Site itself is not due to poor design but an inevitable result of change in land use from agricultural to solar development, and should not in itself be a reason for objection. It is notable that while there would be adverse effects on the character of the Site, these effects would reduce with maturation of the proposed planting and would have some beneficial effects including enhancement of the landscape fabric. These effects would reduce from 'major/moderate adverse' at Year 1 to 'moderate / minor adverse' at Year 15 and would represent a combination of beneficial effects from BNG and adverse effects and is therefore considered to be neutral.
- 8.79 In terms of effects on the National Forest and Charnwood Forest Regional Park, the Site is located outside of these landscapes and therefore does not have any direct effect on these areas in landscape or visual terms.
- 8.80 The LVA details the visual effects on various receptors, including PROW and road users, and residential properties. During construction, the receptors likely to experience the most elevated effects are the users of PROW S14, Heath Road and residential properties at Woodside Farm and Heath House, ranging from 'substantive' to 'major' adverse. Albeit such effects would be temporary and limited to the construction period.

- 8.81 The LVA concludes that the long-term visual effects would be greatest at PRoW S14 being 'major / moderate adverse' and residential properties along Heath Road being 'major adverse' at Year 1. Once the proposed planting matures (i.e. at Year 15), the effects would be no greater than 'moderate adverse' during winter months and 'moderate / minor adverse' during summer months on these receptors, with the elevated levels of effect on specific visual receptors not due to poor design but due to the proximity to the Proposed Development (i.e. receptors within 1 km of the Site), the sensitivity of the receptors and the level of change experienced by the land use change from arable agriculture to a solar farm with grazing (pasture). However, given the presence of humanising factors, such as existing pylons, agricultural / industrial and energy infrastructure development in the surrounding area, the Proposed Development would not necessarily conflict with the character of the area.
- 8.82 As such, these effects are not considered to be significant and would be temporary and reversible in the longer term given the enhanced landscape framework of hedgerows at Year 15 and particularly post-decommissioning. Overall, the LVA concludes that the Proposed Development would provide sufficient screening, filtering and softening to allow for landscape and visual integration with the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development which are likely to be limited to within 1 km of the Site. Furthermore, the proposal would contribute positively to the landscape fabric and biodiversity of the Site and area in the long term as a result of the robust landscape strategy.
- 8.83 In landscape and visual terms, the Proposed Development would not result in significant harm to the landscape character or visual environment, either individually or cumulatively. When juxtaposed with substantial benefits of the Proposed Development it is considered that the Proposed Development complies with relevant planning policy relating to landscape and visual impact.

Cultural Heritage

Policy Summary

- 8.84 The NPPF states at paragraph 207:

"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using

appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a Site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation”.

- 8.85 Policy DM2 (Delivering Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Development) of the DMP notes that commercial scale renewable energy developments will be supported if they accord specifically with Policy DM11 and Policy DM12.
- 8.86 Policy DM11 (Protecting and Enhancing the Historic Environment) of the DMP outlines that *“The Borough Council will protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment throughout the borough.”* It continues in saying that *“All development proposals which have the potential to affect a heritage asset or its setting will be required to demonstrate:*
- a) An understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting; and*
 - b) The impact of the proposal on the significance of the asset and its setting, including measures to minimise or avoid these impacts; and*
 - c) How the benefits of the proposal will outweigh any harm caused; and*
 - d) Any impact on archaeology in line with Policy DM13.”*
- 8.87 Policy DM12 (Heritage Assets) of the DMP states that *“All development proposals affecting heritage assets and their setting will be expected to secure their continued protection or enhancement, contribute to the distinctiveness of the areas in which they are located and contribute to the wider vibrancy of the borough.”*
- 8.88 Spatial Objective 10 (Natural Environment and Cultural Assets) of the CS seeks to *“deliver a linked network of green infrastructure, enhancing and protecting the borough’s distinctive landscapes, woodlands, geology, archaeological heritage and biodiversity and encourage its understanding, appreciation, maintenance and development.”*
- 8.89 Draft Policy SP08 (High Quality Design) of the emerging Local Plan attributes that development will be supported where it demonstrates understanding or the *“archaeology, history and culture of the local area.”*
- 8.90 One of the key aims of the Heritage Statement 2018-2023 is to *“ensure conservation areas are adequately protected and thoroughly understood.”*

Assessment

- 8.91 The Cultural Heritage Assessment ('CHA') is supported by a geophysical survey, of which both form part of the planning application submission, covering the matter of cultural heritage, including above-ground built heritage and archaeology.
- 8.92 The National Heritage List for England (NHLE) records scheduled moated sites at Lindridge Fields Farm and Bagworth within the 2km study area whilst a third Scheduled moated site lies immediately adjacent to the study area at Newbold Verdon Hall, the Hall itself being Grade I Listed (Asset 3). Newbold Verdon moat, the hall and nine Grade II Listed Buildings all lie within the Newbold Verdon Conservation Area. The Grade II Listed Ivy Cottage is located to the west of the Conservation Area. There are four II Grade Listed Buildings in the village of Barlestone to the west of the Site, which include the Church of St Giles. The Grade I Church of St Peter and two Grade II Listed Buildings lie to the north of the Site.
- 8.93 The CHA confirms that the Site is visible from two designated assets located within 2km north of the Site, being the Bagworth War Memorial and corner cottage of station lane assets. The CHA concludes that the potential intervisibility is generally very limited and distant, and consequently the assessed levels of impact upon the character of the two assets are judged to be 'neutral'. As such, there would be no harm predicted to these assets and specific mitigation measures for settings impacts are not considered necessary.
- 8.94 There is no intervisibility to the other assets due to intervening topography, vegetation or built structures.
- 8.95 The Site, including part of the cable route, has been in agricultural use from at least the post-medieval to the modern period. There is considered to be low potential for finds or remains, however agricultural remains associated with cultivation, field boundaries or drainage are likely to be present and of negligible cultural value. The geophysical surveys undertaken in 2018 and 2023 supports these findings. However, the potential or previously unrecorded buried remains to be present on the Site cannot be entirely discounted particularly as the evidence suggests that the Site is unlikely to have seen intensive occupation since at least the Conquest.
- 8.96 The geophysical surveys identified a number of archaeological anomalies within the Site, mostly related to agricultural activity, historic field boundaries, geological features and field drains. Historic ploughing remains one of the greatest threats to archaeological sites and deposits and may have had a detrimental impact upon any hitherto unknown buried archaeological remains which may survive.

- 8.97 Historic maps record the section of the Cable Route located along Heath Road has been a main road/track since at least the late 19th century. The construction of the modern road has likely had a severe adverse impact on any below ground remains which may have survived. As such there is judged to be a Negligible potential for remains of any periods to survive along the Heath Road section of the Cable Route
- 8.98 The Proposed Development adopts the Rochdale Envelope approach in which the 'maximum impact' of the final design has been considered. However, the overall footprint of development (encompassing piling, topsoil stripping, cable trenching and foundation excavation) is anticipated to be very limited in extent, typically a minor proportion of a site.
- 8.99 Furthermore, the Proposed Development would spread the weight of the panels evenly across the array's footprint. The predicted impacts on archaeological remains resulting from the Proposed Development therefore stands in marked contrast to other forms of greenfield development, such as mineral extraction, which is wholly destructive, and housing developments, which are largely, if not wholly, destructive.
- 8.100 It should be noted that the Proposed Development presents an opportunity to restrict further damage to the archaeological resource by removing the Site from arable use and therefore the effects of modern ploughing. However, the installation of the piles for solar panel modules in other areas of the Site would likely have a limited physical impact upon any present buried archaeological remains, but other associated excavations, such as cable trenches, new access tracks or any structures (transformer/ inverter stations) may have a greater impact, however only within the relatively limited footprint of these works.
- 8.101 Given the archaeological potential of the Site it is advised that Planning Archaeologist at Leicestershire County Council, archaeological advisor to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, may require an archaeological investigation by intrusive means to determine the nature and extent of any surviving archaeological remains within the Site prior to development although the geophysical survey could suggest that the archaeological potential may be limited. Such mitigation measures could be addressed by a suitably worded planning condition.
- 8.102 For these reasons, the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable and in compliance with planning policy in terms of cultural heritage and archaeology.

Biodiversity

Policy Summary

8.103 Paragraph 193 in the NPPF asserts that, when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should (inter alia) apply the following principles:

- If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
- Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- Opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

8.104 Policy DM6 (Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geological Interest) of the DMP outlines that *“Development proposals must demonstrate how they conserve and enhance features of nature conservation and geological value including proposals for their long term future management. Major developments in particular must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to restore, enhance and create valuable habitats, ecological networks and ecosystem services.”*

8.105 It continues: *“Proposals where the primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity or geological interest will be permitted where they comply with other relevant policies in the plan. On site features should be retained, buffered and managed favourably to maintain their ecological value, connectivity and functionality in the long-term. The removal or damage of such features shall only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated the proposal will result in no net loss of biodiversity and where the integrity of local ecological networks can be secured.”*

8.106 Policy DM9 (Safeguarding Natural and Semi-Natural Open Spaces) of the DMP states that *“All developments within or affecting Natural and Semi-Natural Open Spaces should seek to retain and enhance the accessibility of the space and its recreational value whilst ensuring the biodiversity and conservation value is also enhanced.”*

8.107 Spatial Objective 10 (Natural Environment and Cultural Assets) of the CS seeks to *“deliver a linked network of green infrastructure, enhancing and protecting the borough’s distinctive landscapes,*

woodlands, geology, archaeological heritage and biodiversity and encourage its understanding, appreciation, maintenance and development.”

8.108 Draft Policy SP25 (Enhancing Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity) of the emerging Local Plan states that *“Biodiversity Net Gain shall be secured and delivered in accordance with the statutory framework and shall maximise opportunities for the enhancement of ecological networks within the Borough and where appropriate support nature-based solutions to climate change. Major developments in particular must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to:*

- a) Restore and enhance existing features on site;*
- b) Create additional habitats and ecological networks; and*
- c) The linking of existing habitats to create links between ecological networks and where possible, with adjoining features.”*

8.109 The Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy 2024 to 2028 sets out how HBBC will manage its land to protect, celebrate, and enhance biodiversity. They outline the following goals:

- 1. “Work towards an increased tree canopy in the borough.*
- 2. Increase biodiversity on our property and enhance our green infrastructure.*
- 3. Through the planning service ensure the delivery of at least 10% biodiversity net gain on all qualifying planning applications which are permitted.”*

Assessment

8.110 An Ecological Appraisal has been submitted as part of this application which describes habitats and ecological receptors within and around the Site, assesses their ecological value and identifies potential effects resulting from the Proposed Development, as informed by standard desk and field-based investigations. A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Calculation and Skylark Mitigation Strategy also form part of this submission.

8.111 The Site is not subject to any environmental designations and there are no internationally designated sites within 10 km of the Site. There are no nationally designated sites or county important designations within 2 km.

8.112 The Site is not covered by any non-statutory designations. There are 8 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within 2 km of the Site. Seven parcels of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland (a Priority Habitat)

are located within 500m of the Site, the closest is located approximately 125 metres west of the Site. There are no Ancient Woodlands nor any other Irreplaceable Habitats within 500m of the Site.

- 8.113 The Ecological Appraisal found that the onsite habitats are predominantly of limited intrinsic nature value (less than Local level) comprising mainly of large intensively managed arable and improved grassland fields. Locally valuable habitats are restricted to the field boundaries / hedgerows within the Site. It is important to note, that all trees, tree groups and hedgerows, and the woodland belt would be retained due to the careful design of the Site layout (as indicated in the AIA the submitted with this planning application), as would the existing ditch and pond on-site.
- 8.114 The Ecological Appraisal found that on Site habitats support a locally valuable breeding bird assemblage, including skylark, and Site level importance assemblage of wintering birds. On a precautionary basis, the hedgerows are presumed to be of County level significance for foraging and commuting bats with the arable fields being less than Site level importance. Any trees identified as suitable for bat roosting are to be retained. Note, in the absence of significant lighting requirements during construction and operation, bat activity surveys were not considered to be necessary. While there was no evidence of badger activity or sett creation on the Site, given their mobile nature, the common status of badger in the county and district and habitats present, it is considered that badger could be present in the future and therefore of Site level importance.
- 8.115 No records of Brown hare records exist from the local landscape however, the species is considered likely to forage and breed across the Site. Owing to their Priority Species status, the population is considered to be of up to Site-level importance. There are hedgehog records in the wider landscape however opportunities for this species on the Site is limited to the field boundary habitats. Owing to their Priority Species Status, if any such population is present, it is considered to be of up to Site-level importance.
- 8.116 One record of great crested newt was returned within 2 km of the Site, approximately 500m away. A population of great crested newt is using the Site, however given the distance to the breeding site and the habitats present on-site, is judged to be of Site importance. A district level or other mitigation licence, or non-licensed method statement will be sought. With the exception of field margins / woodland belt, the Site supports limited habitat with potential to support reptiles.
- 8.117 Accordingly, a proportionate and appropriate response for the avoidance, mitigation and compensation of any predicted impacts and ecological effects is considered in the Ecological Appraisal in outline and summarised below.

8.118 The following mitigation is embedded within the indicative masterplan, which can be secured by suitably worded pre-commencement planning condition for a detailed layout and landscape plan:

- Creation of a skylark mitigation area in the north of the Site, which will comprise arable habitat and skylark plots, to ensure this species is not significantly impacted by the Proposed Development;
- Creation of a 1.5ha ecological mitigation area in the south-east which will be sown with a suitable wild bird seed mix for skylark and other farmland birds;
- The on-site pond and dry ditch will be retained and enhanced where possible;
- Utilising existing hedgerow gaps, field gateways and ditch crossings, where feasible, for access, to minimise any watercourse/ grassland /tree damage /losses, where possible;
- Retention and buffering of trees and the woodland belt, including trees identified as having bat roosting suitability;
- Enhancement and strengthening of the existing hedgerows through gaps and tree planting of native species, which will increase diversity; and
- Sowing areas with species rich grassland in areas between solar panels and in the margins with shade tolerant species sown under the solar panels;
- Using native species only.

8.119 The construction/ pre-construction measures for the Site would be detailed in an Ecological Method Statement (ECMS) produced by an Ecological Clerk of Work which can be secured by a suitably worded planning condition. These measures include:

- Briefing of site personnel and supervision of certain construction/ enabling works by a suitably experienced ecologist of the potential ecology interests, identification and legislative protection (if required);
- Protection of retained habitats within working areas where construction personnel, vehicles and materials are excluded;
- Standard pollution prevention measures to ensure pollution does not enter the ditch network;
- Pre-commencement walkover survey and setting monitoring for badgers and an ECMS;

- A district-level or other mitigation license/non-licensed method statement for great crested newts; and
- Sensitive timing and methods of vegetation clearance with regards to nesting birds, badgers, reptiles, amphibians and hedgehogs, where suitable habitat losses occur. If this is not practical, then a check for any active nests by a suitable qualified ecologist should be undertaken immediately prior to any clearance and any nests left undisturbed until no longer occupied; and
- Sensitive construction lighting scheme for bats.

8.120 Detailed design measures will include the following which can be secured by suitably worded planning condition for a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) or equivalent:

- Creation of species rich grassland in areas between solar panels and in the margins with shade tolerant species sown under the solar panels;
- Enhancement and strengthening of the existing hedgerows through gap and tree planting of native species, which will increase diversity;
- Provision of skylark plots in the skylark mitigation area;
- Provision of bird and bat boxes on suitable mature trees along the boundaries of the Site, including a barn owl box;
- Provision of invertebrate features and hibernacula that provide refuge, hibernation and foraging opportunities for reptiles and newts, as a precautionary measure; and
- Provision of mammal gates in the security fencing, suitable for badgers and other mammals, such as hedgehogs, proposed at 250m intervals around the Site.

8.121 A BNG Strategy will create new habitats of greater distinctiveness and in better overall condition than the current baseline on Site. It is anticipated that the Site will provide an overall net gain of +66.86% habitat units and +47.06% hedgerow units based on the Indicative Layout Plan and Landscape Strategy Plan. The final BNG Plan will be secured by way of planning condition and delivered alongside a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan ('HMMP').

8.122 For these reasons, the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable and in compliance with planning policy in terms of biodiversity.

Flood Risk

Policy Summary

- 8.123 Paragraph 170 of the NPPF states that *“Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk.”* Paragraph 174 aims to *“steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding from any source.”*
- 8.124 Policy DM7 (Preventing Pollution and Flooding) of the DMP states: *“Adverse impacts from pollution and flooding will be prevented by ensuring that development proposals demonstrate that:*
- a) It will not adversely impact the water quality, ecological value or drainage function of water bodies in the borough;*
 - b) Appropriate containment solutions for oils, fuels and chemicals are provided;*
 - c) All reasonable steps are taken through design, siting and technological solutions to ensure the abatement of obtrusive light to avoid sky glow, glare and light intrusion;*
 - d) It would not cause noise or vibrations of a level which would disturb areas that are valued for their tranquillity in terms of recreation or amenity;*
 - e) Appropriate remediation of contaminated land in line with minimum national standards is undertaken;*
 - f) It will not contribute to poor air quality;*
 - g) It will not result in land instability or further intensify existing unstable land; and*
 - h) The development doesn’t create or exacerbate flooding by being located away from areas of flood risk unless adequately mitigated against in line with National Policy.”*
- 8.125 Draft Policy SP06 (Flood Risk) of the emerging Local Plan (Regulation 18 draft) outlines that *“Planning applications for development proposals that require a Flood Risk Assessment will be required to address the actual and residual risk from all forms of flooding and the impact of climate change.”*
- 8.126 It continues: *“All development proposals should, wherever possible, include measures to reduce and manage surface water in accordance with the principles laid out within the drainage hierarchy through appropriate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and avoiding where possible discharge to the public sewerage system so as to minimise and manage flood risk and improve water quality in accordance with relevant Local Plan policies on climate change and pollution control.”*

Assessment

8.127 The Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1 the area at lowest risk of flooding, defined as land having a less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of river or sea flooding.

8.128 This is fully in accordance with the aim of the sequential approach set out in the NPPF which is to steer new development to areas at the lowest probability of flooding in Zone 1. In relation to Flood Risk Vulnerability and Flood Zone 'Compatibility', the planning practice guidance to the NPPF advises that all uses of land are appropriate in Flood Zone 1.

8.129 A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy have been submitted alongside this Application. The assessment concludes that the Site is at 'low' to 'very low' risk from all forms of flooding.

8.130 There are some areas of elevated surface water flood risk associated with low-lying areas of the Site where surface water could accumulate and where topography could concentrate runoff. However, these areas of risk are isolated and shallow (less than 0.3m) even during the extreme 'low risk' (1 in 1000 year) events. The proposed layout has been designed to raise sensitive equipment above any flood depths or to protect sensitive equipment in these areas, which would ensure the Proposed Development would remain operational and safe in times of the design flood event. These design flood mitigation measures include:

- Control equipment sequentially located in areas of 'very low' surface water flood risk.
- Panel supports and security fencing in flood risk areas will be securely piled into the ground and designed to allow for the effect of flowing water pressures and to be resistant to inundation during a flood event.
- All sensitive control equipment would be raised at least 300 mm above ground level and the finished floor level of all buildings would be at least 150 mm above ground level to safeguard from the ingress of surface waters.
- All built development (solar arrays, security fencing and control equipment) is at least 3 m from the onsite ordinary watercourses (drainage ditches). To facilitate an internal cable route land drainage / ordinary watercourse consent could be required for amendments to drainage ditch at one localised location.

8.131 As such the aims of the sequential test are satisfied and the development and the Proposed Development is located in predominantly 'low' to 'very low' risk areas and the development is compatible with the small areas of elevated surface water flood risk.

- 8.132 Furthermore, all solar panels would be a minimum of 0.8 m above ground level and separated by 3 m, allowing rainwater to drain freely to the ground beneath and in between solar panels thereby replicating the greenfield scenario.
- 8.133 Access tracks utilise existing ditch/ hedgerow crossings, where possible, and would comprise semi-permeable materials to avoid creating impermeable areas across the Site.
- 8.134 Existing drainage features will be retained except at one localised location, and the Site will remain in a vegetated state throughout construction and operation to prevent soil erosion. The sustainable drainage strategy involving the implementation of SuDS in the form of proposed interception swales would manage surface water runoff on the Site which will gradually drain via infiltration, evaporation and evapotranspiration. The interception swales are proposed at low points of the Site to intercept extreme runoff flows. The interception swales have a storage capacity greater than additional runoff volume generated, and would lead to an overall reduction in surface water flow rates from the site and mitigate any increase in run-off due to the minor reduction in the overall permeable area of the Site.
- 8.135 These measures would ensure that the Proposed Development would remain operational and safe in times of the 'design flood'. The nature and design of the supporting framework for the development is such that the Proposed Development would not increase flood risk elsewhere and would reduce the flood risk overall, subject to the implementation and maintenance of the drainage arrangements set out in the FRA submitted with this application, and briefly described above. This can be secured by a suitably worded planning condition.
- 8.136 For these reasons, the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable and in compliance with planning policy in terms of flood risk and drainage.

Traffic and Transport

Policy Summary

- 8.137 Paragraph 109 in the NPPF encourages developers to consider (inter alia) the potential impacts of development on transport networks, and how these can be addressed, and opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use. Paragraph 116 in the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.
- 8.138 Policy DM17 (Highways and Transportation) of the DMP states that development proposals will be supported where they, among other things:

- a) *“Demonstrate that there is not a significant adverse impact upon highway safety; and in the case of development that generates significant movement;*
- e) *Where it can be demonstrated that the residual cumulative impacts of development on the transport network are not severe.”*

8.139 Draft Policy SP29 (Transport, Movement and Access) of the emerging local plan is largely focused on traffic generating development and supporting sustainable transport and minimising private vehicle usage. It requires Transport Assessments for major development to demonstrate that there is no adverse impact on highway safety and any residual cumulative impacts of development on the transport network are not severe.

Assessment

8.140 The Applicant has submitted a Transport Report and Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan ('CTMP') as part of the application submission.

8.141 The site access during construction and operation, and internal movement is described in Sections 4 and 6 above. The site access is located approximately 60m west of the priority T junction of Heath Road and comprises an existing private road / farm track.

8.142 Preliminary layout drawings which show the available visibility splays for the access junction and swept path analysis of 16.5 m articulated HGVs have been submitted which demonstrate safe access and egress of HGVs. The required visibility splays are achievable within land under the control of the applicant or the publicly maintained highway which would be subject to further detailed design and would be discussed and agreed with the local highway authority, if needed. Furthermore, a construction compound will be provided within the Site for vehicles to unload and turn, and access and egress the Site safely, as well as parking so that construction vehicles do not need to park on the public highway. If any supplementary management measures are required following more detailed design, these shall be agreed with the local highway authority and then implemented accordingly. An updated CTMP could be updated prior to construction works starting, as appropriate, to reflect the final agreed strategy and any associated measures and secured by a suitably worded planning condition.

8.143 The construction vehicle routing of all vehicles to/ from the Site will approach via the B585 and the A511 which is considered to be the most appropriate route to/ from the Strategic Road Network ('SRN') whilst avoiding as many local settlements, such as Bagworth, as possible and any height and weight restrictions. Swept path analysis was undertaken of the access route which has identified that the route is suitable for construction vehicles such as HGVs.

- 8.144 It should be noted that an alternative construction route was considered which would provide a shorter route to the SRN. However, this would route vehicles north on Heath Road from the Site, through the village of Bagworth to the B585 and on to the A511. Whilst being the shorter route, it is not considered to be the most appropriate for HGV traffic given that it goes through villages of Bagworth and Stanton under Bardon.
- 8.145 During the temporary 24 week construction programme, vehicle movements are typically expected to comprise 50 LGV (cars/ vans) and 8 HGV two-way movements per day, arriving in the morning and leaving in the evening.
- 8.146 Personal Injury Collision (PIC) data for the highway network (for the period 1/1/2019-30/9/2024) in the vicinity of the Site does not indicate clustering of accidents that would indicate deficiency in the highway network that could result in an increase in accidents as a result of the Proposed Development, and therefore is not considered to have a significant adverse impact on highways safety.
- 8.147 It is considered that this volume of vehicle trips is minimal and will have a negligible impact on the operational capacity of the local highway network during construction.
- 8.148 Once the Proposed Development becomes operational, the frequency of vehicle movements would be much lower than in the construction phase and the vehicle types would generally be limited to two LGVs arriving on two occasions per month (i.e. 4 two-way vehicle movements per month). It is estimated that 1 HGV trip may occur per annum to replace items/ equipment, with no abnormal loads anticipated. Traffic volumes of this magnitude would be imperceptible on a daily basis. There would be no residual traffic related impacts arising from the permanent operational phase of the Proposed Development.
- 8.149 There would be no abnormal loads arriving during either construction or operation, however in any event the appropriate arrangements would be made and the Highways Authority notified in the event.
- 8.150 For these reasons, the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable and in compliance with planning policy in terms of its impact on transport and traffic.

Amenity

Policy Summary

- 8.151 Policy DM7 (Preventing Pollution and Flooding) of the DMP states that adverse impacts from pollution will be prevented by ensuring development proposals, among other things, demonstrate:

- c) *“All reasonable steps are taken through design, siting and technological solutions to ensure the abatement of obtrusive light to avoid sky glow, glare and light intrusion;*
- d) *It would not cause noise or vibrations of a level which would disturb areas that are valued for their tranquillity in terms of recreation or amenity;*
- f) *It will not contribute to poor air quality;”*

8.152 Policy DM10 (Development and Design) of the DMP outlines that developments will be permitted providing that the following requirements, among other things, are met:

- a) *“It would not have a significant adverse effect on the privacy and amenity of nearby residents and occupiers of adjacent buildings, including matters of lighting, air quality (including odour), noise, vibration and visual intrusion;*
- b) *The amenity of occupiers of the proposed development would not be adversely affected by activities in the vicinity of the site;*
- c) *It complements or enhances the character of the surrounding area with regard to scale, layout, density, mass, design, materials and architectural features;”*

8.153 Draft Policy SP08 (High Quality Design) of the emerging Local Plan adds that developments will be supported where, among other things:

- b) *“The amenity and privacy of nearby residents are not materially adversely affected, including by matters of lighting, air quality, odour, noise, vibration and visual intrusion*
- c) *The amenity of the proposed users of the development would not be materially adversely affected by activities in the near vicinity of the site, including by matters of lighting, air quality, odour, noise, vibration and visual intrusion.”*

Assessment

8.154 The nature of the Proposed Development is such that it is not likely to detrimentally impact amenity or cause any form of pollution during its operational stage. This is because there are few noise sources, traffic would be very low and the Proposed Development would not be lit at night. Furthermore, the Proposed Development does not include any plans to divert or close any PROW during either construction or operation.

8.155 The closest residential properties are located approximately 250m to the north at Woodside farm, along Merrylees Road approx. 400m to the south-west and along Bagworth Road approx. 750m to the west. The Applicant has submitted a Noise Assessment with this application which considers

the potential noise generation from the plant associated with the Proposed Development with respect to existing noise levels in the area. It concludes that surrounding properties would experience low levels of noise attributable to the operation of the solar farm, predicted to be generally within the 'No Observed Effect Level', and no acoustic mitigation is required. It should be noted that the assessment considers that all items of plant associated with the solar farm are assumed to be fully operational continuously and simultaneously at all times during the daytime and night-time periods. In reality, the items of plant relating to the solar farm will only be fully operational during the daylight hours. As such the assessment is considered to represent the worst-case scenario.

8.156 In terms of traffic noise, there would be some temporary noise during the construction phase, which is anticipated to last approximately 24 weeks. This would include the following activities:

- Vehicle movements along access tracks and haulage routes associated with the delivery and removal of construction materials;
- Equipment delivery;
- Site and ground preparation activities; and
- Material hauling.

8.157 The construction activities may increase noise levels within the vicinity of the Site; however, it is considered that noise impacts during construction would be intermittent, localised and temporary in nature.

8.158 The Proposed Development would be passive in operation and therefore would not generate any significant operational noise, other than that associated with occasional visits by maintenance/service vehicles. The noise associated with such activities would be negligible and less than that associated with farming activities in the area.

8.159 The Proposed Development would not result in any emissions to air during its operation other than those from vehicles associated with periodic maintenance/ inspection visits to the Site. Emissions associated with the construction phase would relate to construction vehicles and it is considered would not be of a level to cause harm to the environment or residential amenity. It is considered that emissions would be more than offset by the benefits of generating renewable energy at the Site.

8.160 A Glint and Glare Assessment has been undertaken as part of this planning submission to assess the potential for visible glint or glare from the solar panels. It is notable that the solar panels are

designed to absorb sunlight, therefore there would be no significant issues associated with glint and glare. The metal frame is treated to avoid any significant issues associated with glint and glare.

- 8.161 The Glint and Glare Assessment considered the potential impacts on ground-based receptors such as roads, rail and residential dwellings as well as aviation assets. The effects of glint and glare and their impact on local receptors has been analysed in detail. The proposal would not result in significant adverse effect once mitigation measures (i.e., screen planting of native hedgerows) are implemented on the southern boundary of the Site to screen two road receptors on Broad Drove West. This is shown on the Landscape Strategy Plan (Drawing Ref. edp7530_d014d).
- 8.162 In terms of aviation assets, only 'green glare' is predicted to impact on Runway 22, 24, 28, 33 and 34 approach paths and Air Traffic Control Towers at Leister Airport and Runway 08 approach path at Lodge Farm. Green glare is an acceptable impact when pilots are approaching runways/helipads, according to FAA guidance. Therefore, the impact on these runway approach paths is Not Significant and mitigation is not required.
- 8.163 Further to this, the Glint and Glare Assessment includes a cumulative assessment of glint and glare effects with the nearby Lindridge solar farm (Ref 14/01270/FUL) and concludes that there would be no significant adverse cumulative effects on residential and road receptors once mitigation measures are taken into account nor for rail or aviation receptors.
- 8.164 As mentioned previously, one PROW (S14) runs along the northern boundary of the southern parcel, briefly entering the centre of the Site. A second public footpath (R60) intersects the underground cable route on Heath Road. These would be retained and protected throughout construction and operation with appropriate fencing. Should any construction movements need to occur across a PROW, gates will be erected and a banksman present to open the gates and ensure the safety of PROW users
- 8.165 In light of the above, the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact upon residential amenity and accords with relevant planning policy.

9.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The Proposed Development comprises the construction, operation and subsequent decommissioning of a solar PV farm and associated infrastructure on land at Heath Road, Bagworth located south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone.
- 9.2 There is an urgent and compelling need for the generation of renewable energy in the UK. It is estimated that the proposals would export around 21.5 MW of renewable energy – enough electricity to power approximately 7,581 homes annually and displace up to 3,856 tonnes of CO₂ per year.
- 9.3 The Proposed Development benefits from an accepted point of connection a short distance from the Main Site, allowing an imminent grid connection, enabling it to provide a significant and imminent contribution to UK targets. Given the limited opportunities which currently exist for grid connections nationally, it is of key importance in the consideration of this proposal. 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.
- 9.4 It is clearly evident that the principle of the Proposed Development is in line with both local and national policy support for the urgent deployment of renewable energy generation, including solar to meet climate change targets. As set out within the NPPF, significant weight should be provided to these benefits. As outlined within Appendix 2, this position has been supported by a number of recent appeal decisions. There is therefore a significant and demonstrable urgent need for the Proposed Development, as set out in Section 2 of this document.
- 9.5 Further to this, the Applicant has undertaken a site specific ALC Survey and FRA, and also an ASA within a 3 km search area of the agreed Point of Connection. The ASA demonstrates there are no other reasonable alternative sites of similar size that are on equal or lower agricultural land or flood risk zones within technical and commercial feasible distance of the Point of Connection.
- 9.6 The Applicant has carried out a meaningful pre-application consultation exercise in respect of the Proposed Development, primarily focused on the local community, but also including consultation with other stakeholders. The Applicant considered the points raised by consultees during the

engagement process. The Applicant considers that information provided in the Transport Report, Construction Traffic Management Plan, Alternative Site Assessment and Planning, Design and Access Statement suitably addresses the concerns raised regarding loss of arable/cropland and construction traffic. Further to this, the majority of feedback received was positive and as a result no changes or additions are deemed to be necessary. It has been demonstrated that the Proposed Development complies with planning policy and there are significant benefits associated with it. The environmental and technical reports that form part of the planning application submission demonstrate that there would be no unacceptable environmental impacts, and there are a number of added benefits, including habitat creation and substantial biodiversity gains of +66.86% habitat units and +47.06% hedgerow units, well in excess of the mandatory 10% BNG. Furthermore, it includes the creation of 3.5 ha of skylark mitigation area with skylark plots and 1.5 ha ecological mitigation area for skylark and other farmland birds. The contribution that the Proposed Development will make to the delivery of important energy and climate change policy objectives, not least the legally binding target of Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, should be afforded very substantial weight by HBBC in determining the Application.

- 9.7 These factors, when combined with the significant need for renewable energy, mean that the planning balance (and, in particular, when considered in the context of the tests under Section 38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) is weighted significantly in favour of the Proposed Development.
- 9.8 The Applicant therefore respectfully requests that planning permission is granted for the Proposed Development.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF PLANS

No.	Reference	Title
1	RCN1008-SP-01	Site Location Plan
2	RCN1008-PLE-01	Indicative Site Layout Plan
3	RCN1008-DZ-01	Development Zone Plan
4	RCN1008-200	Solar Panel Array Details
5	RCN1008-221	Customer substation details
6	RCN1008-220	DNO details
7	RCN1008-223	Power station (Transformer) details
8	RCN1008-202	Inverter Mounting Details
9	RCN1008-210	Trench Section details
10	RCN1008-215	CCTV Pole Mounting Details
11	RCN1008-230	Access Track Section Details
12	RCN1008-231	Fence and Gate Section Details

APPENDIX 2: RECENT AND RELEVANT APPEAL DECISIONS

APPEAL DECISION	REFERENCE	EXTRACT
Very Significant Weight		
Langford (Appeal ref. 3293104) 5 December 2022	Paragraph 21, page 4	<i>The Secretary of State affords the production of electricity significant weight in favour of the proposal.</i>
Bramley (Appeal ref. 330456) 5 February 2023	Paragraph 59, page 12 Paragraph 77, page 15	<i>The agricultural land would not be permanently or irreversibly lost, particularly as pasture grazing would occur between the solar panels. This would allow the land to recover from intensive use, and the soil condition and structure to improve. The use of the soils for grassland under solar panels should serve to improve soil health and biodiversity and the proposed LEMP, which could be secured by a condition attached to any grant of planning permission, includes measures to improve the biodiversity of the land under and around the panels.</i> <i>There are no physical constraints limiting early development of this site and a grid connection offer is in place. As such, the scheme could make an early and significant contribution to the objective of achieving the statutory Net target set for 2050 and the commitment to reducing emissions by 78%, compared with 1990 levels, by 2035. The LPA acknowledges that this is a substantial benefit that attracts significant weight. Accordingly, I give substantial weight to the generation of renewable energy and contribution to a low carbon economy and significant weight to the provision of low cost and secure energy.</i>
Murton (Appeal ref. 3308881) 25 May 2023	Paragraph 22, page 4	<i>As such, the scheme could make an early and significant contribution to the objective of achieving the statutory Net Zero target, this is a material consideration and in accordance with Policy 33 of the CDP I afford it significant weight.</i>
Halloughton (Appeal ref. 3279533) 25 May 2023	Paragraph 55, page 11	<i>As such, the scheme could make an early and significant contribution to the objective of achieving the statutory Net Zero target set for 2050 and the commitment to reducing emissions by 78% compared with 1990 levels by 2035. Given this imperative, this benefit attracts significant weight</i>
Scruton (Appeal ref. 3315877) 27 June 2023	Paragraph 36, page 6	<i>The support in both national and local policy for renewable energy is caveated by the need for the impacts to be acceptable, or capable of being made so, nevertheless, the renewable energy benefit of the proposal must be accorded substantial weight.</i>
Cray's Hall (Appeal ref. 3318171)	Para 25, page 6	<i>However the provision of a renewable energy scheme with a generation capacity of 25.6MW, and annual</i>

APPEAL DECISION	REFERENCE	EXTRACT
Very Significant Weight		
30 August 2023		<i>generation output of 36,499.26 MWh, offsetting 13,300 tonnes of CO2 emissions annually whilst potentially meeting the electrical needs of 12,585 homes attracts very significant weight.</i>
Sherborne (Appeal ref. 3317247) 25 September 2023	Paragraph 34, page 7	<i>Given the national targets for a transition towards a low carbon future, the importance attached to the objective by the Council in declaring a climate emergency, the clear support given to renewable energy development in the NPPF, and the support for renewable energy within Local Plan policy CC2, it is evident that the proposal would provide a very significant environmental benefit.</i>
Gunthorpe Road (Appeal ref. 3295140/1) 29 September 2023	Paragraph 31, page 7	<i>Given the scale and urgency of the emergency, I attach significant weight to this material consideration, including the impact of climate change on food production.</i>
Marsh Green (Appeal ref. 3320714) 30 October 2023	Paragraph 49, page 7	<i>As such, I accept the scheme could make an early and significant contribution to the objective of achieving Net Zero and the commitment to reducing emissions by 78% compared with 1990 levels by 2035. Accordingly, the clean and secure energy benefits on offer attract substantial weight in my decision.</i>
Cutlers (Appeal ref. 3319421) 18 December 2023	Paragraph 141, page 22	<i>"Accordingly, I give substantial weight to the generation of renewable energy, the contribution the development would make to a low carbon economy and the provision of low cost and secure energy."</i>
Land north of Little Cheveney Farm, Sheephurst Lane (Appeal ref: 3321094) 5 February 2024	Paragraph 64, page 12	<i>"I turn then to the planning balance. There is agreement between the Council and the Appellant that the provision of renewable energy carries substantial weight in this case. "</i>
Land To The West Of Honiley Road (A4177), Honiley, Kenilworth (Appeal ref: 3332671) 23 July 2024	Paragraph 36, page 5	<i>"Weighing in favour of the proposal are the renewable energy benefits and BNG which each carry substantial weight"</i>
Land East of Hawksworth and Northwest of Thoroton, Thoroton, Nottinghamshire (Appeal 3330045)	Paragraph 101, page 23	<i>"Chief amongst these is the significant contribution of the appeal scheme towards the generation of renewable energy, the resultant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and energy security benefits, which warrant substantial weight".</i>

APPEAL DECISION	REFERENCE	EXTRACT
Very Significant Weight		
23 October 2024		
Hamilton Hill Farm, Cauldwell Road, Sutton in Ashfield NG17 5LB (Appeal ref: 3323952)	Paragraph 43, page 9	<i>"Given the scale and urgency of the [climate emergency], I attached significant weight to this material consideration, including the impact of climate change of food production."</i>
4 November 2024		
Land north of Haddon Road and land north of the A605, approximately 830m east of Bullock Road, Haddon PE7 3TT (Appeal ref: 3344095)	Paragraph 70, page 12	<i>"Overall, the proposal would make a significant contribution to mitigating against climate change and achieving net zero ambitions, which I give substantial weight."</i>
11 November 2024		
Land South of Runwell Road, Runwell, Wickford, Essex, SS11 7QH (Appeal Ref: 3344509 and 3344510)	Paragraph 98, page 15	<i>"The parties agree that substantial weight should be given to the generation of renewable energy in this case, and I agree. Substantial weight should also be given to the contribution the development would make to ensuring low cost and secure energy."</i>
26 November 2024		
Land at Woodlands Farm, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP24 2AH (Appeal Ref: 3345132)	Paragraph 30, page 8	<i>"Given the benefits of the appeal scheme to the reduction of carbon emissions and towards energy security considerations, I consider that renewable energy generation from the proposed solar farm attracts significant weight in the planning balance."</i>
7 January 2025		
Alfred G Pearce, Castle Road, Wormegay, Norfolk PE33 0SG (Appeal Ref: 3351873)	Paragraph 28, page 5	<i>"Although the appeal proposal does not fall within the threshold of a major renewable energy scheme, it would still contribute towards the national policy agenda to achieve carbon net zero by 2050. The appeal scheme would also reduce operational costs and provide energy security which would assist in securing business viability. In turn, the appeal proposal would be beneficial to the security of both national food supplies and local jobs. Further economic benefits would arise temporarily during the construction phase. In line with paragraph 168 (a) of the Framework, each of these benefits carry significant favourable weight."</i>
13 January 2025		

APPEAL DECISION	REFERENCE	EXTRACT
Very Significant Weight		
Land at Deptford Farm, Ebberley Hill, near Great Torrington, Devon (Appeal Ref: 3353044) 7 February 2025	Paragraph 18, page 4	<i>"The proposal would therefore help to serve increasing demand for electricity and provide a secure, stable supply; and support the decarbonisation of the electricity network and the move towards a low carbon future. It would thus contribute towards UK energy security and addressing the negative impacts of climate change. Consistent with the Framework's provisions on planning for climate change, this is critical to meeting local and national targets and commitments on renewable energy and carbon emissions, and the need to achieve net zero... These economic, social and environmental benefits are extensive and attract substantial weight."</i>
Land to the South of Hall Lane, Kemberton, Telford, TF11 9LB (Appeal Ref: 3329815) 22 February 2024	Paragraph 52, page 8	<i>[the solar panels] would cause minimal disturbance to the soil and the quality of the land...Overall, I am satisfied that the proposal would not result in the temporary or permanent loss of agricultural land as the land could continue to be used for some agricultural purposes whilst also being used to produce solar energy. Nor would the proposal be detrimental to the quality of the land, so a return to agricultural use at a later date would still be possible.</i>
Land Off Great Sike Road, Old Malton, Malton YO17 6SB (Appeal Ref: 3342002) 25 February 2025	Paragraph 33, page 6	<i>"Weighing in favour of the proposal are the benefits of renewable energy provision and the contribution to Biodiversity Net Gain, which each carry significant weight."</i>
Burcot Farm, Burcot, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 3GW (Appeal Ref: 3350890) 4 March 2025	Paragraph 94, page 15	<i>"The [National Planning Policy] Framework sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and renewable energy development is central to achieving a sustainable low carbon future. The appeal scheme would make a significant contribution to this, and I give substantial weight to the contribution the proposal makes to renewable energy generation, addressing climate change and to improving energy resilience and security. In addition, I give significant weight to the provision of a BESS and to the proposals use of available grid connection and its ability to start delivering energy within a short period of time."</i>
Land At Graveley Lane And To The East Of Great Wymondley, Hertfordshire (Appeal Ref: 3323321)	Paragraph 12.57, page 38	<i>"the application does not seek to replace the agricultural use of the site, but for agricultural use to continue alongside the solar farm. The land around and below the panels would be sown with grass and used for the grazing of sheep...There is nothing before me to indicate that grass cover would be unable to be established on the developed site, nor that the height and position of the</i>

APPEAL DECISION	REFERENCE	EXTRACT
Very Significant Weight		
11 March 2024		<i>solar panels would prevent the land being grazed by sheep.”</i>
Land at Manor Farm, to the East of Denchworth, Oxfordshire, OX12 OHP (Appeal Ref 3356504) 3 April 2025	Paragraph 43, page 7	<i>“The importance of this form of renewable energy infrastructure is emphasised by the NPPF in paragraph 168 which states that planning authorities should give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the proposal’s contribution to a net zero future. I consider the contribution the scheme would make to the generation of clean and secure energy is a substantial public benefit”</i>