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Dear Sir/Madam,

REQUEST FOR SCREENING OPINION UNDER REGULATION 6 OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017 (AS AMENDED)

PROPOSED SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC FARM AND OTHER ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE – LAND AT HEATH ROAD, BAGWORTH, LEICESTERSHIRE.

We write on behalf of our client, Renewable Connections Developments Ltd (the 'Applicant') to formally request from Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council ('HBBC') an Environmental Impact Assessment ('EIA') Screening Opinion under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the 'EIA Regs').

The request for a Screening Opinion relates to a proposed solar photovoltaic ('PV') farm and associated infrastructure, including two cable route corridors to the point of connection (the 'Proposed Development') on approximately 31.9 hectares ('ha') of land at Heath Road (the 'Site'). The Site currently comprises three agricultural fields of 26.9 ha, being the main site where the solar arrays and ecological enhancement areas would be located (hereafter the 'Main Site'), and two cable route corridors which would connect the northern parcel, and the two southern parcels to the point of connection. The point of connection is an existing electricity pylon located 1 kilometre ('km') north-west of the Main Site (measured at its closest point).

The Site is located to the south of Bagworth and Thornton, north of Newbold Verdon and Desford and east of Barlestone. The Proposed Development would generate up to 21.5 megawatts ('MW').

The Proposed Development responds to identified need by providing a renewable energy supply that would reduce carbon emissions, improve the UK's security of supply and assist in establishing a greater diversity of energy sources in the UK.

REQUIREMENT FOR EIA

The EIA Regulations cover two main types of development:

- Schedule 1 – identifies all types of projects for which EIA is mandatory; and
- Schedule 2 – identifies the types of projects for which EIA may be required if the project in question is considered likely to give rise to significant environmental effects.



The Proposed Development does not constitute Schedule 1 development as for energy projects, this applies to thermal power stations with a heat output of 300 MW or more and nuclear power stations.

It is considered that the Proposed Development constitutes Schedule 2 of development under Section 3(a) of Schedule 2:

“industrial installation for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (unless included in Schedule 1”

Development proposals described under Schedule 2 require an EIA if they are considered likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as nature, size and location.

The Site, at approximately 31.9 ha, exceeds the applicable threshold of 0.5 ha site area. Subsequently, there is a requirement under provisions of the EIA Regs to screen the Proposed Development in order to determine whether or not an EIA is required.

SCREENING REQUEST SCOPE

Regulation 6(2) of the EIA Regs requires a request for a screening opinion to be accompanied by:

- a plan sufficient to identify the land;
- a description of the development; including in particular a description of the physical characteristics of the development and a description of the location of the development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;
- a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;
- a description of any likely significant effects of the Proposed Development on the environment resulting from expected residues and emissions and use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and
- such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make.

This letter and enclosures provide the following information:

- a description of the Site, its planning designations and the nature and purpose of the Proposed Development;
- an assessment of the possible environmental effects of the Proposed Development and consideration of these within the context of the guidance on EIA;
- a Site Location Plan with the boundary of the Site coloured in red (**Appendix 1**);
- an extract from the Leicestershire County Council ('LCC') Public Rights of Way ('PRoW') map, showing PRoWs (**Appendix 2**);
- a MAGIC map, showing national designations/allocations in the area (**Appendix 3**);
- Flood Risk Map for Planning, showing different flood zones in the area (**Appendix 4**);
- an extract from the Local Plan Proposals Map, showing local designations/allocations in the area (**Appendix 5**); and
- EIA Definition of a 'Sensitive Area' (**Appendix 6**).

The remainder of this letter considers the Proposed Development within the context of the guidance provided on the potential need for EIA. It follows that the Applicant accepts that the Proposed Development is likely to result in some potential environmental effects, however these are anticipated to be of a limited nature. This letter seeks to demonstrate in further detail that the Proposed Development (with reference to its size, nature and location) will not require an EIA and the preparation of an Environmental Statement ('ES').

SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The Main Site comprises three agricultural fields on land at Heath Road, delineated in red on the enclosed Site Location Plan in **Appendix 1**. The total area of the Main Site is approximately 26.9 ha. 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 LCC. The Main Site is connected to the point of connection, an existing electricity pylon, to the north-west by two underground cable route corridors. The total site area including the two corridors is 31.9 ha.

Renewable energy generation is already a component in the area, as the Main Site is located approximately:

- 0.5 km to the north of an operational 5 MW solar farm (granted consent on 3 February 2015; LPA ref. 14/01270/FUL);
- 1.5 km north of an operational 100 kW solar array (granted consent 9 December 2015; LPA ref. 15/01062/FUL);
- 2.1 km south-west of an operational 10 kW solar array (granted consent 2 February 2016; LPA ref. 15/01081/FUL);
- 2.3 km east of a consented 49.9 MW renewable energy generating station (granted consent on 16 August 2022; LPA ref. 21/01395/FUL);
- 2.5 km north-east of an approved 20 panel ground mounted solar PV system (granted consent on 15 February 2024; LPA ref. 23/01160/FUL);
- 2.9 km north-east of an operational 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);
- 2.92 km north-west of an operational 17 ha solar farm (granted consent 26 November 2018; LPA ref. 18/00980/FUL);
- 3.23 km south of an operational 2.77 MW solar farm (granted consent on 8 September 2015; LPA ref. 15/00645/FUL);
- 3.8 km west of an operational 5.3 MW solar farm (granted consent on 10 December 2014; LPA ref. 14/00654/FUL);
- 3.85 km south of an operational 19.9 MW solar farm (granted consent on 10 July 2015; LPA ref. 15/00343/FUL);
- 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]; and
- 340 metres ('m') – 750 m from a number of wind turbines.

The Main Site is partly bounded by hedgerows. Agricultural buildings and agricultural workers' dwellings sit between the southern and northern parcels, with Merrylees Road on the southern boundary, Heath Road on the northern boundary and a dense woodland belt on the western boundary.

An existing quarry is located immediately opposite the Main Site on the eastern side of Heath Road. An expansion to the quarry, which would adjoin the Main Site to the east, was approved in June 2019 (HBBC ref. 2018/0669/04; LCC ref. 2018/CM/0110/LCC).

In addition, there are designated open spaces within the vicinity, namely: Bagworth Heath Country Park (to the north of the Site on the opposite side of Heath Road); Centenary Wood and Royal Tigers (80 m north-east); and Woodland, The Hollow (480 m north-east).

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.

The surrounding area is characterised by agricultural fields interspersed by woodland, however the presence of the abovementioned existing solar farms, wind turbines and the industrial use and claypits directly to the north-east of the Site provide a more urban/industrialised context.

The Provisional Agricultural Land Classification ('ALC') Data on the Government's MAGIC Map website indicates that the Site comprises Grade 3 agricultural land. Best and most versatile ('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. An ALC survey confirms that the Main Site is 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%). In terms of topography, the Main Site slopes gently southwards.

The Main Site is crossed by one PRoW, separating the northern and southern parcels. The cable route corridor intersects another PRoW to the north and runs parallel to another to the east (**Appendix 2**).

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNATIONS

The MAGIC Map at **Appendix 3** shows 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 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Site is located within the 'Countryside' under the HBBC Local Plan Policy Map.

In the general vicinity of the Site, Botchesdon Bog (SSSI) is situated over 2.7 km to the south-east. 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. 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 500 m of the Site, the closest being approximately 125 m west of the Main Site and two more adjoin the cable corridor to the east.

A number of listed buildings are within 2 km of the Site, primarily Grade II but also include the Grade I Listed Newbold Verdon Hall and its designated Conservation Area, which are 2 km south-west of the Site. Two Schedule Monuments (moated sites) are 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.

The Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1, the area at lowest risk of flooding, as shown below in **Appendix 4**. However, as the Site is in excess of 1 ha any forthcoming application would have to be accompanied by a flood risk and drainage strategy.

An extract from the HBBC Policies Map (**Appendix 5**) demonstrates that the Site is not covered by any local policy designations but is located in the countryside.

THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposal is for the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a ground mounted solar farm (no battery storage) with a maximum export capacity of up to 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;
- Inverters;
- Substation compound;
- Internal access tracks and access gates;
- Perimeter fence;
- Temporary construction compound;
- Underground cabling to an existing electricity pylons (the POCs);
- CCTV cameras; and
- Landscaping and a skylark and ecological mitigation areas (no development, ecological mitigation).

The Proposed Development also includes the underground cable routes to the point of connection, an existing pylon north-west of the Main Site. The underground cabling would predominantly follow the public highway, within the carriageway, with a small portion on third party land between the highway and the existing electricity pylon.

As a general design principle for ground mounted solar farms, the proposed layout will comprise bifacial panels anchored onto a fixed mounting system, with rows of panels running east to west and orientated to the south.

Bifacial panels collect light both on the front and the rear sides as it captures sunlight reflected from the grass surface under the solar framework. Depending on site conditions, bifacial yield-gain can reach +30 percent compared to traditional systems¹. The top height of the panels is expected to be circa. 3 m, as is industry standard.

The Proposed Development would also include a package of landscape, ecological, and biodiversity benefits that could include the installation of barn owl boxes, bird nesting boxes, bee hives, log piles, restoration of traditional field boundaries, and other hibernacula such as small, buried rubble piles

¹ By example, Canadian Solar BiKu Panel produces up to 30% more energy. See: <https://www.canadiansolar.com/biku/>

suitable for reptile species, amphibians and insect life. Land between and beneath the panels can be used for biodiversity enhancements and seasonal grazing for sheep. There is limited existing planting in the locality. However, any existing hedgerows would be bolstered with additional hedgerow and tree planting where required in addition to potential new mitigation planting around the boundaries of the Site in order to provide natural screening where appropriate. The Proposed Development would also be designed to ensure greenfield run-off rates are maintained and flood risk is not increased elsewhere.

There will also be some electrical connection infrastructure to allow the renewable energy generated from the solar farm to enter the National Grid. The point of connection to the National Grid is proposed off-site to the north-west. An on-site substation will be required to facilitate this connection via an underground cable.

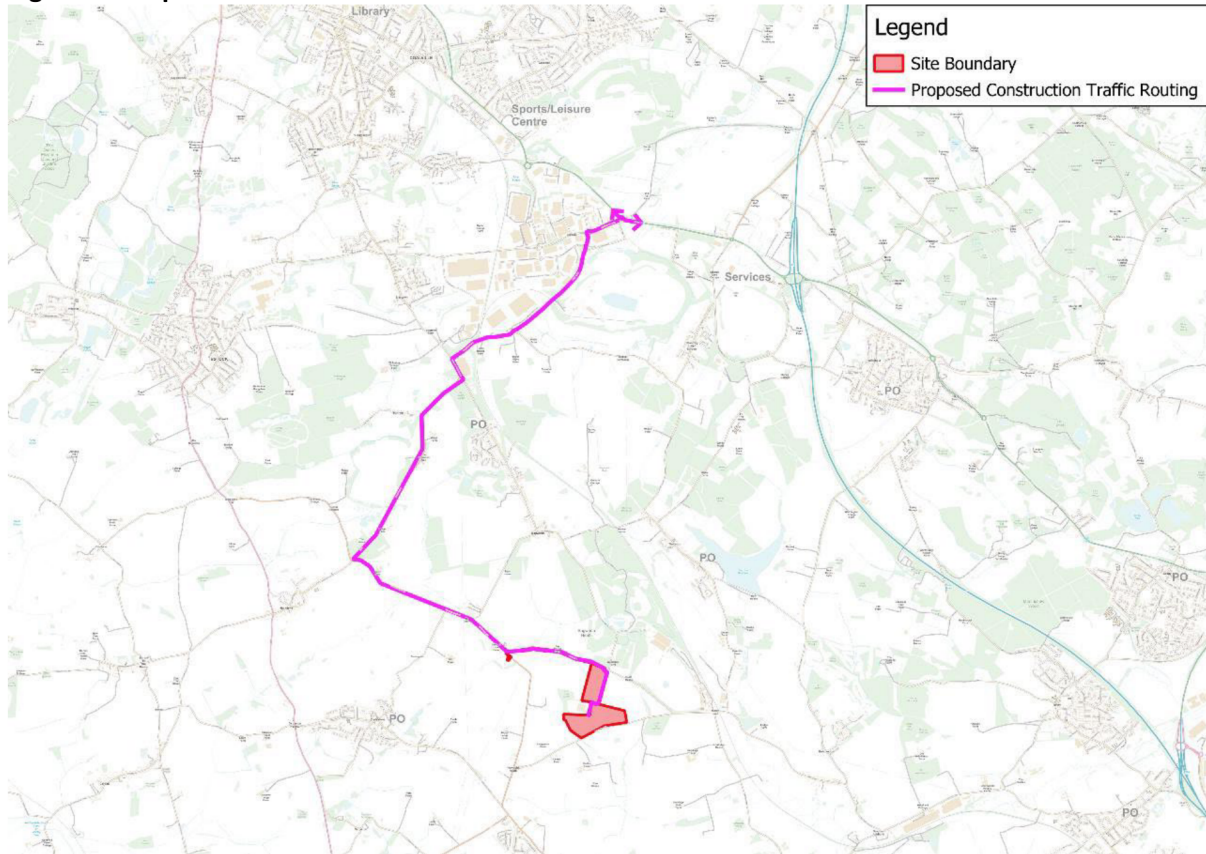
The solar panel arrays would be set within a 2.1 m high metal security fence. The distance between the proposed fencing and existing hedges would vary across the Site but would typically be around 5 m. The security measures that will accompany the scheme include pole-mounted CCTV cameras spaced at regular intervals around the fenced boundary, directed inwards towards the solar farm and away from any public highways or footways.

Construction

The construction phase of the Proposed Development is expected to last approximately 24 weeks. During this period, initial site setup works would take place followed by construction of the internal access route(s), ground works, and the installation of the solar panels and other infrastructure.

The Site does benefit from access from a track via an existing private road / farm access off Heath Road associated with the adjoining northern property (**Appendix 1**). 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 has been considered by the Applicant's transport consultants. The proposed route via the B585 and A511 has been appraised as the most appropriate option to ensure the least disruption to neighbouring settlements and neighbouring amenity. An alternative, shorter route to the strategic road network was considered, 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 (shown in **Figure 1** below).

The Transport Report and Construction Traffic Management Plan ('CTMP') for the Proposed Development which have been prepared would be submitted with a future planning application. The outcomes of these reports are expanded upon later in this letter.

Figure 1. Proposed construction route

Operation

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.

It is expected that, under normal circumstances, only a very small number of cars/vans would visit the Site (generally on two occasions per month).

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 and restoration

At the end of the solar farm's operational lifespan (potentially up to 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 simpler to restore to its prior condition than other more intrusive development, e.g. large buildings requiring significant foundations.

The decommissioning process is intended to ensure that the land is restored to the same quality as it was previously, and it is envisaged that a Decommissioning Plan would be secured through a suitable condition attached to any planning permission.

ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regs identifies criteria that should be considered in screening Schedule 2 developments in terms of the need for EIA. These encompass the characteristics of the Proposed Development, including the cumulation with other development; the location of the development; the environmental sensitivity of the area; and the characteristics of the potential impact.

The Secretary of State's view is that, in general, EIA is only needed for Schedule 2 development in three main types of case:

- for major developments that are of more than local importance;
- for developments that are proposed within a particularly environmentally sensitive or vulnerable location; and
- for developments with unusually complex and potentially hazardous environmental effects.

Paragraph 018 Reference ID 4-018-20170728 of the Government's Planning Practice Guidance provides guidance in relation to the need for EIA for Schedule 2 development that:

"Only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an assessment. While it is not possible to formulate criteria or thresholds which will provide a universal test of whether or not an assessment is required, it is possible to offer a broad indication of the type or scale of development which is likely to require an assessment...To aid local planning authorities to determine whether a project is likely to have significant environmental effects, a set of indicative thresholds and criteria have been produced."

The guidance further states:

"...it should not be presumed that developments above the indicative thresholds should always be subject to assessment, or those falling below these thresholds could never give rise to significant effects, especially where the development is in an environmentally sensitive location. Each development will need to be considered on its merits."

An assessment as to whether the Proposed Development requires EIA is set out below:

- **Environmentally sensitive areas** – the Site does not lie within any highly environmentally sensitive areas which are defined by the EIA Regs (detailed within **Appendix 6**). In the wider area, Botchesdon Bog (SSSI) is situated over 2.7 km to the south-east and a designated National Forest is situated approximately 400 m to the north. The National Forest is a project to regenerate land previously known for coal mining and heavy industry across 200 square miles of the Midlands. There are patches of priority habitat (Deciduous woodland) to the north-east, east and south-east of the Site (220 m - 500 m). There are 8 LWSs within 2 km of the Site. Seven parcels of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland (a Priority Habitat) are located within 500 m of the Site, the closest is located approximately 125 m west, with two more adjoining the cable corridor to the east.

The environmental sensitivity of the location is an important factor in determining whether EIA is required. In this case, the Site is within a location that is considered to be of relatively low environmental sensitivity and certainly not the type of location where the EIA Regs indicate that there would be the need for an EIA.

- **Mineral safeguarding area** – the Site is located within a Minerals Safeguarding Area ('MSA') for the protection of Sand and Gravel as aggregate minerals. An active clay quarry is present approximately 450 m north-east of the Site and an extension to it was approved in 2019 (LCC ref. 2018/CM/0110/LCC). The extension covers the area directly bordering the Site to the east. It should be noted the original quarry and extension cover a larger area of glaciofluvial sand and gravel deposits. Notwithstanding, the Site is in an MRA for Sand and Gravel extraction and not clay extraction.

A Minerals Assessment ('MA') has been prepared and confirms that two small sections of the Site are underlain by zones of Glaciofluvial (sand and gravel) Deposits, accounting for only approximately 6.40% of the Site. These relatively small areas are defined as parts of (sand and gravel) an MSA. The MA concludes that the Site is unlikely to be economically workable for sand and gravel extraction due to only approximately 6.40% of it being potentially underlain by the targeted Glaciofluvial Deposits. The Site is also not in an MSA for clay and therefore the approved extension to the clay quarry is unlikely to be adversely impacted. Furthermore, the Proposed Development 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. Therefore, the MA concludes that there is no risk of the Proposed Development permanently sterilising on-Site mineral resources that may be present. The MA would be submitted with any future planning application.

- **Land use and agricultural land quality** – the Site is categorised as Grade 3 agricultural quality according to national mapping available on the Government's MAGIC map website. The Applicant has undertaken a site specific ALC Survey which concludes that the Main 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%). 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.

The Site is currently used as arable land and the Applicant acknowledges that agricultural land is a valuable resource, particularly BMV land. Sheep grazing and grass collection for feed often form part of the land management of the Site, allowing a form of agricultural use to continue and most of the Site would be planted with a combination of grassland/meadow, including land between and underneath panels. This scenario would allow agriculture and renewable energy generation to be facilitated simultaneously. At the end of the Proposed Development's lifespan, the panels and other infrastructure would be removed, and the land restored to its original condition. It follows that there would be no permanent loss of agricultural land as a result of the Proposed Development.

Further to this, an Alternative Site Assessment ('ASA') has been prepared, which confirms that there are no sites that comprise a more feasible alternative to the Proposed Site on land of equal or lower agricultural grade or brownfield land. The ASA would be submitted with the planning application.

It is important to emphasise that limited opportunities currently exist for grid connections nationally, however in this case the Applicant benefits from an accepted grid connection offer.

- **Biodiversity** – the Site is not covered by any national or international designations or assets that relate to biodiversity (**Appendix 3**).

An Ecological Appraisal has been prepared and informed by the appropriate Phase 1 Habitat Survey and species surveys, such as Breeding Bird, Wintering Bird and Great Crested Newt ('GCN') surveys and is accompanied by a management and mitigation strategy. Ecological mitigation includes design measures embedded in the landscape masterplan, such as 'no development' zones where an onsite pond and drainage ditch are located and the creation of a 3.5 ha skylark mitigation area with skylark plots and a 1.5 ha ecological mitigation area for skylark and other farmland birds to ensure these species would not be significantly adversely affected by the Proposed Development. Furthermore, the Applicant would obtain a district-level, other mitigation license or non-licensed method statement for GCN.

Boundary planting of native hedgerows at the Site is proposed to increase connectivity and corridors for local wildlife where none presently exist. In addition, the Proposed Development would reinforce existing Site boundaries with further landscaping. For the avoidance of doubt, there are no proposals to remove trees, hedgerows, or woodland belts.

The future planning application would be supported by Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy which secures a number of ecological enhancement measures to ensure a significant biodiversity net gain ('BNG') at the Site as a result of the Proposed Development of +66.86% habitat units and +47.06% hedgerow units, well in excess of the mandatory 10% BNG.

- **Landscape and visual impact** – the Site is not subject to any locally, nationally or internationally important landscape designations, or local policy designations. The Proposed Development has been designed to respect the character of the landscape and use the strong field pattern to integrate the scheme as far as practicable. The Applicant has prepared a full Landscape and Visual Assessment ('LVA') to inform a future planning application.

The Applicant's landscape specialist (EDP) accepts that the host landscape character and Site itself is of some value and sensitivity in landscape and visual terms, however, notes that the development of solar panels and associated infrastructure could be accommodated without notable change to the most sensitive characteristics, particularly given the clear human influence found in the surrounds of high voltage pylons, agricultural and industrial development, and other energy infrastructure. Furthermore, it is noted that the industrial influence of the identified claypits, an industrial estate and existing plant machinery (such as existing solar farms and wind turbines) in the broader area limit the visual sensitivity of the Site when viewed in a wider context.

In terms of landscape and visual impact (generally), the LVA prepared by the Applicant's landscape consultant considers that there would be no significant adverse landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development, subject to the implementation of the landscape strategy, particularly (i) given the existing undulating topography, dense hedgerows and mature screening which encloses the Site; (ii) the existing visual detractors of existing energy infrastructure and other industrial-type development in the landscape; and (iii) when considering that a comprehensive landscaping scheme, informed by a Landscape Strategy, would be provided to assimilate the Proposed Development into the landscape. The latter would include the provision of new hedgerows where there are none and the gapping up of existing hedgerows, retaining all mature trees and providing long term landscape and biodiversity conservation. 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.

The LVA and landscape strategy would be submitted with a future planning application.

- **Cultural heritage** – the Site does not contain any listed buildings, Scheduled Monuments or other designations/assets. There are a number of designated heritage assets within 2 km of the Site, however it is considered that the majority of these are unlikely to be impacted by the Proposed Development due to their distance and other prominent physical features in the landscape.

A Cultural Heritage Desk Based Assessment ('CHA') has been prepared by the Applicant's heritage consultant which has considered a number of designated heritage assets. With regards to the Grade II listed Bagworth War Memorial and the Grade II listed Corner Cottage, the CHA concludes that the Proposed Development would have no impact on the setting or character of these assets given that the Site is not within their setting and where there is intervisibility between these assets and the Site, it is generally limited and distant and would development on the Site would not obstruct any key views. As such, the effects on the character of nearby assets are considered to be neutral.

Like any rural site, there is also the potential for impacts on any unknown archaeological assets within the Site. Two geophysical surveys (2018 and 2023) have been undertaken to identify areas where significant buried archaeological remains may be located. The Site has been in agricultural use from at least the post-medieval to the modern period with parts of the cable route undergoing construction of Heath Road. There is considered to be low potential for finds or remains. 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, and would be of negligible cultural heritage value. 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. It should be noted that solar farms are relatively low impact in terms of ground disturbance, and it is possible to achieve mitigation by design, such as through the use of raised foundations and/or exclusion zones etc.

Furthermore, historic maps record that 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.

The Applicant has been engaging with LCC to agree a suitable trenching plan for archaeological trial trenching.

- **Aviation and airfield operations** – several airfields are located within the vicinity (approximately 10 km) of the Site, including Twycross, Wharf Farm and Stoke Golding (Nuneaton) Airfields. A Glint and Glare Assessment has been prepared which considers ground-based receptors (such as roads, rail and residential dwellings), and high-level aviation concerns and mitigation measures (as required) to ensure the operational safety of nearby airfields and aerodromes. 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. The Glint and Glare Assessment has also considered the Lindbridge solar farm (ref. 14/01270/FUL), 0.5 km south of the Site and has concluded that there would be no cumulative effects on aviation receptors as a result of the Proposed Development.

In terms of ground based receptors, the Glint and Glare Assessment concludes that there would be no glint and glare effects at residential dwellings or rail receptors. In terms of road receptors, there would be no glint and glare effects subject to the mitigation within the proposed landscaping proposals. As such, there would be no significant glint and glare effects on any ground-based receptors as a result of the Proposed Development.

- **Noise** – the Proposed Development would be passive in operation and therefore would not generate any significant operational noise, other than from the inverters. However, their siting away from the Site boundaries reduces the noise levels to ambient levels at the perimeter. Otherwise, the only noise would be that associated with occasional visits by maintenance/service vehicles. A Noise Assessment has been prepared to support the future planning application which concludes that the Proposed Development would generate very low noise levels at surrounding properties throughout the day and that noise levels would represent ‘no observed effects level’ and thus would not result in unacceptable levels of 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; erection of panels using construction machinery; and material hauling. 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.
- **Air emissions** – 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 and would be somewhat offset by a reduction in emissions related to the current arable farming of the land. It is considered that emissions would be more than offset by the significant benefits of generating renewable energy at the Site.
- **Waste** – no waste would be generated during the operation of the Proposed Development. Due to the methods of installation, limited (if any) waste would be generated during the construction phase and any waste produced would be dealt with appropriately.
- **Flood risk/drainage** – the entirety of the Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1. A Flood Risk Assessment (‘FRA’) and Drainage Strategy have been prepared outlining how the Proposed Development would remain operational and safe for users in times of flood, result in no net loss of floodplain storage, and not impede water flows nor increase flood risk elsewhere. The potential flood risk to the Site from the majority of sources of flooding is considered to be predominantly ‘very low’. There are areas of elevated surface water flood risk associated with low-lying areas of the site and the Proposed Development has been designed to raise sensitive equipment above any flood depths or protect the sensitive

equipment to ensure it is appropriately flood resilient and resistant, and any residual flood risk is appropriately managed. These measures are detailed in the FRA which would be submitted with a future planning application.

With respect to surface water runoff, the solar panels are raised above the existing ground allowing a permanent grass sward to be maintained underneath the panels. Rainfall falling onto the photovoltaic panels would runoff directly to the ground beneath the panels and infiltrate into the ground at the same rate as it does in the Site's existing greenfield state. Access tracks will be semi-permeable in nature (unbound crushed stone).

A sustainable drainage strategy, involving the implementation of SuDS in the form of interception swales, is proposed for managing surface water runoff on the Site. Interception swales are proposed at the low points of the Site to intercept extreme flows, which may already run offsite and provide runoff pathway management. The proposed interception swales 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. On this basis, the Proposed Development would not increase flood risk on-Site or elsewhere and would preserve the Site's natural drainage regime.

The overall conclusions drawn from the FRA are that future users of the development would remain appropriately safe throughout the lifetime of the Proposed Development, and that subject to the implementation and maintenance of the proposed drainage arrangements, the development will not increase flood risk elsewhere and will reduce flood risk overall.

- **Traffic** – traffic associated with the Proposed Development would be largely limited to the temporary construction phase, during which appropriate and proportionate management measures would be implemented. The forecast average daily two-way traffic movements associated with the 24 week construction phase is anticipated to comprise 50 two-way light vehicle movements (cars/ vans) and 8 two-way HGV movements. During the operational phase, traffic is expected to be limited to periodic maintenance/ inspection. It would likely comprise 4 two-way cars/van movements per month, which might involve one HGV for maintenance purposes. The Transport Statement and a CTMP prepared by the Applicant's transport consultant confirm that the Site access arrangements can accommodate safe access and egress of HGVs onto the public highway, and that the volume of vehicle trips is minimal and will have a negligible impact on the operational capacity of the local highway network during construction and operation.

Furthermore, there is one PRow (S14) that runs along the north-eastern boundary of the southern parcel, through the northern parcel and runs across the access track, and one which intersects the cable route. 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.

There are several PRows within the environs of the Site. Public footpath (R60) intersects the underground cable route to the north on Heath Road. Another footpath (R70) runs parallel with the eastern part of the cable route adjacent to 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.

- **Complex and potentially hazardous environmental effects** – the Proposed Development is not of a nature, being for the generation of renewable energy, that presents any complex or potentially hazardous environmental effects.
- **Population and Human Health** - consideration has been given to the potential health determinants associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. The following potential health effects (either adversely or positively) and potentially in-combination have been identified:
 - Changes to local air quality during construction (dust);
 - Changes in traffic flows, noise levels and air quality during construction and operation; and
 - Employment opportunities.

To summarise information already provided in this letter, any impacts arising from the construction period of the Proposed Development would be temporary and intermittent in nature, these would however be mitigated through the implementation of best practice measures, to be set out in a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and CTMP and secured by planning condition. On this basis, significant adverse health effects from air quality, noise and traffic are not anticipated.

- **Cumulative effects** – a search of satellite imagery and the Councils' online planning registers found that within 4 km of the Main Site, as informed by the Zone of Potential Visibility ('ZPV'), the following renewable energy developments are present:
 - The Site is 0.5 km north of an operational 5 MW solar farm (granted consent on 3 February 2015; LPA ref. 14/01270/FUL);
 - The Site is 1.5 km north of an operational 100 kW solar array (granted consent 9 December 2015; LPA ref. 15/01062/FUL);
 - The Site is 2.1 km south-west of an operational 10 kW solar array (granted consent 2 February 2016; LPA ref. 15/01081/FUL);
 - The Site is 2.3 km east of a consented 49.9 MW renewable energy generating station (granted consent on 16 August 2022; LPA ref. 21/01395/FUL); and
 - The Site is 2.5 km north-east of an approved 20 panel ground mounted solar PV system (granted consent on 15 February 2024; LPA ref. 23/01160/FUL);
 - The Site is 2.9 km north-east of an operational 10 MW solar farm (granted consent on 3 June 2015; LPA ref. 14/00660/FUL);
 - The Site is 2.9 km south-east of a 5.9 MW solar farm (granted consent on 30 September 2015; LPA ref. 15/00823/FUL);
 - The Site is 2.92 km north-east of an operational 17 ha solar farm (granted consent 26 November 2018; LPA ref. 18/00980/FUL);
 - The Site is 3.23 km south of an operational 2.77 MW solar farm (granted consent on 8 September 2015; LPA ref. 15/00645/FUL);
 - The Site is 3.8 km west of an operational 5.3 MW solar farm (granted consent on 10 December 2014; LPA ref. 14/00654/FUL); and
 - The Site is 3.85 km south of an operational 19.9 MW solar farm (granted consent on 10 July 2015; LPA ref. 15/00343/FUL).

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).

Further to this, there are a number of applications for major development within approximately 4 km from the Main Site, including:

Pending Decision

- 21/00240/FUL – extension of school. The Site is 0.75 km east;
- 24/01061/OUT – up to 240 residential dwellings, a cemetery, health centre and public open space. The Site is 1.2 km north-east;
- 24/00657/FUL – childcare facility. Appeal lodged 26 March 2025 (APP/K2420/W/25/3362567) and awaiting decision. The Site is 1.48 km west;
- 22/01048/FUL – 58 dwellings. The Site is 1.84 km north-east;
- 24/01158/OUT – up to 135 dwellings. The Site is 1.97 km north;
- 21/01389/OUT – up to 49 dwellings. The Site is 1.99 km north-east;
- 25/00060/FUL – electrical substation. The Site is 3.26 km south-east; and
- 25/00306/FUL – pipe manufacturing facility. The Site is 3.52 km north-east.

Approved

- 22/00070/FUL – 5 employment units – approved 2 August 2022. The Site is 1.09 km west;
- 20/00511/FUL – 49 dwellings – approved after appeal on 12 May 2025 (APP/K2420/W/21/3285060). The Site is 1.5 km south-west;
- 23/00392/FUL – stable block – approved 10 November 2023. The Site is 1.89 km north-east;
- 20/00835/FUL – two agricultural buildings – approved 30 April 2021. The Site is 2.11 km north-east;
- 22/00277/OUT – up to 239 dwellings – approved after appeal on 17 May 2024 (APP/K2420/W/23/3331081). Reserved matters application (24/00854/REM) approved 19 March 2025. The Site is 2.35 km north-east;
- 21/01331/FUL – care home extension by 51 bedrooms – approved 22 December 2022. The Site is 2.5 km west;
- 23/00061/OUT – up to 100 dwellings – approved after appeal 25 March 2024 (APP/K2420/W/23/3332401). Reserved matters application (25/00393/REM) awaiting decision. The Site is 2.51 km north-west;
- 24/00352/FUL – substation – approved 21 August 2024. The Site is 2.79 km south-east;
- 21/00096/OUT – up to 55 dwellings – approved 24 May 2022. Reserved matters application (24/00294/REM) approved 27 September 2024. The Site is 2.94 km east;
- 22/01227/OUT – up to 120 dwellings – approved after appeal 5 October 2023 (APP/K2420/W/23/3320601). Reserved matters application (24/00709/REM) awaiting decision. The Site is 3.11 km north-west;
- 21/00619/FUL – buildings for B2/B8 use – approved 22 November 2021. The Site is 3.2 km north;
- 22/00420/FUL – roof tile manufacturing facility – approved 27 April 2023. The Site is 3.36 km north-east;

- 23/00926/FUL – office and welfare facility – approved 22 December 2023. The Site is 3.52 km north-east;
- 20/00866/OUT – up to 82 dwellings – approved 18 January 2021. The Site is 3.6 km south;
- 22/00527/OUT – up to 50 residential dwellings – approved 26 June 2024. Reserved matters application (24/00828/REM) approved 28 March 2025. The Site is 3.75 km south; and
- 21/00531/HYB – storage and distribution and general industry uses – approved after appeal 22 November 2021 (APP/K2420/W/21/3279939). Reserved matters application approved 15 June 2023 (23/00080/REM). The Site is 3.85 km south.

Furthermore, the aforementioned application for an extension to the clay quarry to the north-east was approved in June 2019 and adjoins the Site to the east (LCC ref. 2018/CM/0110/LCC).

No other ground based solar developments or other forms of major development have been identified within 4 km of the Site.

The Proposed Development is anticipated to result in limited additional trips on the local highway network during construction and decommissioning. An CTMP will be submitted with the planning application and its implementation secured by a suitably worded planning condition, and the submission and implementation of a CEMP can be secured via planning condition. It is anticipated that all identified cumulative schemes will also adhere to a CEMP which will set out the best practices and measures to be implemented during the construction and decommissioning phases to avoid likely significant effects. Each CEMP will be pre-agreed with HBBC prior to the commencement of any works.

A CTMP or equivalent for all cumulative schemes will also be implemented during construction and decommissioning phases to minimise road traffic and adverse environmental effects.

On this basis, following implementation of mitigation measures during construction and decommissioning, traffic impacts are not anticipated to be significant.

Once operational, the Proposed Development would sit quietly in the landscape without emitting significant amounts of noise or generating significant additional vehicle movements (approx. four two way vehicle movements per month). Once the landscaping proposals, which would include new and bolstered hedgerows and trees, have matured and the grassland is established, the Proposed Development would no longer be a new element in the landscape and the magnitude of change would reduce to low and the resulting level of effect would be moderate/minor. Furthermore, energy infrastructure and industrial uses are already present within the wider landscape, and thus the Proposed Development would not form an incongruous feature.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development would not result in significant cumulative effects, such that EIA is required, although cumulative effects will be considered in environmental assessments.

In view of the characteristics of the Proposed Development, the relatively low environmental sensitivity of the location and the limited potential for impacts, it is considered that the proposed solar farm would not result in significant environmental effects that require an EIA to be undertaken.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Proposed Development involves the generation of renewable energy. It would make a positive contribution towards reducing carbon emissions and also contribute to supporting the local community and economy.

The Site is not environmentally sensitive nor subject to any local, national or international environmental designations or assets which relate to biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage or other in close proximity to have an effect on any. It would not involve complex or potentially hazardous environmental effects and the use is for a temporary period of time, with the land reverting back to its original use after the planning permission.

The Proposed Development does not therefore, in our view, represent EIA development.

We look forward to receiving the Council's Screening Opinion within the timeframe specified by the EIA Regs.

Should additional information be required from either the Council or statutory consultees please do not hesitate to contact me directly. We very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,



Chloe Desgrand MRTPI
Associate
DWD



Encs:
Site Location Plan
Extract from the Leicestershire County Council PRow Map
MAGIC Map
Flood Risk Map for Planning
Extract from the Local Plan Proposals Map
EIA Definition of a 'Sensitive Area'

APPENDIX 1 – SITE LOCATION PLAN



Notes:

- All dimensions to be confirmed on site prior to installation.
- All dimensions are indicative only and in m unless otherwise specified.
- Drawing based on satellite data:
Imagery date: 16/06/21

Reference drawings

Detra-Site_Ground-Mount_Project Form_Heath Road.docx	--	17/08/22
RC107 - 25-11-10 - Heath Road Fixed Layout REV3.pdf	--	17/08/22
RC107 - 22-01-27 - Heath Road SMD.kmz	--	17/08/22
Heath Road Updated.kmz	--	13/11/23
NM_Site.dwg	--	13/11/23
RC107 - Heath Road.dwg	--	13/11/23

Legend:

Site boundary (31.90 ha)

Proposed location:

Revisions:

Rev	Date	Comments	Drawn	Approve
0	21/11/23	First issue	IM	NM
1	11/12/23	Layout update	PJ	NM
2	11/08/24	Site boundary updated	IV	NM
3	15/11/24	Site boundary updated	IV	GU
4	12/02/25	Site boundary updated	IV	GU

Project: Heath Road

Location: Heath Road and Merry Lees, Bagworth, LE9 9NR, UK
52.648197°, -1.329302°

Title: Site Location Plan

Drawn: Detra Solar / IM Checked: AM

Scale: 1:3000@A1 Date: 12/02/25

Drawing No: RCN1008-SP-01 Rev: 4

renewable connections

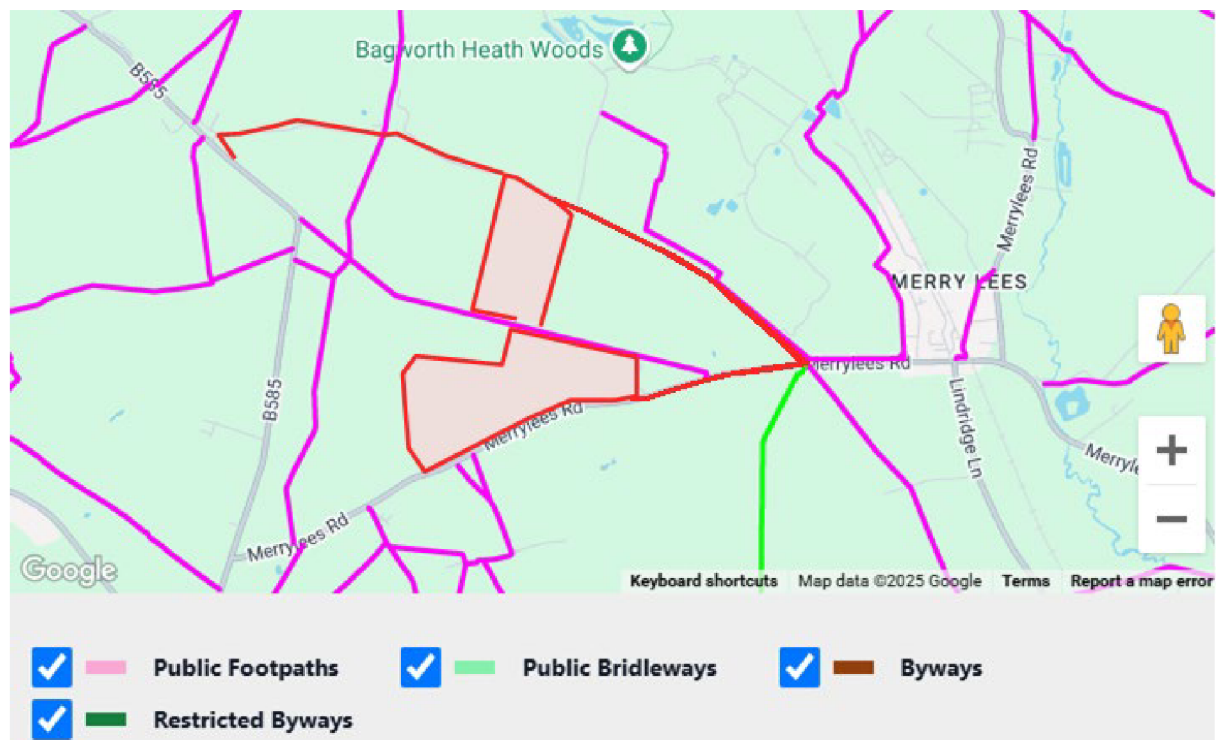
Renewable Connections
Level 4, LDN/W, 3 Noble Street
London, EC2V 7EE
+44 (0)20 7749 2650
www.renewableconnections.co.uk

detra solar

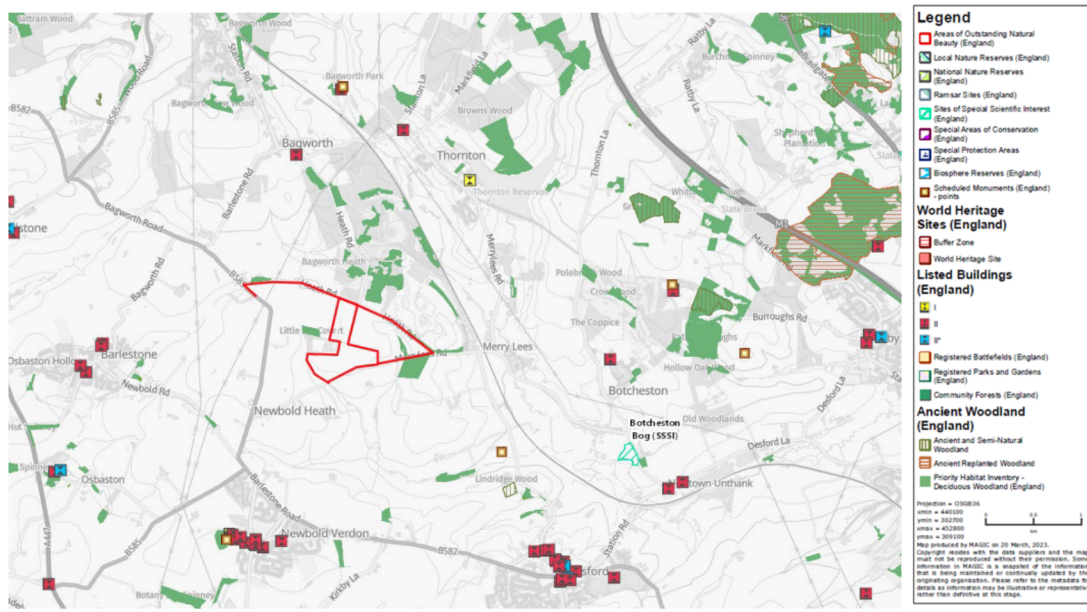
Detra Solar
Lvovo str. 25-104,
LT-09320 Vilnius
www.detrasolar.com

Do not scale from this drawing. Site verify all dimensions prior to construction.
Report all discrepancies to the drawing originator immediately. This drawing is to be read in conjunction with all relevant documents and drawings.

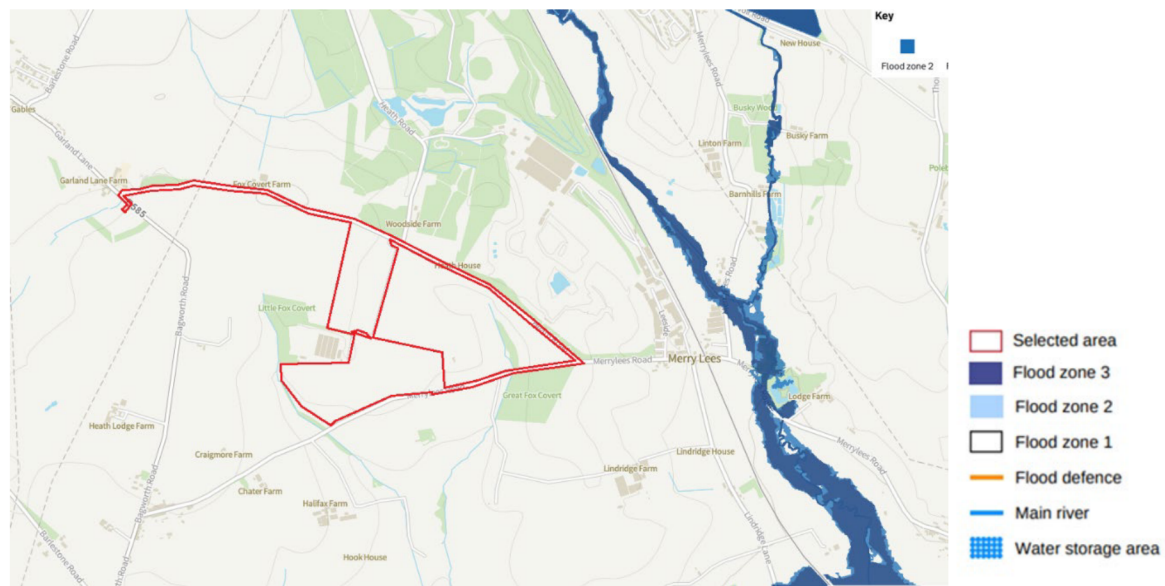
APPENDIX 2 – LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PROW MAP



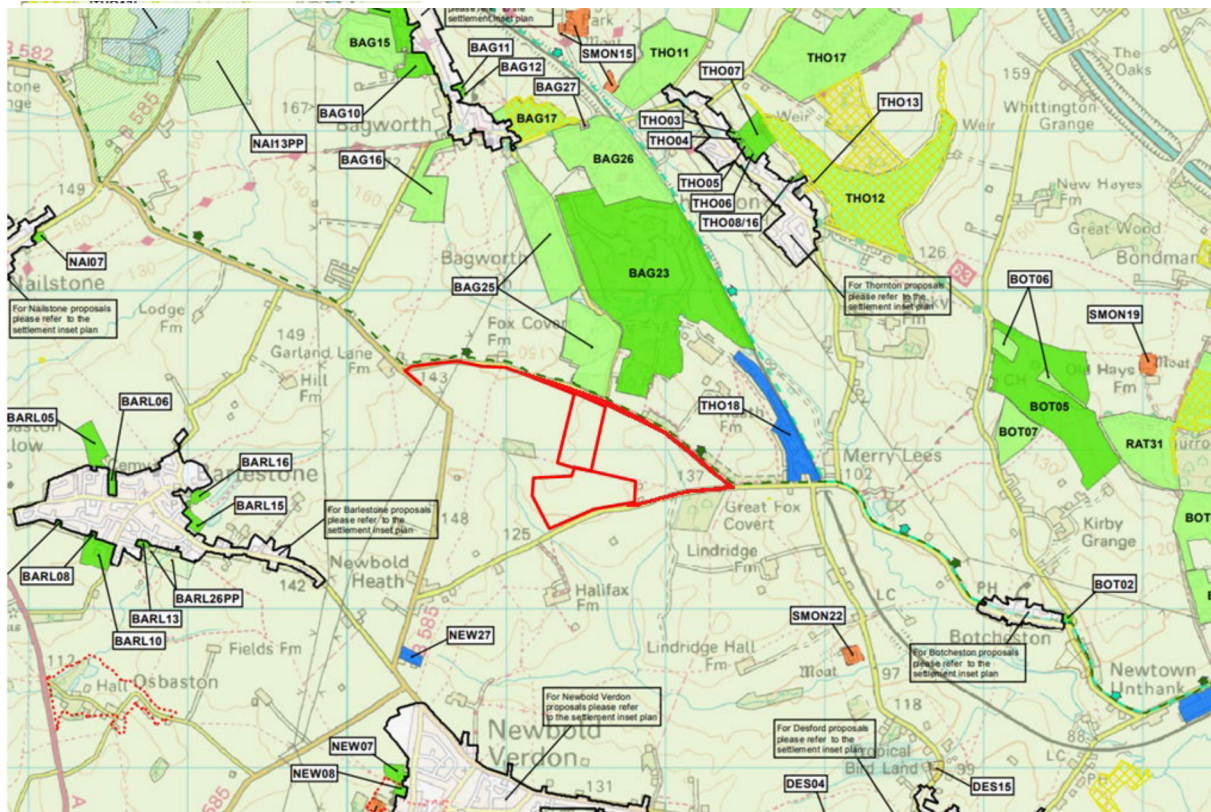
APPENDIX 3 – ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE DESIGNATIONS MAP



APPENDIX 4 – FLOOD RISK MAP FOR PLANNING (JAN 2025)



APPENDIX 5 – EXTRACT FROM LOCAL PLAN PROPOSALS MAP



APPENDIX 6: EIA DEFINITION OF A 'SENSITIVE AREA'

APPENDIX 6 - EIA Definition of a ‘Sensitive Area’

EIA definition of a ‘Sensitive Area’ (Regulation 2)

“sensitive area” means any of the following—

(a) land notified under section 28(1) (Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(23);

(b) a National Park within the meaning of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949(24);

(c) the Broads(25);

(d) a property appearing on the World Heritage List kept under article 11(2) of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage(26);

(e) a scheduled monument within the meaning of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979(27);

(f) an area of outstanding natural beauty designated as such by an order made by Natural England under section 82(1) (areas of outstanding natural beauty) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000(28) as confirmed by the Secretary of State;

(g) a European site (within the meaning of regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended), including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).