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09 June 2025

Supporting Document

Planning, Design and Access Statement

Yardley Road Solar Farm

Yardley Road Solar Farm Limited

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Document Prepared For

Harry Whittaker
Harry.whittaker@solar2.co.uk

Document Prepared By

Freena Garcia
Assistant Project Manager
planning@atmosconsulting.com

Document Approved By

Malcolm Sangster
Technical Director
planning@atmosconsulting.com

Version	Date	Reason
1.1	27/05/2025	Original Issue
1.2	09/06/2025	Updated Issue following Client Review

1. Introduction

This Planning, Design and Access Statement supports an application for planning permission for Yardley Road Solar Farm (the 'Proposed Development'), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR): NGR) 476431, 243982 (the 'Site'). The planning application also includes the grid connection cable route beyond the main solar farm site as shown on Figure 1. The Proposed Development lies wholly within the planning authority area of the West Northamptonshire Council.

The Proposed Development comprises the installation and operation of 40 megawatt (MW) ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels fixed to a dual-axis solar tracking system, and associated infrastructure including access roads, cabling, inverter platforms, control room; a Distribution Network Operator (DNO) station; storage containers; security fencing and CCTV; and temporary construction compound. The Site will occupy an area of approximately 89.60 hectares (ha). The layout of the Proposed Development is shown on Figure 2 and will be subject to an iterative detailed design process.

The underground grid connection route runs from approximate NGR SP 76598 43892 on Yardley Road, south along the field boundaries until it reaches Watling Street. The grid connection route then follows this street due east for approximately 10km along the public road network to Milton Keynes. The grid connection route then runs along Towcester Rd, Queen Eleanor St, Stratford Rd, V5 Great Monks St, H3 Monks Way and terminates at the connection point at Bradwell Abbey Substation (NGR SP 82518 39839).

The operational lifetime of the Proposed Development is 40 years.

This statement presents an overview of the Proposed Development, the site selection criteria and design process and an assessment of the Proposed Development against the applicable planning policies, as well as its potential impacts and benefits.

This statement has been prepared in accordance with the instructions of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment) Order 13, contained within the legislation.gov.uk webpage which states that:

> *"An application for planning permission to which this article applies shall be accompanied by a statement ("a design and access statement") about—*
>
> *(a)the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development; and*
>
> *(b)how issues relating to access to the development have been dealt with.*
>
> *(3) A design and access statement shall—*
>
> *(a)explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development;*
>
> *(b)demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how the design of the development takes that context into account;*
>
> *(c)explain the policy adopted as to access, and how policies relating to access in relevant local development documents have been taken into account;*
>
> *(d)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*
>
> *(e)explain how any specific issues which might affect access to the development have been addressed."*

2. Site Description and Context

2.1 Site Description

The Site comprises of two irregular shaped land pieces, extending over an area of 89.60ha, located to the north and south of Yardley Road, respectively. Yardley Road which runs approximately northeast-southwest, connects the A508 to Potterspury.

The pieces of land are joined by common access tracks, and consist of a series of interlinked agricultural fields intersected by footpaths. The Site is comprised of several arable fields with hedged boundaries and occasional trees.

The Site is situated mostly in the parish of Potterspury, the modern settlement of which lies c.500m to the southwest. The modern parish includes the former parish of Furtho which is located immediately to the south of the Site. A single field in the northern part of the Site lies in the parish of Yardley Gobion with the modern settlement lying c.100m to the north.

The Site slopes generally down towards the south towards the settlements of Furtho and Potterspury, from a height of c.98m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to c.75m AOD at the southern Site boundary which is marked by a west-east aligned watercourse. In the southeast part of the Site a second watercourse runs east from Cheley Well and then turns south, forming the Site boundary, until it joins the first. The combined watercourse, Dogsmouth Brook, then heads c.2.5km to the southeast until it joins the Great Ouse. The Grand Union Canal and the River Tove lie c.900m and c.1.2km east of the Site respectively, both on a broad northwest-southeast alignment.

The proposed location of the solar farm is 35% land that is classified as Grade 2 (very good agricultural land) for the northerly sections of the Site and 64% Classification 3b (good to moderate quality agricultural land) for the southerly sections of the Site. See the Agricultural Land Classification Report (reference SES/S2/YSF/#1) dated 26 November 2021 submitted with the Planning Application.

2.2 Surrounding Area

The immediate surrounding area is rural in nature consisting mainly of agricultural fields.

There is a farmhouse dwelling in the immediate area, south of the Site, with denser concentrations of residential occupation in Potterspury to the southwest (c.470m southwest of the Site at its closest point) and Yardley Gobion (c.70m north of the Site at its closest point).

Further to the southeast, c.340m of the Proposed Development, is the former civil parish of Furtho and bounding Yardley Gobion, running northwest to southeast is the Grand Union Canal.

A further densely populated residential area is present at Old Stratford to the south of the A5, approximately 1.7km to the south of the Proposed Development.

2.3 Landscape Designations

The Site lies within The Tove Catchment (6a) of the Undulating Claylands character area (6) of Northamptonshire, as described in pages 72-78 of the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment (Northamptonshire Country Council, 2006). The assessment states that this area "*appears as a wide belt of rolling countryside*' and '*is deeply rural and sparsely settled, with small villages and farmsteads scattered throughout the undulating topography*".

The Site does not lie within a National Landscape (NL), formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), nor any locally defined landscapes such as Areas of Great Landscape Value.

The nearest nationally designated site is the Emberton Country Park, which is located approximately 12.7km northeast from the Site.

2.4 Heritage Designations

There are no designated heritage assets recorded within the Site. The closest to the Site is the Grade II* listed building Church of St. Bartholomew, located 90m south of the Site. There are no World Heritage Sites or Registered Battlefields within 2km of the Site.

The National Heritage List for England (NHLE) and the Historic Environment Records (HER) have identified a total of 70 designated assets within 2km of the Site. These comprise:

- 26 Grade II Listed Buildings (LB) in Potterspury, between approximately 165m and 950m of the Site;
- 19 Grade II LBs in Yardley Gobion, between approximately 345m and 670m of the Site;
- Seven Grade II LBs in Cosgrove, between approximately 1.7km and 1.94km of the Site;
- One Grade I LB in Cosgrove, located approximately 1.9km from the Site (Asset 162 – Church of St. Peter and St. Paul);
- One Scheduled Monument located approximately 650m from the Site (Asset 1 - Moor End Castle moated site and fish pond);
- Two Grade II* LBs within 135m of the Site (Asset 21 - Dovecote at Manor Farm and Asset 29 – Church of St. Bartholomew);
- A further nine Grade II LBs, between 920m and 1.9km of the Site;
- Four Conservation Areas between 350m and 1.95km of the Site (Asset 2 – Yardley Gobion, Asset 3 – Grand Union Canal, Asset 164 – Cosgrove and Asset 165 – Old Stratford); and
- One Registered Park and Garden located approximately 1.2km from the Site (Asset 163 – Wakefield Lodge Park).

2.5 Ecology Designations

There are no sites designated for ecology within the Site boundary.

The Whittlewood Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located c.1.4km west of the Site at its closest point and Mill Crook SSSI is located c.1.8km north of the Site at its closest point. Briary Wood Ancient Woodland is located approximately 4km southwest of the Site at its closest point.

The nearest Special Protection Area (SPA) is the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits, which is located c. 16km north of the of the Site.

3. Site Selection and Characteristics

3.1 Site Selection

Careful site selection has been undertaken in order to ensure that an efficient, technically and economically viable solar farm can be developed without causing significant adverse environmental impacts. The site selection process consisted of an evaluation of the following:

- Electricity Grid connection feasibility including identification of areas with available grid capacity, potential sites with proximity overhead line (132kV);
- Site suitability including identification of sites of a suitable size, orientation and topography with suitable insolation levels. The site must also be accessible for construction and operational purposes;
- Site availability, i.e., landowners willing to offer land for solar development;
- Identification of potential planning issues including National and Local level designations (landscape, ecology, heritage);
- Identification of potential environmental constraints including the presence of Heritage assets, flood risk, visual receptors;

Assessment of access routes and potential constraints were also investigated as well as ground truthing of visibility and presence of habitats.

3.2 Design Principles, Layout and Scale

The design principles of the Proposed Development carry forward the principles applied to site selection through establishing a design that maximises the output of the solar farm, whilst minimising the impact on the environment. Wherever possible enhancement measures (particularly habitat and biodiversity measures) have been incorporated into the scheme with the design adapted to maximise the benefits.

These factors include establishing buffers between the infrastructure and potential wildlife habitats (such as hedges and ancient woodland). A Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) (refer to: 58754 R1 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Preliminary Ecological Assessment) has been undertaken to identify the habitats present and potential species present. A Landscape and visual appraisal was carried out to assess and mitigate potential effects.

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (refer to: 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) has been undertaken to assess the likely effects on landscape character and visual receptors arising from the Proposed Development.

A Heritage and Archaeological Impact Assessment (HIA) (refer to: 58754 R11 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Heritage Impact Assessment) has been undertaken in order to assess the Proposed Development in relation to designated and non-designated cultural heritage assets.

A Geophysical Survey Report (refer to: 58754 R13 Yardley Road Solar Farm HIA Appendix 3: Geophysical Report) was undertaken in 2023 to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence of potentially significant archaeological anomalies and the character and extent of those anomalies within the survey area.

A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) (refer to: 58754 R3 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Flood Risk Assessment) and Surface Water Drainage Impact Assessment (refer to: 58754 R4 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Drainage Assessment) has been carried out to ensure that the Proposed Development does not result in an increase in flood risk.

A Transport Statement (TS) and framework Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) (refer to: 58754 R6 Yardley Road Solar Farm - Transport Statement) has been compiled which takes into consideration the potential construction and operational effects of the Proposed Development in relation to traffic and access.

A Glint and Glare Appraisal (GGA) (refer to: 58754 R5 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Glint and Glare Study) assessing the potential effects from the Proposed Development on road safety, residential amenity and aviation activity has been undertaken. This determined that the potential effects of the design can be operationally accommodated without alteration or mitigation.

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) (refer to: 58754 R8 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Arboricultural Impact Assessment) was undertaken to evaluate the Proposed Development in relation to existing trees on site.

A Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) (refer to: 58754 R9 Yardley Road Solar Farm – Noise Impact Assessment) was undertaken in support of the planning application to establish the noise impacts on the surrounding area of the proposed Site.

Consultation which has been undertaken with the local community has yielded feedback which has been considered as part of the design. This is presented within the Statement of Community Engagement Report (refer to: Yardley Road Solar Farm Statement of Community Engagement Report) which provides more information with regards to how the design has taken into account visual amenity.

3.3 Design Evolution

As a result of the survey work, consultation and the need to maximise the output of the solar farm; the design has evolved since its first iteration to take into account the results of the assessments and feedback from consultation.

In response to feedback provided and following initial meetings and contact with the Parish Councils, the design of the scheme was amended as follows:

- Construction access is proposed from the A508 and would not be through the villages of Potterspury or Yardley.
- Land immediately adjacent to Hesketh Road and Eastfield Crescent was removed from the original scheme due to proximity to a residential area. This followed initial conversation and feedback with the Parish Councils in 2021.
- Panels in the southernmost field (Furtho) were removed, due to proximity to the Medieval village, therefore, to reduce the impact on heritage assets this area will be retained within the red line boundary to provide a buffer the solar development but will also be used to provide additional Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) benefit to the scheme.

Further measures have been incorporated into the design of the Proposed Development to reduce potential impacts and improve the layout of the Proposed Development, including:

- Setting back of panels adjacent to the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) that traverse the Site and inclusion of new characteristic hedgerows with field boundary trees along development edges, to retain and enhance the amenity from the footway;
- Management of existing field boundaries allowing vegetation to grow out to mature heights of 6m and inclusion of infill planting and gapping up to maximize screening potential of these boundaries;

- Screening elements of the Proposed Development from key receptor locations, e.g., users of the PRoW and residential properties adjacent to the Site boundaries; and
- Reflecting existing landscape elements and character in new mitigation planting.

Landscape mitigation proposals are incorporated into the Proposed Development design and are illustrated on the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) (refer to: 58754 Yardley Road Solar Farm LVIA Figure 5).

4. The Proposed Development

The Proposed Development comprises the installation and operation of a 40MW ground-mounted solar farm over a fenced area of approximately 89.60ha and will generate approximately 54,580MWh of electricity per annum, enough renewable electricity to meet the needs of approximately 18,492 homes per annum.

The Proposed Development will comprise a series of linear rows (also known as arrays) of PV solar modules, together with 11 power stations, 125 string inverters, a customer substation, a DNO substation, energy storage containers and enhanced landscaping.

The proposals are shown on the Site Layout Plan (Figure 2).

In a solar energy generation system, the solar module comprises multiple PV cells. The PV cells are composed of semiconducting materials and when daylight hits the module, a voltage develops between the semiconductor materials and a direct current is generated.

As the current generated by this process is Direct Current (DC) and the distribution system is designed for Alternating Current (AC), solar generation facilities require the use of inverters to convert DC to a useable AC.

The inverters convert the DC to AC immediately after generation. The AC is then fed through the transformer, where the voltage is stepped up and transmitted to the distribution network. The modules will be fixed to a dual-axis solar tracker system able to take advantage of the most optimum angle for solar panels for renewable energy generation.

The proposed solar farm will include principal components described below.

4.1 PV Modules

The solar farm will use state-of-the-art polycrystalline PV modules. The modules ensure optimal use of solar irradiation and perform very efficiently at different angles to the sun. The PV modules will generate electricity with no air emissions, no waste production and no water use. The modules are fixed to a simple galvanised steel supporting frame with a -60 to 60 degree inclination during operation hours (refer to: Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 1: Panel Elevations).

4.2 PV Arrays

Each array of modules is approximately 12m wide. Typically, there are 30 modules per array.

In order to avoid shading by adjacent rows and to ensure optimum energy yield in the winter months the rows will be spaced approximately 3.5m apart, depending on local variations in topography. The rows would be aligned east to west and south facing. There will be a stand-off around the end of each array to allow for facility maintenance, access and ecological and landscape enhancements.

The supporting structure is pile driven vertically into the ground to a depth of approximately 1.5m. When the modules are fixed to the supporting frame, the modules will reach a maximum height of 3.1m above the ground level. The lowest point of the modules is approximately 1.0m above ground and designed to allow sheep to graze underneath the arrays.

4.3 Site Access

Primary access to the Proposed Development will be taken from three locations with two new priority junctions on Yardley Road and one priority junction from Beech House Drive. HGV movements to the Site would be via Yardley Road and Beech House Drive. The access points would require a new access junction arrangement and will be constructed to be compliant with local design standards.

In addition to the primary access points, there will also be a 'construction only' access from Northampton Road.

The site will generally be accessed via the A508 Northampton Road from the north, turning onto Yardley Road. Both routes are of good standard, with a 60 mph speed limit, and the A508 offers good access to the wider strategic road network.

A framework CTMP has been produced and presented within the TS (refer to: 58754 R6 Yardley Road Solar Farm Transport Statement) to demonstrate that adequate arrangements can be put in place to minimise and control the construction traffic impacts from the 6-9 month construction phase of the Proposed Development along with any associated environmental impacts.

Once operational the Proposed Development will generate a low number of vehicle trips.

These routes have been assessed and found to be suitable for the types and volume of construction traffic associated with the site.

4.4 Proposed Access Tracks

Approximately 1.8km of new access track is proposed and will have a maximum width of approximately 2.1m. The tracks will be designed to have sufficient radii for turning of the construction vehicles and plant. The access tracks have been designed to avoid sensitive features and are constructed, where possible, along the path of existing farm tracks and utilising existing gates.

The locations of the proposed internal tracks are shown on Figure 2: Site Layout Plan.

The access track and internal tracks will be constructed using permeable graded crushed aggregate from the site. At the end of the construction works a main track will be built through the interior of the plant mode of ballast to a minimum depth of 30cm (refer to: Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 8: Road Elevation). No puddles or ponds should form at the sides of the track.

4.5 Inverters

The solar farm requires 11 power station platforms in total. An indicative power station platform and elevation is shown on Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 2: Power Station Elevation.

The platforms comprise an intelligent inverter system and a small transformer. The power station is a power conversion device which changes the direct current (DC) generated by the PV modules into grid-compliant alternating current (AC) and feeds this into the local electricity distribution network.

The transformer is an electrical device that alters the ratio of current and voltage in power to meet the requirements of transmission grids and devices. The inverter platforms are 12.2m long, 2.4m wide and 2.89m high.

4.6 DNO Substation Station

One DNO substation is required for the solar farm. The DNO substation contains the electrical switchgear, which comprises of disconnect switches used to control and protect the electrical equipment, as well as isolate the circuit if a fault occurs in the solar farm and in the local electricity distribution network.

The dimensions of the DNO substation will be defined by the DNO Operator but would not exceed 4m in height (Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 3: DNO Station Elevation).

A security light will be required on the exterior of the DNO substation. This would only be required in the case of an emergency call out in hours of darkness, in order to facilitate access and any repair

work required. The light would be activated by a motion sensor and not illuminated permanently. No other site lighting is required during the operational period of the solar farm.

4.7 Customer Cabin

One customer cabin is required for the solar farm and to contain electrical safety switchgear, used to control, protect and isolate electrical equipment at the solar farm (refer to: Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 4: Customer Station Elevation). The customer cabin will be 12.72m long, 4.03m wide and 3.0m high. It will be coloured dark green to ensure it blends into the existing environment.

4.8 Spare Parts Container

There will be one container on the site to store spare parts (refer to: Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 5: Spare Parts Container Elevation).

The container will be 13.7m long, 2.4m wide and 2.6m high.

4.9 Security Fence and Gates

For security and safety purposes the solar farm will be closed to the general public throughout the construction and operation phases via security fencing and a locked access gate.

A 2.15m high security fence will be installed around the perimeter of the solar farm (refer to: Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 6: Fence and Gates Elevation) The fence will be placed around the site at the start of the construction programme and will remain for the duration of the operation of the solar farm.

A main steel gate will also be erected, 2.2m high, and 6m wide.

The fence will be designed to allow small animals to pass through the site and will be placed behind existing and proposed hedges to ensure it blends into the natural setting and existing environment.

4.10 Security Cameras and Lighting

CCTV cameras pointing into the solar farm will be installed within the fencing for security purposes (refer to: Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 7: CCTV Elevation). The CCTV cameras will be mounted on poles up to 2.4m high. There will be no external artificial lighting during operation of the Proposed Development.

4.11 Temporary Construction Compound

To ensure the efficient management of the construction phase, a temporary construction compound will be set up for the duration of the estimated 6-9 month construction phase. An indicative drawing of the temporary construction compound is included in Yardley Road Solar Farm Technical Drawing 11: Temporary Construction Compound).

The construction compound will be accessed by HGVs via the access track off Yardley Road or Beech House Drive.

A construction compound would be located close to the site access point to facilitate the construction of the Proposed Development. The compound provides sufficient space for:

- Staff welfare facilities;
- Storage of site vehicles and materials;

- The safe loading and unloading of materials;
- Staff vehicle parking.

The construction compound will require the laying of a temporary roadway and walkway system on the existing ground surface. The construction compound will be removed at the end of the construction period and the area restored to its original condition.

5. Potential Effects

5.1 Landscape and Visual

A LVIA has been undertaken in support of the planning application for the Proposed Development.

The Proposed Development would introduce a new vertically low, utility-scale renewable energy feature into the arable farmland to the southwest of Yardley within the 'Undulating Claylands LCT 6' and sub area '6a The Tove Catchment'. At this point the landscape is defined by relatively flat to gently sloping landform and a mix of mature field boundaries and trees to provide localised variations and containment to large parts of the Site. This is at a point away from the more notable outward facing convex slopes and more intricate low lying sections of the surrounding landscape.

The area is reasonably typical of the defined character detailed within the published landscape character assessments of the area with a patchwork of medium to large scale, arable fields delineated by a network of clipped and mature hedgerows. At this location, the Site sits within a more elevated section of land and often larger in scale. Beyond the Site boundaries broad, gentle, convex slopes descend to more intimate areas such as the settled areas around Potterspury to the south and heritage features such as RPGs and Medieval Villages.

The overall design of the Proposed Development has considered landscape and visual effects within the confines of the Site to ensure the effects upon the landscape and visual receptors have been minimised. To this end, the Proposed Development would be set back from key sections of the Site where receptors are likely to gain some views, including Public Rights of Way (PRoW) through the Site and isolate residential properties on the southern edge of Yardley Gobion to retain and enhance the amenity at these points with mitigation planting.

The proposed mitigation and enhancement measures at these buffer areas and boundary points, combined with management of other existing field boundaries, would also assist in reducing the duration of effects and aid in retaining and improving the field boundaries and woodland character, in keeping with the character of this landscape.

Direct landscape effects would include changing the prevailing arable land use to a dual use, renewable energy generation with potential for grazing and with landscape character and biodiversity enhancements. The solar PV panel layout has been designed to retain existing vegetation within the Site as far as possible and no notable tree or hedgerow sections would be removed.

The overall field scale that is characteristic of the Site and the surrounding landscape would remain and views to surrounding features including hedgerows and wooded skylines would be retained. Further to this, new field boundaries would be provided with open sections to fully enclose the Site within characteristic field boundaries.

LVIA effects are considered to be relatively localised to points within or adjacent to the Site and to a small section of the nearest settlement edges at Yardley, with intermittent visibility likely. Most other views would be limited and heavily filtered to small sections of the Site. Clear and open views where largely sections of the Site are visible are likely to be restricted.

The solar array would sit in contained views often framed by surrounding field boundaries and below more distant skylines and in views interspersed by large areas of vegetation. This would allow views to the landscape beyond the Site. In the medium to long term the proposed mitigation would mature. This would screen views towards the Proposed Development.

The Site lies to the west of a locally defined Special Landscape Ares (SLA) designation and at a further point to the east side of another SLA. However, the nature of the Site setting and surrounding

character of the designated areas including lower lying farmland to the east an extensive woodland to the west, would help to reduce views and effects on the character and value of the designation and on its immediate setting.

In the medium to long-term, the proposed landscape mitigation planting along various boundaries combined with management of other existing field boundaries along other boundaries would help to screen the large majority of the Proposed Development from most near and middle-distance views, as well as integrating the Proposed Development into the surrounding landscape.

At the end of the Proposed Development's lifespan, the predicted effects are reversible as the land would be returned to its former agricultural use, similar in form to its current state.

In terms of compliance with the relevant landscape policies of the adopted West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (WNJPU, 2014), the LVIA concludes that the Proposed Development has been designed in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Where adverse effects arise, mitigation has been used to reduce the degree of harm and to provide a characteristic scheme that assimilates into the landscape in accordance with Policy, principally in Policy BN1 and BN5.

Overall, the Site represents a suitable location for development and the Proposed Development parameters with the embedded landscape mitigation results in limited and localised effects. The Proposed Development complies with policy aspirations and the LVIA process confirms the acceptability of the proposals.

5.2 Ecology

The majority of the habitats on the Site are intensively managed as arable fields and are of low intrinsic ecological value. The existing arable farming regime means that the Site as a whole is fairly disturbed, with fragmented pockets of semi-natural habitats. The Proposed Development will be focused within these fields, avoiding the more sensitive hedgerow and ditch habitats.

A supporting Landscape and Ecological Mitigation Plan (LEMP) (refer to: Figure 5: LEMP, R10 Landscape and Visual Assessment) is provided to outline the proposed habitat creation and enhancements from the Proposed Development. The main habitat impacted by these works will be arable fields. No hedgerows or trees are to be removed, and the ditch will be retained, protected and enhanced.

Habitat creation includes the creation of modified grassland under the solar panel array. The planting of species rich grassland around the field boundary and to the south of the Site within the 'additional areas of environmental enhancement and BNG' and the planting of other broadleaved woodland. Further details on habitat conditions are detailed within the BNG report (refer to: 58754 R2 Yardley Road Solar Farm Biodiversity Net Gain Report).

Hedgerows will be enhanced by the infilling of any gaps with local native species and additional species rich hedgerows with trees planted throughout the Site. If any area of hedgerow needs to be removed as part of the works, a further hedgerow survey will be required.

There are no suitable breeding ponds on or near the Site with all eDNA results negative. There is some suitable terrestrial habitat, but this is within a largely unsuitable and fragments landscape.

If the works were timed during the bird breeding season, adverse effects on birds (predominantly skylark) could occur if nests were caused to fail. It is recommended that a pre-construction check is completed by the Project Ecologist prior to any works in the arable fields during the breeding season (March to August inclusive) to check for any ground nesting birds. If evidence of nesting is found, the Project Ecologist will identify a buffer area in which no works will take place until the young have fledged.

Mitigation measures include enhancement of nesting habitats via the provision of bird boxes, hedgerow planting and secure ground nesting bird habitat due to the cessation of agricultural practices and installation of security fencing which will discourage access for ground-based predators.

The ditch within the Site is not considered suitable for otter and water vole species due to the lack of cover and management practices. However, when these practices are no longer carried out, the area will likely become suitable over time. Pollution prevention and sedimentation prevention measures will be adopted to avoid indirect impacts to this species through potential pollution of the watercourses.

A possible badger sett was identified 0.2 km south of the Site and it is therefore likely that the species will range onto Site. As badgers range onto Site, as a good practice measure, any excavations should be covered overnight, or a mammal ladder placed inside to prevent any ranging mammals (such as badger) from becoming trapped.

There are several trees with bat roost potential within the Site; however, these are to be retained with no illumination of features resulting in no significant effects.

The implementation of habitat enhancement and creation measures will likely result in a BNG and calculations indicate that this net gain will be well in excess of 10% for habitats, hedgerows, and watercourses, respectively. The measures are illustrated on 58754 Yardley Road Solar Farm LVIA Figure 5.

The Proposed Development will have no detrimental effect on the habitats and species on the Site. The enhancements to the existing habitats present mean the Proposed Development has been shown through the BNG calculations to provide an improvement in the biodiversity of the Site and the species it supports.

5.3 Heritage and Archaeology

A Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been undertaken in support of the planning application for the Proposed Development. The assessment as has been undertaken in line with current planning regulations set out in Planning Policy Guidance (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), 2016 and updated 2019); National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2025); and local planning policy.

For many designated assets considered in this assessment, the impacts on their setting are extremely limited or none, and as such, no mitigation is deemed necessary. However, for Dovecote at Manor Farm, the Church of St Bartholomew, Cheley Well and Beech House, the potential impacts are greater, the magnitude of impact is judged to be Low Adverse in these cases. Appropriate mitigation measures should be implemented to reduce any adverse effects on their settings and historical value.

For Cheley Well, the Proposed Development could impact its setting, particularly by reducing visibility and disrupting its spatial context as a historically significant meeting place. However, this is difficult to appreciate in its current setting and the original setting of the asset is difficult to appreciate beyond the location of the its original natural resource as a natural spring.

The assets are currently located within trees, which form part of a field boundary, and this field boundary and tree stand will be maintained as part of the Proposed Development and as such the immediate setting will be unchanged.

For Beech House, the Dovecot at Manor Farm and the Church of St Bartholomew, the Proposed Development would be partially visible, although the maintenance and enhancement of hedgerows

and planting of trees along the boundary of the Site would in part screen the Proposed Development from views and help to minimise impacts upon the setting of these assets.

Given the known heritage assets on Site, as well as the assessed archaeological potential and in accordance with national and local planning policies on heritage, an archaeological programme of works will be required in advance of the construction of the Proposed Development.Such works would initially take the form of an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in portions of the Site that would be affected by the Proposed Development. These works should be informed by the geophysical survey carried out by Archaeological Research Services in 2023 (refer to: 58754 R13 Yardley Road Solar Farm HIA Appendix 3: Geophysical Report), which highlighted several potential archaeological features across the Site.

If significant features are found, further mitigation is likely to be required and may include mitigation by design by either designing out areas or use of 'no dig' construction techniques.

5.4 Flood Risk and Drainage

An FRA and a Drainage Assessment (DA) have been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development.

The FRA (refer to: 58754 R3 Yardley Road Solar Farm Flood Risk Assessment) investigated the mechanisms for flooding at the Site. It identified that the risk of flooding to the Proposed Development is assessed to be negligible/low, with the exception of some small areas of low to high pluvial surface water risk due to a shallow overland flow pathway and ponding within localised depressions in the Site topography.

The Environment Agency (EA) Flood Map for Planning indicates the Site and the proposed cable route to be located in flood zone 1. However, there is a small area of flood zone 2 and flood zone 3 in the southeast of the Site, with three relatively short lengths of the cable route where it passes beneath Dogsmouth Brook, along Watling Street and over the River Great Ouse for which the land is defined as flood zone 3.

However, the grid connection comprises an underground cable. As such, the cable would not be affected by flooding, nor increase flood risk. During installation, the cable will be laid along trenches with relatively small extents of trenches being excavated and re-instatement generally occurring on the same day. The works required to facilitate the Dogsmouth Brook watercourse crossing (i.e. the entry and exit points for the directional drilling) and any stored spoil would be located outside the fluvial and surface water flood extents indicated. As such, the construction works would not increase flood risk elsewhere.

The assessment presented in the FRA demonstrates that the Proposed Development may be completed in accordance with the requirements of planning policy subject to the following:

- Existing drainage ditches to be retained, with no development proposed within a minimum of 9m;
- Flood pathways associated with surface water runoff and runoff associated with existing drainage ditches not to be obstructed by the substation or PV power stations; and
- Ground under the PV solar panel drip line to be seeded with a suitable grass mix to prevent rilling and an increase in surface water runoff rates.

The DA (refer to: 58754 R4 Yardley Road Solar Farm Drainage Assessment) undertaken for the Proposed Development, presents a preliminary scheme for the management of surface water from the Proposed Development. A summary of the principal findings is provided below:

- The Site comprises greenfield land with no formal drainage. Runoff is expected to infiltrate where conditions allows and flow overland in a direction determined by topography;
- No formal drainage is proposed in the northern parcel (north of Yardley Road) as existing swales/ditches will intercept, store and treat surface water runoff, along with managed grassland below solar panels;
- Surface water runoff from access tracks and inverter units in the southern parcel (south of Yardley Road) is proposed to discharge into the existing drainage ditch to the southeast of the Site;
- Flows from the southern parcel will be restricted to the mean annual maximum flow rate greenfield rate with attenuation storage provided in an attenuation basin;
- Any exceedance flows will follow the natural topography, mimicking the current arrangement;
- The utilisation of existing swales/ditches, filter drains and an attenuation basin will provide the necessary pollution mitigation measures to ensure satisfactory water quality treatment is achieved; and
- The site operator or their appointed management company will be responsible for maintenance.

In conclusion, the DA demonstrates that the Proposed Development will be completed in accordance with the requirements of planning policy.

5.5 Glint and Glare

A GGA (refer to: 58754 R5 Yardley Road Solar Farm Glint and Glare Assessment) has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development. This assessment considered the potential impacts on ground-based receptors such as road users and residential dwellings as well as aviation assets.

A 1km survey area around the Site was considered for the assessment of ground-based receptors, whilst a 10km study area was considered for aviation receptors. The GGA assesses the potential effects of glint and glare concerning aviation activity at Hall Farm Airfield, Buttermilk Hall Airfield, Thornborough Grounds Airfield, and New Farm Airfield.

Solar reflections are not geometrically possible towards the assessed section of the A508. No impact is predicted and mitigation is not required.

Solar reflections are geometrically possible towards 79 of the 100 assessed dwellings. Screening in the form of existing vegetation, proposed vegetation, buildings, and/or intervening terrain is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels for all 79 dwellings. No impact is predicted and mitigation is not required.

Solar reflections towards the splayed approaches and final sections of visual circuits at Hall Farm Airfield, Buttermilk Hall Airfield, Thornborough Grounds Airfield, and New Farm Airfield are predicted to occur outside a pilot's field-of-view (50 degrees either side relative to the runway threshold bearing) or have intensities no greater than 'low potential for temporary after-image'. No significant impact is predicted and mitigation is not required.

5.6 Traffic and Transport

A TS (refer to: 58754 R6 Yardley Road Solar Farm Transport Statement) has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development.

The Site is considered to be well-located for a development of this nature, being within close proximity to the strategic road network (Northampton Road and the A5), and having suitable HGV access routes via local roads.

Sustainable modes of transport have been assessed for this Site and summarised in the following sections.

5.6.1 Walking

Yardley Road, where the Site takes its access from, has no footway provision on either side of the carriageway. Additionally, there is no footway provision on the A508 Northampton Road (to the north of the Site) or on Beech House Drive (to the south) so walking trips to the Proposed Development are not expected.

5.6.2 Cycling

There are no dedicated cycle routes/cycle lanes within the vicinity of the Site. All trips by bicycle would have to use the local road network, though it is noted that the nature of Yardley Road generally makes it conducive to cycling.

5.6.3 Public Transport

The nearest bus stops to the Site are located on the High Street in Potterspury, a distance of approximately 800m away, and can be reached with an 11 minute walk from the Site. It is important to note that there are no footways between the Site and the bus stops, so any walking trips would occur along Yardley Road, which is a wide, single track road.

The Site will generally be accessed via the A508 Northampton Road from the north, turning onto Yardley Road. Both routes are of good standard, with a 60mph speed limit, and the A508 offers good access to the wider strategic road network.

Access to the Site will be taken from Yardley Road via new and existing accesses including Beech House Drive. Access for HGVs from the Potterspury end of Yardley Road will be prohibited to minimize construction traffic impacts in the village.

The vehicle trip generation of the Proposed Development will be negligible at the operational stage, and as such, it is considered that it can be accommodated without detriment to the local road network over the longer term.

The construction period is expected to last for six to nine months. At peak times such as during months four to six of the construction programme, there are expected to be approximately 10-15 HGV trips to the Site per day, although these are unlikely to coincide with peak times on the road network. Staff will be expected to arrive on site by 07:00, and will typically depart between 15:00 and 18:00.

Considering the level of trip generation, the quality of the road links, and the distribution of traffic, it can be concluded that the construction phase of the Proposed Development will not result in a significant increase in vehicle trips. Therefore, the impact on the surrounding road network is expected to be negligible, and the effect on existing road users will be minimal and insignificant.

There will be some localised delays in relation to the grid connection works along the public road. The vehicle numbers associated with such works are not expected to be significant but the works may require some temporary traffic control measures in order to deliver. It is noted that these works will not be delivered by the Applicant but will instead be delivered by a utility provider under statutory powers.

Access to the Site will be taken from three locations with two new priority junctions on Yardley Road and one priority junction from Beech House Drive. There will also be 'construction only' access from the Northampton Road.

A framework Construction Stage Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been produced and presented within the TS to demonstrate that adequate arrangements can be put in place to minimise and control the construction traffic impacts from the construction phase of the Proposed Development along with any associated environmental impacts.

Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development can be accommodated without detriment to the local road network at both the construction and operational stages.

5.7 Arboriculture

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development (refer to: 58754 R8 Yardley Road Solar Farm Arboricultural Impact Assessment).

The AIA evaluates the Proposed Development in relation to existing trees on-site. This assessment has been carried out in accordance with the principles and guidance set out in British Standard 5837:2012 '*Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations'*.

All trees within influencing distance of the proposed works both on-site and on adjacent land have been surveyed. These trees are detailed within the Tree Survey Schedule (Appendix 1 of the AIA) and are plotted on all relevant accompanying plans.

32 individual trees, twelve groups and 18 hedgerows were surveyed and mapped on a Preliminary Tree Constraints and Impact Assessment Plan Ref: 25/AIA/MKCC/01, Drawing No. 1 & 2 at Appendix 2. All arboricultural information recorded during the survey is presented within the Tree Survey Schedule (Appendix 1 of the AIA).

Following on-site consultation with the Arboricultural consultant and a detailed review of the survey findings and constraints plan, the Proposed Development layout has been carefully developed to ensure no adverse impacts on trees and hedgerows. The design reflects a responsible and informed approach to tree retention and protection.

No trees or hedgerows are proposed for removal to facilitate the development. Furthermore, no adverse construction impacts are anticipated, as all proposed works are located well outside of designated Construction Exclusion Zones.

A comprehensive report was produced identifying all existing trees on-site, along with their respective Root Protection Areas (RPAs). These RPAs were subsequently incorporated into a Tree Constraints and Impact Assessment Plan, which has directly informed the design development process.

The proposal demonstrates full compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2025), the adopted West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) (WNJPU, 2014), and relevant policies within the Part 2 Local Plans (South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) 2020b). It also adheres to the principles outlined in BS 5837:2012 (BSI, 2012) particularly with respect to the retention and protection of existing trees throughout the design and construction phases.

Considering the above, it is considered there to be no valid arboricultural grounds for refusal of the application.

5.8 Agricultural Land

An Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey and report was undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development (refer to: 58754 R7 Yardley Road Solar Farm Agricultural Land Classification).

The survey was conducted in November 2021 and classified the land into an ALC Grade of 2 and 3b for the Site. 26ha (35.14%) of the Site was classified as Grade 2 (Very good quality agricultural land with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivation or harvesting) and 48ha (64.86%) of the Site was classified as Grade 3b (Moderate quality agricultural land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops or lower yields of a wider range of crops).

The majority of the fields to the northeast of Yardley Road is Grade 2 and all the fields to the southwest of Yardley Road is Grade 3b. 65% of the proposed location of the solar farm is not BMV.

5.9 Noise

A Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) has been undertaken in support of the planning application for a Proposed Development (refer to: 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm Noise Impact Assessment).

This assessment looks to establish the current noise impacts on the surrounding area of the proposed site in line with the British Standard (BS) 4142:2014 (BSI, 2014a), BS 8233:2014 (BSI,2014b), BS ISO 9613-2: 2024 (BSI, 2024) and World Health Organisation (WHO) Community Noise Guidelines (WHO, 1999).

A noise model, based on the proposed specification of the inverters chosen for this site, has been constructed using IMMI noise modelling software to predict noise levels. Within the modelling software, the propagation of noise has been calculated in accordance with BS ISO 9613-2:2024 (BSI, 2024).

The Proposed Development consists of 12 fields containing solar panels with 125 string inverters distributed throughout behind the panels and 11 solar transformers (power stations) distributed around the site. These are the only noise sources of interest. The layout is shown in Figure 2: Site Layout with the locations of the string inverters and transformers.

The solar farm will operate during the hours of daylight only. In the summer months, operation of the solar farm could begin in hours traditionally considered part of the nighttime period, specifically before 7am. However, this period is often associated with the dawn chorus when noise from bird song can be quite loud. The solar farm would not operate during the quietest time of night, nor when most people are trying to get to sleep, e.g. between 10pm and midnight.

The site is in between the A5 and the A508 roads and therefore traffic noise is likely affect the noise climate especially during the day. However, noise levels are likely to be fall during the evening and night and then increase after 5am.

In instances of low rating and background noise levels, BS4142 (BSI, 2014a) indicates that assessment in line with absolute noise limits might be more appropriate. In this case, a rating noise level limit of 35 dB LAr (free-field) is proposed during operational hours for noise from the solar farm at residential receptors. This is well below the BS 8233 (BSI, 2014b) threshold for outdoor amenity periods meaning background noise levels are likely to exceed this during the day. During the early hours of the morning, when the solar farm could operate in what is traditionally considered to be the night- time period, this limit is sufficiently low to protect sleep as it is well below the WHO sleep disturbance threshold.

The predicted noise levels assume that the string inverters are operating at 70% capacity, which is likely to be typical. This may be exceeded during the hottest periods of the day, but this will not happen during the more critical early morning or evening periods which are likely to be more sensitive in respect of the nearby residential locations.

Calculations indicate that the typical operational noise condition would comply with the noise limit at the noise sensitive receptors. Based on this, there is no reason that planning permission should not be granted.

6. Planning Policy Assessment

6.1 Development Plan

Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act and Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 together require that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of this application, the Development Plan comprises:

- The West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) (West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (WNJPU), 2014);
- Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (Northamptonshire County Council, 2017); and
- South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2) (SNC, 2020b).

West Northamptonshire Council are currently preparing a new local plan for the area to guide development in the period up to 2043.

The West Northamptonshire Local Plan will replace the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) and the Part 2 Local Plans which were adopted for the former Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire areas.

Consultation on a Regulation 18 Draft Plan ran between 8 April 2024 and 2 June 2024 and are now being considered and will inform the next stage of the plan-making process.

In March 2025 a new timetable for the production of the local plan was published taking into account the consequences of recent government proposals for plan making on the plan. The new timetable proposes the next public consultation on the local plan will take place in October 2025, this will also be on a Regulation 18 Draft Plan.

The following sections identify the Development Plan policies and material considerations relevant to this application. An assessment is also provided of the Proposed Development against the relevant policies.

Additional material policy considerations for the Proposed Development are derived from global and national energy and planning policy as set out in the National Policy Statement, the National Planning Policy Framework (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), 2024), and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) on renewable and low carbon energy.

6.2 West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) (December 2014)

Objective 1 of the Joint Core Strategy considers the impacts of Climate Change and notes that the Council will "*minimise demand for resources and mitigate and adapt to climate change by… encouraging renewable energy production in appropriate locations*". This lead Objective suggests that the Council's local development framework is set up to support the UK Government's statutory obligation to be Net-Zero by 2050 through, among other things, the provision of decentralised renewable energy development.

The Core Strategy (WNJPU, 2014) sets out the strategic vision for West Northamptonshire to 2029. The following Core Strategy policies are considered applicable to the Proposed Development:

- SA: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development;

- S1: The Distribution of Development;
- S10: Sustainable Development Principles;
- S11: Low Carbon and Renewable Energy;
- C2: New Developments;
- BN1: Green Infrastructure Connections;
- BN2: Biodiversity;
- BN3: Woodland Enhancement and Creation;
- BN5: The Historic Environment and Landscape;
- BN7A: Water Supply, Quality and Wastewater Infrastructure;
- BN7: Flood Risk;
- BN9: Planning for Pollution Control; and
- R2: Rural Economy.

6.2.1 Policy SA – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

This policy states that:

> *"When considering development proposals, the relevant council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the national planning policy framework. It will always work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals for sustainable development will be approved and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.*
>
> *Planning applications that accord with the policies in this local plan (and, where relevant, with policies in other local plans and neighbourhood plans) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.*
>
> *Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision, then the appropriate council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:*
>
> - *Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the national planning policy framework taken as a whole; or*
> - *Specific policies in that framework indicate that development should be restricted."*

The Proposed Development has undergone an extensive site assessment process to ensure that the proposed solar farm complies with local planning policy and is considered to be situated in an appropriate location. The application is supported by a number of studies including noise, landscape and ecology which demonstrate that the Proposed Development will not have an impact upon the surrounding area and its environs and it is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy SA.

6.2.2 Policy S1 – The Distribution of Development

The policy states that:

> *"Development and economic activity will be distributed on the following basis:*

(a) *Development will be concentrated primarily in and adjoining the principal urban area of Northampton*

(b) *Appropriate development of a lesser scale will be located in and adjoining the sub-regional centre of Daventry town*

(c) *The development needs of the rural service centres of Towcester and Brackley and the rural areas will also be provided for*

(d) *New development in the rural areas will be limited with the emphasis being on:*

1) *Enhancing and maintaining the distinctive character and vitality of rural communities;*

2) *Shortening journeys and facilitating access to jobs and services;*

3) *Strengthening rural enterprise and linkages between settlements and their hinterlands; and*

4) *Respecting the quality of tranquillity*

In assessing the suitability of sites for development priority will be given to making best use of previously developed land and vacant and under-used buildings in urban or other sustainable locations contributing to the achievement of West Northamptonshire target of 30% of additional dwellings on previously developed land or through conversions."

The Proposed Development is considered to be relevant to the section (d) 1 of this policy. The LVIA (refer to: 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm Landscape and Visual Assessment) for this application includes the assessment of the likely effects of the Proposed Development in respect of landscape and visual matters, including Landscape Character Types and Areas. The HIA (refer to: 58754 R11 Yardley Road Solar Farm Heritage Impact Assessment) for this application also assesses the potential impact of the Proposed Development on heritage assets and the effect on their character.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy S1.

6.2.3 Policy S10 – Sustainable Development Principles

The policy states that:

"Development will:

(a) *Achieve the highest standards of sustainable design incorporating safety and security considerations and a strong sense of place;*

(b) *Be designed to improve environmental performance, energy efficiency and adapt to changes of use and a changing climate over its lifetime;*

(c) *Make use of sustainably sourced materials;*

(d) *Minimise resource demand and the generation of waste and maximise opportunities for reuse and recycling;*

(e) *Be located where services and facilities can be easily accessed by walking, cycling or public transport;*

(f) *Maximise use of solar gain, passive heating and cooling, natural light and ventilation using site layout and building design;*

(g) *Maximise the generation of its energy needs from decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources;*

(h) Maximise water efficiency and promote sustainable drainage;

(i) Protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment and heritage assets and their settings;

(j) Promote the creation of green infrastructure networks, enhance biodiversity and reduce the fragmentation of habitats; and

(k) Minimise pollution from noise, air and run off."

It is considered that the Proposed Development will not result in any unacceptable impacts, and the benefits of the proposal outweigh any minor impacts.

The Proposed Development is a renewable energy scheme and is considered to be sustainable development. There are relevant policies in place (S11) and the need for the Proposed Development is clearly demonstrated for the reasons given above. The assessments accompanying the application demonstrate limited potential impacts and are not considered to outweigh the potential benefits. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy S10.

6.2.4 Policy S11 – Low Carbon and Renewable Energy

This policy states that:

> *"Major development and sustainable urban extensions should contribute to reductions in carbon emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change through the sustainable development principles (Policy S10), so as to minimise energy using sustainable design and construction, maximise energy efficiency and the provision of low carbon and renewable energy, including where feasible and appropriate, through provision of decentralised energy.*
>
> *Proposals should be sensitively located and designed to minimise potential adverse impacts on people, the natural environment, biodiversity, historic assets and should mitigate pollution…."*

As a clean form of electricity generation the Proposed Development will result in the reduction of potentially harmful emissions from conventional fossil fuel generation. The proposed 40MW development will contribute to energy production from renewable sources through the generation of an estimated 54,580MWh of electricity per annum. The need to decarbonise the electricity grid in response to the climate crisis is ongoing as reflected in National Energy Policy.

The potential impacts on the residential amenity (people), the natural environment, biodiversity and historic assets has been undertaken through the assessments undertaken in support of this application. These demonstrate that the Proposed Development will not result in significant, demonstrable harm. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy S11.

6.2.5 Policy C2 – New Developments

This policy states:

> *"New housing, employment, commercial and retail development in the four towns of Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley and primary service villages will be expected to achieve the modal shift targets (in paragraph 6.13) by maximising travel choice from non-car modes.*

Development will be required to mitigate its effects on the highway network and be supported by a transport assessment and travel plan prepared in accordance with current best practice guidelines as issued by the departments for transport or the relevant local authority.

Sustainable urban extensions, as allocated within this plan, will additionally be required to:

a) Provide access via walking, cycling and public transport routes to a mix of uses including local employment, housing and retail facilities;
b) Ensure that new or enhanced public transport services are secured on occupation of the first dwelling when this is appropriate;
c) Secure the most efficient networks for walking, cycling and public transport within the development;
d) Ensure sufficient density across the site in order to sustain public transport and other local services."

A TS (refer to: 58754 R6 Yardley Road Solar Farm Transport Statement) has been produced in support of the application. The TS has considered the access strategy for the development as well as the suitability of the road network around the Site to serve the development. The impact of the Proposed Development on the transport network has been considered and mitigation proposed in the form of a CTMP. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy C2.

6.2.6 Policy BN1 – Green Infrastructure Connections

This policy states:

"Green infrastructure corridors of sub-regional and local importance as set out in Figure 6 of the Joint Core Strategy will be recognised for their important contribution to sense of place and conserved, managed and enhanced by:

(1) Incorporating existing and identified future networks into new development proposals;
(2) Securing contributions from development or other sources for the creation of and future management of the green infrastructure networks;
(3) Delivering long term management strategies for the sub-regional and local network

Measures to enhance existing and provide new green infrastructure provision will:

(a) Be designed and delivered sustainably with prudent use of natural resources
(b) Mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change including through improved flood risk management and as a carbon store;
(c) Be designed to the highest quality in terms of appearance, access provision and biodiversity enhancement and protection;
(d) Reflect local character through the planting of native and other climate appropriate species and consideration of natural and cultural heritage features;
(e) Be supported by a long-term management strategy."

It is considered that the Proposed Development constitutes green infrastructure, will actively assist in mitigation of impacts of climate change, and will seek to actively enhance habitats and biodiversity (refer to: 58754 R1 Yardley Road Solar Farm Preliminary Ecological Assessment and 58754 R2 Yardley Road Solar Farm Biodiversity Net Gain Report).

The HIA produced in support of the application (refer to: 58754 R11 Yardley Road Solar Farm Heritage Impact Assessment) considers the potential impacts of designated heritage assets within

2km of the Site. For many designated assets considered in the assessment, the impacts on their setting are extremely limited or none, and as such, no mitigation is deemed necessary. However, for assets where it is considered that the impacts are greater, measures such as maintaining and enhancing planting have been proposed.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy BN1.

6.2.7 Policy BN2 – Biodiversity

This policy states that:

> *"Development that will maintain and enhance existing designations and assets or deliver a net gain in biodiversity will be supported.*
>
> *Development that has the potential to harm sites of ecological importance will be subjected to an ecological assessment and required to demonstrate:*
>
> - *The methods used to conserve biodiversity in its design and construction and operations*
> - *How habitat conservation, enhancement and creation can be achieved through linking habitats*
> - *How designated sites, protected species and priority habitats will be safeguarded*
>
> *Development management decisions will reflect the hierarchy of biodiversity and geodiversity designations attaching appropriate weight to the status of the site which would be affected. In cases where it can be shown that there is no reasonable alternative to development that is likely to prejudice the integrity of an existing wildlife site or protected habitat, appropriate mitigation measures including compensation will be expected in proportion to the asset that will be lost. Where mitigation or compensation can not be agreed with the relevant authority, development will not be permitted.*"

A landscaping plan has been provided in support of the application (refer to: Figure 5: LEMP, 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm Landscape and Visual Assessment), which supports the PEA (refer to: 58754 R1 Yardley Road Solar Farm Preliminary Ecological Appraisal). The PEA and LEMP outline the proposed habitat creation and enhancements from the Proposed Development. The main habitat impacted by these works will be arable fields, no hedgerows or trees are to be removed, and the ditch will be retained, protected and enhanced.

Habitat creation includes the creation of modified grassland under the solar panel array. The planting of species rich grassland around the field boundary and to the south of the Site within the 'additional areas of environmental enhancement and BNG' and the planting of other broadleaved woodland. Further details on habitat conditions are detailed within the BNG report. Hedgerows will be enhanced by the infilling of any gaps with local native species and additional species rich hedgerows with trees planted throughout the Site. If any area of hedgerow needs to be removed as part of the works, a further hedgerow survey will be required.

It has been demonstrated in the BNG report (refer to: 58754 R2 Yardley Road Solar Farm Biodiversity Net Gain Report) that the Proposed Development will achieve the minimum statutory requirement for BNG. The report demonstrates that:

- The overall BNG for area habitats is 61.88%;
- The overall BNG for linear habitats is 26.03%; and
- The overall BNG for watercourse based habitats of 14.73%.

This well exceeds the 10% minimum target for BNG. The enhancements to the existing habitats, coupled with reduction of farming activities will ensure that the Proposed Development has the potential to provide an improvement to West Northamptonshire's biodiversity. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy BN2.

6.2.8 Policy BN3 – Woodland Enhancement and Creation

This policy states that:

> *"Measures to enhance and manage existing woodlands and create new woodlands in West Northamptonshire will be supported. Opportunities will be sought to create new woodland to buffer, extend and relink areas of ancient woodland which have become fragmented. The protection of aged or veteran trees outside ancient woodland will also be supported. Development that would lead to further fragmentation or result in a loss of ancient woodland, aged and veteran trees, will not be permitted unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss."*

An AIA has been undertaken in support of this application (refer to: 58754 R8 Yardley Road Solar Farm Arboricultural Impact Assessment). The assessment concluded that the Proposed will not result in any tree loss or adverse impacts to retained trees, as all works are located outside designated RPAs and Construction Exclusion Zones. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy BN3.

6.2.9 Policy BN5 – The Historic Environment and Landscape

This policy states that:

> *"Designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings and landscapes will be conserved and enhanced in recognition of their individual and cumulative significance and contribution to West Northamptonshire's local distinctiveness and sense of place.*
>
> *In environments where valued heritage assets are at risk, the asset and its setting will be appropriately conserved and managed.*
>
> *In order to secure and enhance the significance of the area's heritage assets and their settings and landscapes, development in areas of landscape sensitivity and/or known historic or heritage significance will be required to:*
>
> *(1) Sustain and enhance the heritage and landscape features which contribute to the character of the area including:*
>
> *(a) Conservation areas;*
> *(b) Significant historic landscapes including historic parkland, battlefields and ride and furrow;*
> *(c) The skyline and landscape settings of towns and villages;*
> *(d) Sites of known or potential heritage or historic significance;*
> *(e) Locally and nationally important buildings, structures and monuments*
>
> *(2) Demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of the impact of development on surrounding heritage assets and their setting in order to minimise harm to these assets; where loss of historic features or archaeological remains is unavoidable and justified, provision should be made for recording and the production of a suitable archive and report*

(3) Be sympathetic to locally distinctive landscape features, design styles and materials in order to contribute to a sense of place

The retention and sensitive re-use of disused or underused heritage assets and structures is encouraged in order to retain and reflect the distinctiveness of the environment, contribute to the sense of place and promote the sustainable and prudent use of natural resources.

Proposals to sustain and enhance the area's understanding of heritage assets, for tourism and historic interest as part of cultural, leisure and green networks will be supported."

The HIA (refer to: 58754 R11 Yardley Road Solar Farm Heritage Impact Assessment) demonstrates that the Proposed Development will result in less than substantial harm to the settings of nearby designated heritage assets. The implementation of appropriate mitigation measures will minimise the direct impacts resulting from the Proposed Development. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy BN5.

6.2.10 Policy BN7A - Water Supply, Quality and Wastewater Infrastructure

This policy states that:

"New development proposals will ensure adequate and appropriate water supply and wastewater infrastructure is available to meet the additional requirements placed upon it and to ensure that water quality is protected, and as far as practicable, improved.

Development proposals will ensure that adequate wastewater treatment capacity is available to address capacity and environmental constraints.

Development should use sustainable drainage systems, wherever practicable, to improve water quality, reduce flood risk and provide environmental and adaption benefits.

To ensure all new housing is water efficient, all new development will be required to achieve the equivalent of minimum level 4 standards for water conservation in the code for sustainable homes or any national equivalent standard for 2016."

A DA (refer to: 58754 R4 Yardley Road Solar Farm Drainage Assessment) has been undertaken in support of the application and demonstrates that the Proposed Development will be completed in accordance with the requirements of planning Policy BN7A.

6.2.11 Policy BN7 – Flood Risk

This policy states:

"Development proposals will comply with flood risk assessment and management requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance and the West Northamptonshire strategic flood risk assessments to address current and future flood risk with appropriate climate change allowances.

A sequential approach will be applied to all proposals for development in order to direct development to areas at the lowest probability of flooding unless it has met the requirements of the sequential test and the exception test as set out within table 6.

All new development, including regeneration proposals, will need to demonstrate that there is no increased risk of flooding to existing properties, and proposed development is (or can be) safe and shall seek to improve existing flood risk management.

All proposals for development of 1 hectare or above in flood zone 1 and for development in 2, 3A, or 3B must be accompanies by a flood risk assessment that sets out mitigation measures for the site and agreed with the relevant authority.

A flood risk assessment must also accompany proposals where it may be subject to other sources, and forms, of flooding or where other bodies have indicated that there may be drainage problems.

In order to meet the exception test, development must:

1. *Demonstrate that the development provides wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk;*
2. *Be located on previously developed land; and*
3. *Be accompanied by a site specific flood risk assessment that demonstrates that the development will be safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere and where possible, reduce flood risk overall.*

Where flood risk management requires the use of sustainable drainage systems to manage surface water run off, these should:

a) *Separate surface water from foul and combined sewers;*

b) *Be accompanied by a long term management and maintenance plan; and*

c) *Protect and enhance water quality."*

The FRA (refer to: 58754 R3 Yardley Road Solar Farm Flood Risk Assessment) has been undertaken in support of this application. The risk of flooding to the Proposed Development is assessed to be negligible/low, with the exception of some small areas of low to high pluvial surface water risk due to a shallow overland flow pathway and ponding within localised depressions in the Site topography.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development would not be expected to have an adverse impact on flood risk and is consistent with Policy BN7.

6.2.12 Policy BN9 – Planning for Pollution Control

This policy states:

"Proposals for new development which are likely to cause pollution or likely to result in exposure to sources of pollution or risks to safety will need to demonstrate that they provide opportunities to minimise and where possible, reduce pollution issues that are a barrier to achieving sustainable development and healthy communities, including:

a) *Maintaining and improving air quality, particularly in poor air quality areas, in accordance with national air quality standards and best practice;*

b) *Protecting and improving surface and groundwater water quality;*

c) *Minimising light pollution;*

d) *Ensuring remediation of contaminated land so as not to pose a risk to health and the environment; and*

e) *Reducing the adverse impacts of noise.*

Development that is likely to cause pollution, either individually or cumulatively, will only be permitted if measures can be implemented to minimise pollution to a level which provides a high standard of protection for health and environmental quality."

An NIA (refer to: 58754 R9 Yardley Road Solar Farm Noise Impact Assessment) has been produced in support of the application. The NIA demonstrates that the Proposed Development will not generate high levels of noise with the NIA concluding noise impacts will be below the 35db daytime limit. The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy BN9.

6.2.13 Policy R2 – Rural Economy

This policy states that:

"Proposals which sustain and enhance the rural economy by creating or safeguarding jobs and business will be supported where they are of an appropriate scale for their location, respect the environmental quality and character of the rural area and protect the best and most versatile agricultural land. The following types of development are considered to be acceptable:

a) The re-use of rural buildings;
b) Schemes for farm diversification involving small-scale business and commercial development that contribute to the operation and viability of the farm holding;
c) Small-scale tourism proposals, including visit accommodation;
d) Proposals that recognise the economic benefits of the natural and historic environment as an asset to be valued, conserved and enhanced;
e) The expansion of businesses in their existing locations, dependent upon the nature of the activities involved, the character of the site and its accessibility;
f) Small scale employment development to meet local needs; and
g) The use of land for agricultural, forestry and equestrian activity."

The Proposed Development will contribute towards the low carbon economy and provide socio-economic benefits to the locality. The Proposed Development will support farm diversification include changing the prevailing arable land use to a dual use, renewable energy generation with potential for grazing and with landscape character and biodiversity enhancements. This change in use will ensure the long term viability of the farm holding, in accordance with section b) of Policy R2.

6.3 Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (July 2017)

There are no policies in the Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan that are relevant to the consideration of this application.

6.4 South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2)

As the Proposed Development is located within the area of the former South Northamptonshire District Council, the following policies from the South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2) (SNC, 2020b) are considered as applicable to the Proposed Development:

- NE2: Special Landscape Areas;
- NE4: Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows;
- HE1: Significance of Heritage Assets;
- NE5: Biodiversity and Geodiversity;
- SS2: General Development and Design Principles;

- EMP3: New Employment Development; and
- EMP6: Farm Diversification.

6.4.1 Policy NE2 – Special Landscape Areas

This policy states:

1. *"Within Special Landscape Areas development related to unallocated site and sites outside of settlement confines should avoid harmful impacts to the character and appearance of the area.*
2. *Proposals for development within a Special Landscape Area should:*
    a. *pay particular regards to design, materials, siting of buildings and the use of land; and*
    b. *make best use of the land available; and*
    c. *be informed by, the qualities of the special landscape area as set out in South Northamptonshire: A Review of Special Landscape Areas 2017 or any successor document(s); and*
    d. *contribute, where appropriate, to the conservation, restoration or enhancement, or restoration of the area's character and appearance.*
3. *Dependent on scale and context development proposals within the SLA may require a full landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) where required, the LVIA should inform the design of the proposal to minimise negative landscape impacts including the incorporation of mitigation and compensatory measures"*

An LVIA (refer to: 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) has been produced in support of this application. The Site is located between two locally designated SLAs (Tove Valley SLA and Whittlewood Forest and Hazelborough Forest SLA), which cover sloping land away from the Site to the east and within wooded landscapes to the west.

The LVIA assesses the potential effects of the Proposed Development on these SLAs and concludes that effects would not exceed Very Low to None, leading to effects that would be no more than Minor to Negligible Adverse.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy NE2.

6.4.2 Policy NE4: Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

This policy states that:

1. *"Proposals for development should seek to integrate existing trees, woodland and hedgerows.*
2. *Development that results in the loss of ancient woodland or aged and veteran trees or other protected trees will rarely be acceptable. Proposals that would result in the loss or deterioration of these specimens will be refused unless the need for, and benefit of the development in that location clearly and demonstrably outweighs the loss.*
3. *Proposals for felling or pruning will not be permitted to a tree in a conservation area or to a tree subject to a tree preservation order except where the proposal is justified in the interests of good arboricultural practice or other clear environmental benefits.*

4. *Where the loss of existing trees, woodland or hedgerows is unavoidable, suitable replacement planting will be required within the development site, or secured via planning obligation to be provided at another location with direct links to the development site.*
5. *Planting schemes should, where possible, use native or similar species and varieties, and maximise the benefits to the local landscape and wildlife."*

An AIA has been undertaken in support of this application (refer to: 58754 R8 Yardley Road Solar Farm Arboricultural Impact Assessment). The assessment concluded that the Proposed Development would not result in any tree loss or adverse impacts to retained trees, as all works are located outside designated RPAs and Construction Exclusion Zones.

A landscaping plan has also been provided (refer to: Figure 5: LEMP, 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm Landscape and Visual Assessment), which outlines the proposed habitat creation and planting enhancements for the Proposed Development. The mitigation measures would include gapping up and reinforcing field boundary hedgerows, on all Site boundaries as indicated on Figure 5. This would comprise native mix species hedgerows of local provenance which would be allowed to mature up to heights of 6m to screen views from the PRoW and residential properties.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy NE4.

6.4.3 HE1: Significance of Heritage Assets

This policy states that:

> *"When considering proposals that affect both designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings including those identified on local lists, the significance of those assets should first be established by the applicant through a proportionate but thorough and systematic heritage assessment. Such an assessment should be sufficient so as to understand the potential impact of the proposal on the significance of the asset."*

All designated heritage assets within 2km of the Site were considered for potential impacts to their setting as a result of the Proposed Development in the HIA (refer to: 58754 R11 Yardley Road Solar Farm Heritage Impact Assessment) undertaken for the application.

The HIA demonstrated that there is likely to be no impact on the setting of the majority of the designated assets. Three designated assets including Grand Union Canal (Asset 3), The Old Vicarage (Asset 17) and Castlethorpe Mill (Asset 154), are expected to experience Neutral impacts on their settings.

Low Adverse impacts have been predicted on the setting of the Grade II* Listed Dovecote at Manor Farm (Asset 21) and on the setting of the Grade II* Listed Church of St Bartholomew (Asset 29), as well as on the settings of the non-designated heritage assets at Beech House (Asset 445) and Cheley Well (Assets 142 and 243). These impacts are considered to be less than substantial and at the lower end of the scale.

The implementation of appropriate mitigation measures will minimise the direct impacts resulting from the Proposed Development.

The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy HE1 and significant weight should be placed on the potential capacity of the Proposed Development to help meet renewable energy targets in weighing up this minimised harm in the planning balance as per NPPF.

6.4.4 NE5: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

This policy states that:

1. *"Development proposals should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity in order to provide measurable net gains.*
2. *Development proposals will be expected to mitigate harm and incorporate measures to enhance biodiversity within or around a development site, and to contribute to the consolidation and development of local ecological networks, including beyond the district's boundary. Measures should be appropriate and compatible with existing biodiversity, ecosystems and designated wildlife sites.*
3. *The council will seek to ensure new development maintains, enhances, and helps to create or extend networks of natural habitats. Proposals for improved access, recreation and tourism within such networks will be supported where they are compatible with biodiversity aims.*
4. *Development proposals will not be permitted where they would result in significant harm to biodiversity or geodiversity, including protected species and sites of international, national and local significance, ancient woodland, and species and habitats of principal importance identified in the United Kingdom Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework."*

A landscape mitigation plan is an integral part of the Proposed Development design (refer to: Figure 5 – LEMP, R10 Landscape and Visual Assessment) which supports the PEA (refer to: 58754 R1 Yardley Road Solar Farm Preliminary Ecological Appraisal). The PEA and LEMP outline the proposed habitat creation and enhancements from the Proposed Development. The main habitat impacted by these works will be arable fields, no hedgerows or trees are to be removed, and the ditch will be retained, protected and enhanced.

Habitat creation includes the creation of modified grassland under the solar panel array. The planting of species rich grassland around the field boundary and to the south of the Site within the 'additional areas of environmental enhancement and BNG' and the planting of other broadleaved woodland. Further details on habitat conditions are detailed within the BNG report. Hedgerows will be enhanced by the infilling of any gaps with local native species and additional species rich hedgerows with trees planted throughout the Site. If any area of hedgerow needs to be removed as part of the works, a further hedgerow survey will be required.

It has been demonstrated in the BNG report (refer to: 58754 R2 Yardley Road Solar Farm Biodiversity Net Gain Report) that the Proposed Development will achieve the minimum statutory requirement for BNG as per the Environment Act 2021. The report demonstrates that:

- The overall BNG for area habitats is 61.88%;
- The overall BNG for linear habitats is 26.03%; and
- The overall BNG for watercourse based habitats of 14.73%.

This exceeds the 10% minimum statutory requirement for BNG. The enhancements to the existing habitats, coupled with reduction of farming activities will ensure that the Proposed Development has the potential to provide an improvement to West Northamptonshire's biodiversity. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy NE5.

6.4.5 SS2: General Development and Design Principles

This policy states that:

1. *"Planning permission will be granted where the proposed development:*

a. *maintains the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm this identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement; and*

b. *uses a design-led approach to demonstrate compatibility and integration with its surroundings and the distinctive local character of the area in terms of type, scale, massing, siting, form, design, materials and details; and*

c. *is designed to provide an accessible, safe and inclusive environment which maximises opportunities to increase personal safety and security through preventative or mitigation measures; and*

d. *incorporates suitable landscape treatment as an integral part of the planning of the development; and*

e. *incorporates sensitive lighting schemes that respects the surrounding area and reduce harmful impacts on wildlife and neighbours; and*

f. *will result in a good standard of amenity for its future occupiers in terms of privacy, sunlight, daylight, outlook, natural ventilation, noise, odour and vibration; and will not unacceptably harm the amenity of occupiers and users of neighbouring properties and the area through noise, odour, vibration, overshadowing or result in loss of privacy, sunlight daylight or outlook, unless adequate mitigation measures are proposed and secured; and*

g. *has appropriate regard to its effect on air quality and the effects of air quality on its future occupiers; and*

h. *does not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land or valued soils; and*

i. *contributes towards the creation of a healthy community and, in the case of major development, demonstrates the health and wellbeing implications of the proposed development through a suitable health impact assessment (HIA). All major developments (10 or more dwellings or 1000 or more square metres) will be expected to complete and submit a rapid HIA in order to determine if more substantial HIA is necessary or not, while larger developments above 100 homes will be expected to complete a more substantial HIA to support their application; and*

j. *would include a safe and suitable means of access for all people (including pedestrians, cyclists and those using vehicles);*

k. *takes into account existing or planned social and transport infrastructure to ensure development is adequately served by public transport or is in reasonable proximity to a range of local facilities which can be reached without the need for private car journeys; and*

l. *is adequately serviced with utility infrastructure appropriate to the development including power, water supply, sewerage, waste management and telecommunications, and provides for satisfactory foul and surface water drainage and incorporates mitigation identified through an assessment of flood risk and the management requirements to address current and future risks incorporating the required climate change allowances; and meets the optional higher water efficiency standard of 110 litres per person per day; and*

m. *will not adversely affect built heritage and sites of nature conservation value or sites of geological, geomorphological or archaeological importance; and*

n. *is not on or in proximity to land containing known mineral resources, or if known resources exist without first considering the need to safeguard these resources; and*

o. *would not pose additional risk to users, occupiers and neighbours located in the vicinity of sites that are used for the storage, or processing or transporting of hazardous substances; and*

p. *shows a detailed consideration of ecological impacts, wildlife mitigation and the creation, restoration and enhancement of wildlife corridors to preserve and enhance biodiversity;*

q. *ensures an appropriate degree of facility provision and waste and recycling storage. Provision should be made for discrete bin storage, ideally within private rear gardens and service yards where it will not result in visual clutter which can substantially detract from the character and perceived quality of the streetscene.*

2. *Proposals that contravene any of the above criteria (of relevance to that proposal) will be refused unless outweighed by other material considerations."*

The table below summaries how the Proposed Development addresses these policy points:

Table 1: Proposed Development Compliance with Policy SS2

Policy Requirement	Where Addressed
1a) *maintains the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm this identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement*	Section 5.1 of this Statement
1b) uses a design-led approach to demonstrate compatibility and integration with its surroundings and the distinctive local character of the area in terms of type, scale, massing, siting, form, design, materials and details	Section 5.1 of this Statement
1c) is designed to provide an accessible, safe and inclusive environment which maximises opportunities to increase personal safety and security through preventative or mitigation measures	Not applicable. The Proposed Development is not intended to be used by the public.
1d) incorporates suitable landscape treatment as an integral part of the planning of the development	Section 5.1 and 5.2 of this Statement
1e) incorporates sensitive lighting schemes that respects the surrounding area and reduce harmful impacts on wildlife and neighbours	Not applicable. A security light will be required - this would only be operational in the case of an emergency call out in hours of darkness, in order to facilitate access and any repair work required. The light would be activated by a motion sensor and not illuminated permanently. No other site lighting is required during the operational period of the solar farm.
1f) will result in a good standard of amenity for its future occupiers in terms of privacy, sunlight, daylight, outlook, natural ventilation, noise, odour and vibration; and will not unacceptably harm the amenity of occupiers and users of neighbouring properties and the area through noise, odour, vibration, overshadowing or result in loss of privacy, sunlight daylight or outlook, unless adequate mitigation measures are proposed and secured	Section 5.5 and Section 5.9 of this Statement.
1g) has appropriate regard to its effect on air quality and the effects of air quality on its future occupiers	Not applicable. The PV modules will generate electricity with no air emissions, no waste production and no water use.

Policy Requirement	Where Addressed
1h) does not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land or valued soils	Section 5.8 of this Statement.
1i) contributes towards the creation of a healthy community and, in the case of major development, demonstrates the health and wellbeing implications of the proposed development through a suitable health impact assessment (HIA).	The Applicant recognises that the Proposed Development has the potential to generate noise impacts. Accordingly, an NIA has been undertaken, the results of which are discussed in Section 5.9 of this Statement.
1j) would include a safe and suitable means of access for all people (including pedestrians, cyclists and those using vehicles)	Section 5.6 of this Statement.
1k) takes into account existing or planned social and transport infrastructure to ensure development is adequately served by public transport or is in reasonable proximity to a range of local facilities which can be reached without the need for private car journeys	Section 5.6 of this Statement.
1l) is adequately serviced with utility infrastructure appropriate to the development including power, water supply, sewerage, waste management and telecommunications, and provides for satisfactory foul and surface water drainage and incorporates mitigation identified through an assessment of flood risk and the management requirements to address current and future risks incorporating the required climate change allowances; and meets the optional higher water efficiency standard of 110 litres per person per day	Section 5.4 of this Statement.
1m) will not adversely affect built heritage and sites of nature conservation value or sites of geological, geomorphological or archaeological importance;	Section 5.3 of this Statement.
1n) is not on or in proximity to land containing known mineral resources, or if known resources exist without first considering the need to safeguard these resources;	The Proposed Development is not on or in proximity to land containing known mineral resources.
1o) would not pose additional risk to users, occupiers and neighbours located in the vicinity of sites that are used for the storage, or processing or transporting of hazardous substances	Not applicable. The Proposed Development will not store, process or transport hazardous substances.
1p) shows a detailed consideration of ecological impacts, wildlife mitigation and the creation, restoration and enhancement of wildlife corridors to preserve and enhance biodiversity	Section 5.2 of this Statement.
1q) ensures an appropriate degree of facility provision and waste and recycling storage. Provision should be made for discrete bin storage, ideally within private rear gardens and service yards where it will not result in visual clutter which can substantially detract from the character and perceived quality of the streetscene.	Not applicable. The PV modules will generate electricity with no air emissions, no waste production and no water use.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy SS2.

6.4.6 Policy EMP3: New Employment Development

This policy states that:

1. *"New employment and commercial development will be directed to the most sustainable locations in accordance with Policy SS1: The Settlement Hierarchy.*
2. *Employment generating development on suitable sites outside of the settlement confines will be considered acceptable where the proposal:*
    a. *is allocated for employment uses; or*

i. *is for a change of use, conversion or extension of a suitable permanent building; where the proposal; either would not result in the requirement for another building to fulfil the function of the building being converted or replaced; or*

ii. *is on brownfield land; or*

iii. *can only operate in an open countryside location; or*

iv. *is an extension to an existing commercial site in accordance with Policy EMP2 of this Plan*

3. *Proposals for change of use or new employment development will need to be accompanied by evidence that demonstrates:*

   a. *the current use is no longer viable or, in the case of the conversion of agricultural buildings that the buildings are redundant; and*

   b. *the proposed uses and associated employment activities can be carried out without causing harm to residential amenity."*

Construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development would create employment opportunities, with contractors employing local people. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy EMP3.

6.4.7 Policy EMP6: Farm Diversification

This policy states that:

1. *"Development that relates to the diversification of an existing farm, agricultural estate, or other land-based rural business will be acceptable in principle provided that:*

   a. *The proposal would not prejudice the continued viable operation of the existing use; and;*

   b. *The character, scale and type of proposal is compatible with its location and landscape setting; and*

   c. *Existing buildings are reused wherever possible; and*

   d. *Where new or replacement buildings are required, the proposal is in scale with the surroundings and well related to any existing buildings on the site."*

At the end of the Proposed Development's lifespan, the predicted effects are reversible as the land would be returned to its former agricultural use, similar in form to its current state. An LVIA (refer to: 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm Landscape and Visual Assessment) has been undertaken in support of this application. The LVIA assesses the character, scale and type of proposal with regards to the Proposed Development's location and landscape setting.

It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is consistent with Policy EMP6.

6.5 Other Material Considerations

6.5.1 National Planning Policy Framework (February 2025)

The NPPF (MHCLG), 2025) was last updated on 7 February 2025, and replaces the last revision of the NPPF in December 2023 (originally published in March 2012).

The central theme of the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as detailed in Paragraph 11 which for Local Planning Authorities decision-taking means:

> *"…c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
>
> *d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date , granting permission unless:*
>
> *i. The application of policies in this framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
>
> *ii. Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination ."*

Section 14 of the NPPF is of direct relevance to renewable energy generation. Paragraph 161 states that in order to increase the use of renewable and low carbon energy generation:

> *"The planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and take full account of all climate impacts including overheating, water scarcity, storm and flood risks and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure."*

Paragraph 168 states that when LPAs determine planning applications for renewable and low-carbon development, they should;

> *"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"; and*

Paragraph 169 states that:

> *"Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas."*

Other sections of the NPPF are also relevant to the development of a solar farm in the countryside, these include:

Paragraph 88, which states that in supporting the rural economy, Planning policies and decisions should enable; *"the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses".*

Solar farm development can be seen as a form of farm diversification, to provide additional income to support agricultural production on the rest of the farm unit.

Paragraph 142, which acknowledges the UK Government *"…attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence."*

Paragraph 153 sets out the criterion for determining inappropriate development as being; *"…by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances."*

Paragraph 153 continues by stating when considering planning applications;

> *"…local planning authorities should ensure substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness….'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations."*

Paragraph 187 states that decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by; *"…minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity…"* This is demonstrated in the findings of the Ecological Assessment and the incorporation of biodiversity enhancement measures into the overall design.

The footnote to Paragraph 65 states that; "Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality should be preferred to those of a higher quality."

An Agricultural Land Classification study undertaken in support of this application has identified that the Proposed Development is located on Grade 2 and 3b agricultural land (refer to: 58754 R7 Yardley Road Solar Farm Agricultural Land Classification report). 35% of the Site (the majority of the fields northwest of Yardley Road) are classified as Grade 2, and 64% of the Site (the field southeast of Yardley Road) are classified as Grade 3b.

This identified the agricultural land within the northwest section of the Site as being of very good quality agricultural land with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivation or harvesting. The land within the southeast section of the Site are identified as being of moderate quality capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops or lower yields of a wider range of crops.

As such only 35% of the Site is considered as Best and Most Versatile (BMV). Additionally, due to the nature of the Proposed Development being temporary and reversible development, the Proposed Development would not result in the permanent loss of this BMV land.

Paragraph 207 states that when determining planning applications local authorities should require an applicant to describe local heritage assets, and prepare a desk-based assessment, and where necessary, a field evaluation, where the proposed development site has or has the potential to include heritage assets.

Accordingly, an assessment of the potential impacts on cultural heritage assets is provided with the planning application (refer to: 58754 R11– Yardley Road Solar Farm Heritage Impact Assessment).

The Proposed Development therefore complies with the requirements of NPPF and is supported in principle.

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

NPPF Paragraph 5 states that National Policy Statements (NPS) (EN-1):

"form part of the overall framework of national planning policy, and may be a material consideration in preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications."

As such, EN-1 (and EN-3 (see below)) are part of national planning policy and are material considerations in the determination of this application.

The Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ, 2023a and updated in 2024)) and the Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (DESNZ, 2025) state that:

> *"In England, this NPS, in combination with any relevant technology specific NPSs, may be a material consideration in decision making on applications that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)."* (DESNZ, 2023a – paragraph 1.2.1)

EN-1 sets out the Government's overall commitment to increasing renewable energy capacity (paragraph 2.3.6):

> *"We need to transform the energy system, tackling emissions while continuing to ensure secure and reliable supply, and affordable bills for households and businesses. This includes increasing our supply of clean energy from renewables, nuclear and hydrogen manufactured using low carbon processes…"*

EN-3 goes on to clarify in paragraph 2.1.7 that there is an assumed need for renewable energy projects:

> *"As stated in Section 4.2 of EN-1, to support the urgent need for new low carbon infrastructure, all onshore and offshore electricity generation covered in this NPS that does not involve fossil fuel combustion (that is, renewable generation, including anaerobic digestion and other plants that convert residual waste into energy, including combustion, provided they meet existing definitions of low carbon) are considered to be Critical National Priority (CNP) infrastructure."*

The principle of the Proposed Development is therefore supported by current UK Government Policy.

6.5.3 Planning Policy Guidance

The UK Government's Planning Practice Guidance website includes a section for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (MHCLG *et al*., 2015), the key theme of which builds upon the wording of part 14 of the NPPF.

This highlights the importance of renewable energy generation to the UK's security of electricity supply and greenhouse gas reduction targets but makes clear that planning permission would only be granted where the impacts at the specific site are, or can be made, acceptable.

With respect to large scale ground mounted solar farm developments the Planning Practice Guidance provides the following relevant factors for local authorities to consider:

> *"Where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays."*

The Proposed Development is sited on grade 2 very good quality agricultural land and grade 3b agricultural land of moderate quality with poor ecological value. Measures proposed to enhance the biodiversity value of the Site are presented in the Preliminary Ecological Assessment and outlined in Section 5.2.

> *"The proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety."*

The proposal's visual impact is analysed in the LVIA (refer to: 58754 R10 Yardley Road Solar Farm Landscape and Visual Assessment) while the impacts of the Site on aviation and glint and glare are

also assessed in the Glint and Glare Assessment (refer to: 58754 R5 Yardley Road Solar Farm Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study).

The glint and glare assessment concludes that no significant impacts are predicted upon road safety, residential amenity, or aviation activity associated with Hall Farm Airfield, Buttermilk Hall Airfield, Thornborough Grounds Airfield, and New Farm Airfield. Mitigation is not recommended.

With respect to lighting and security measures the Planning Practice Guidance provides the following:

> *"The need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing."*

The security measures proposed include a 2.15m high fence and CCTV cameras. No perimeter lighting or permanent site illumination is required. The proposed fence has been selected to be appropriate for an agricultural setting.

With respect to Cultural Heritage, the Planning Practice Guidance provides the following:

> *"Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are considered in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset."*

An assessment of the potential effects on cultural heritage assets has been conducted (refer to: 58754 R11 Yardley Road Heritage Impact Assessment). The assessment concludes that there is likely to be no impact on the setting of the majority designated assets within the 2km of the Site. Three designated assets including Grand Union Canal (Asset 3), The Old Vicarage (Asset 17) and Castlethorpe Mill (Asset 154), are expected to experience Neutral impacts on their settings.

Low Adverse impacts have been predicted on the setting of the Grade II* Listed Dovecote at Manor Farm (Asset 21) and on the setting of the Grade II* Listed Church of St Bartholomew (Asset 29), as well as on the settings of the non-designated heritage assets at Beech House (Asset 445) and Cheley Well (Assets 142 and 243). These impacts are considered to be less than substantial and at the lower end of the scale.

Given the known heritage assets on Site, as well as the assessed archaeological potential and in accordance with national and local planning policies on heritage, an archaeological programme of works would be required in advance of the construction of the Proposed Development, as previously advised by the local authority's archaeological advisor.

Such works would initially take the form of an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in portions of the Site that would be affected by the Proposed Development. These works should be informed by the geophysical survey carried out by Archaeological Research Services in 2023, which highlighted several potential archaeological features across the Site.

If significant features are found, further mitigation is likely to be required and may include mitigation by design by either designing out areas or use of 'no dig' construction techniques. If avoidance cannot be accommodated then any significant remains may require full excavation to be followed by a programme of post-excavation analysis including publication, if appropriate.

The LVIA accompanying this application considers mitigation measures, and a Landscape and Environmental Management Plan is included.

Existing hedgerows will have gaps filled and reinforced with new planting. Along boundaries where no hedgerows are present, new hedgerow with intermittent tree planting will be implemented. All new planting will be with native species and established and managed up to 6m in height and 3m in width.

6.5.4 UK Solar PV Strategy Part 1: Roadmap to a Brighter Future

The UK Government is committed to meeting our renewable energy targets, which are set out in national policy through the Climate Change Act of 2008. Section 13 of this Act states that there is a duty for the Secretary of State to prepare proposals and policies for meeting carbon reduction targets. These obligations fall to Local Planning Authorities.

In 2011 the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) published the UK Renewable Energy Roadmap, which was updated in 2012 and 2013 (DECC, 2013a). This presents the framework for the delivery of renewable energy deployment in the UK; it reiterates the Government's commitment to meeting our renewable energy targets.

2013 also saw the publication of the UK Solar PV Strategy Roadmap (DECC, 2013b) which states that: *"Solar photovoltaic (PV) technology is a mature, proven technology and is a reliable source of renewable energy with an important role to play in the UK energy generation mix."*

Paragraph 13 of this Strategy notes that presently solar PV accounts for 12% of renewable electricity capacity in the UK.

6.5.5 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change: The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015) is a legally binding agreement signed by 196 parties in 2015 at COP21 in Paris with an overarching goal to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

It required signatories to submit climate action plans (termed Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)) on a five-year cycle with the next submission due in 2025.

The Paris Agreement forms the basis of the UK's climate policies with the targets associated with the rollout of renewable energy and the reduction in carbon emissions aligned to the UK's obligations in relation to the Paris Agreement.

6.5.6 The Clean Growth Strategy: Leading the way to a low carbon future

The Clean Growth Strategy (UK Government, 2017) sets out the UK Government's proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy through the 2020s. It explains how the whole country can benefit from low carbon opportunities, while meeting national and international commitments to tackle climate change.

6.5.7 A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment

The policy paper 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' (UK Government, 2018) sets out the UK Government's goals for improving the environment, within a generation. It details how government will work with communities and businesses to do this.

The Environmental Improvement Plan (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2023) for England is the first revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan. It builds on the 25YEP vision to set out how the UK Government will deliver each of their environmental goals.

6.5.8 National Grid Future Energy Scenarios

The Future Energy Scenarios: Pathways to Net Zero (NESO, 2025) methodology document sets out the purpose of Future Energy Scenarios (FES), considering how the National Energy System Operator (NESO) assesses and develops credible routes to net zero through extensive analysis, research and stakeholder engagement.

6.5.9 Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (IPCC, 2018) outlines in detail that limiting warming to 1.5 °C would require unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society. The report stresses the huge benefits to human welfare, ecosystems and sustainable economic development in keeping warming to 1.5 °C compared to 2 °C, or higher.

The report underlines that we are already seeing the consequences of 1°C of global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice, among other changes.

Limiting warming to 1.5 °C is technically possible but this would entail global emissions of carbon dioxide declining by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 to zero by 2050. At the current rate of emissions, the world will reach 1.5 °C warming by between 2030 and 2052 and is on track for more than 3 °C to 4 °C warming by 2100.

6.5.10 UK Climate Change Risk Assessment

The third UK Government Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3) (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2022) report outlines the UK Government and devolved administrations' position on the key climate change risks and opportunities that the UK faces.

The Technical Report for the CCRA3 identified 61 UK-wide climate risks and opportunities across multiple sectors such as energy; agriculture; people; transport and biodiversity if there is a 2- and 4-degree global warming scenario (Betts and Brown, 2021).

Of the 61 climate risks and opportunities, 34 risks are assessed as 'more action needed' at a UK-wide level. This means that new, stronger, or different government action is required in the next five years over and above those already planned.

Some of the risks include:

- Risk to soils from changing climatic conditions, including seasonal aridity and wetness;
- Risks and opportunities for natural carbon stores, carbon sequestration and GHG emissions from changing climatic conditions, including temperature change and water scarcity;
- Risks to and opportunities for agricultural productivity from extreme events and changing climatic conditions (including temperature change, water scarcity, wildfire, flooding, coastal erosion, wind and saline intrusion);
- Risks to infrastructure services from river, surface water and groundwater flooding;
- Risks to public water supplies from reduced water availability;
- Risks to health and wellbeing from high temperatures;
- Risks to people, communities and buildings from river and surface flooding; and
- Risks to UK food availability, safety, and quality from climate change overseas.

6.5.11 Committee on Climate Change: 2024 Report to Parliament – Reducing UK emissions

In July 2024 the CCC produced a report to the UK Parliament on the progress made towards meeting the UK's Climate goals (CCC, 2024).

The report is clear that;

> *"…the country is not on track to hit this target despite a significant reduction in emissions in 2023. Much of the progress to date has come from phasing out coal generated electricity, with the last coal-fired power station closing later this year. We now need to rapidly reduce oil and gas use as well."*

It identifies that;

> *"…almost all our indicators for low-carbon technology roll-out are off track, with rates needing to significantly ramp up"*

Identifying that installation rates for both offshore and onshore wind are slightly off track, the report states that:

> *"solar installations must increase by five times"*

The report assesses

> "*progress on 28 key indicators of demand, technology uptake and underlying enablers. Of the 22 that have a benchmark or target to compare against, only five are assessed as being on track….. This slow progress in uptake is occurring despite the fact that key technologies, such as electric vehicles, batteries and solar panels, have fallen quickly.*"

The report identifies that:

> *"Total operational capacity for solar was 16 GW in 2023. Achieving the Government's ambition of 70 GW by 2035 will require more than 4 GW to be installed each year on average. This is more than five times the average amount added over the past three years but is not much higher (around 10% higher) than the highest annual installations seen to date, which occurred in 2015."*

6.5.12 Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability – Summary for Policymakers

The Sixth Assessment report (IPCC, 2022) assesses the impacts of climate change, looking at ecosystems, biodiversity, and human communities at global and regional levels.

The report recognizes the interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies and integrates knowledge more strongly across the natural, ecological, social and economic sciences than earlier IPCC assessments. The assessment of climate change impacts and risks as well as adaptation is set against concurrently unfolding non-climatic global trends e.g., biodiversity loss, overall unsustainable consumption of natural resources, land and ecosystem degradation, rapid urbanisation, human demographic shifts, social and economic inequalities and a pandemic.

6.5.13 Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener

In October 2021, the UK Government's (2021) Net Zero Strategy was presented to the UK Parliament In accordance with Section 14 of the Climate Change Act 2008 (UK Government, 2008). It acknowledges the devastating impact that the increase of global temperatures has already had on the UK through flooding and disruption to major services.

In line with the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015), reference is made to potentially catastrophic events that will unfold should global warming increase above 1.5 degrees. It is recognised that in order to meet the Paris Agreement, urgent global action is needed hence why the UK called for ending coal fired power generation, retiring petrol and diesel engines from all cars, and halting deforestation at COP26.

The strategy sets out clear policies and proposals for keeping the UK on track for forthcoming carbon budgets, ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and the UK Government's vision for a decarbonised economy in 2050.

The strategy has a number of commitments for reducing emissions across the economy in relation to power generation. For instance, the target that the UK government will take action so that by 2035, all electricity will come from low carbon sources, bringing forward the government's commitment to a fully decarbonised power system by 15 years.

In 2019, net UK GHG emissions from the power sector totalled 58 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and accounted for 11% of total net UK GHG emissions. This is a reduction of 72% between 1990 and 2019. In 1990, the power sector accounted for 23% of UK GHG emissions. This has largely been achieved through renewables and natural gas generation displacing coal.

The UK Government's vision is that low carbon forms of energy generation will be the paradigm shift away from the use of unabated oil and gas. Low carbon energy is expected to account for a 50% or higher share of final energy consumption. This shift to low carbon energy is expected to account for up to 76% reduction in emissions by 2030; up to 85% by 2035 and 98% by 2050, when compared with 2019 emissions.

In delivering this strategy of decarbonising the power sector, significant public and private investment is needed and will see new employment opportunities across the UK. The UK Government estimate that policies and proposals to reduce emissions in the sector could support up to 59,000 jobs by 2024 and up to 120,000 jobs by 2030.

The recently published Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (UK Government, 2024) states that one of the key benefits of the plan is the creation of new job opportunities, with an estimated £40 billion on average per year between 2025-2030, spreading the economic benefits of clean energy investment throughout the UK. The huge investment in the development of wind, solar, and other renewable energy projects, will see a surge in demand for skilled workers in these industries and the industries and services that support their deployment.

6.5.14 British Energy Security Strategy

The British Energy Security Strategy (DEZNZ *et al.*, 2022), focuses on how the Government plans to provide the UK with energy security and increased independence from a volatile international market.

The policy paper sets out ambition of a five-fold increase in overall solar capacity by 2035:

> *"For ground-mounted solar, we will consult on amending planning rules to strengthen policy in favour of development on non-protected land, while ensuring communities continue to have a say and environmental protections remain in place.*
>
> *We will continue supporting the effective use of land by encouraging large scale projects to locate on previously developed, or lower value land, where possible, and ensure projects are designed to avoid, mitigate, and where necessary, compensate for the impacts of using greenfield sites.*

We will also support solar that is co-located with other functions (for example, agriculture, onshore wind generation, or storage) to maximise the efficiency of land use. We have also included solar in the latest Contracts for Difference auction round and will include it in future rounds."

6.5.15 Seventh Carbon Budget – Advice for the UK Government

In February 2025, the CCC published its advice to the UK Government for the seventh Carbon Budget covering the years 2038 to 2045. This is recommending an emissions cap of 535 $MtCO_2e$.

Under the CCC's Balanced Pathway to Net Zero, electricity generation is identified as a key route to reaching the budget. According to the CCC, a projected increase in demand due to the electrification of the economy (possibly doubling by 2050 from 2023 levels), a significant increase in renewable energy generation will be needed.

The CCC's Balanced Pathway therefore requires solar capacity to increase to 82GW by 2040, compared to 16GW in 2023. This will require recent annual installation rates:

"…to almost quadruple this decade, reaching similar levels to the historical peak seen in 2015. The cost of solar has fallen significantly in recent years, and is expected to fall further in our pathway, from £52/MWh to £29/MWh by 2040. "

"For solar, an average deployment rate of 3.4 GW per year is needed. This requires build rates to grow to around the historical peak (4.1 GW in 2015) this decade."

This increase in deployment of solar by 2050, is estimated to:

"require around 1% of UK land for solar"

6.5.16 Clean Power 2030

Clean Power 2030 (UK Government, 2024) was published in December 2024 with the UK government confirming that delivering clean power by 2030 is at the heart of one of its five missions and Plan for Change. Stating:

"…all routes to a Clean Power system will require mass deployment of offshore wind, onshore wind and solar"

The secretary of state immediately set up a new mission control to drive progress towards the target. In addition to mission control NESO were engaged to provide advice on how to reach the goal. The NESO clean Power Plan stated:

"There is no path to clean power without mass deployment of offshore wind, together with onshore wind and solar".

The NESO advice covers all technologies and looks at options for reaching the targets including acknowledging that flexibility may be required:

"For example, onshore wind and solar could substitute for offshore wind",

The advice also notes the size of the challenge:

"Key supply-side technologies (e.g. offshore wind, onshore wind, solar, batteries) will all need to deploy more on average each year to 2030 than they have ever done in a single year before".

The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan also notes that:

> *"There is greater potential to bring new onshore wind and solar projects forward and deliver additional capacity beyond what is already planned by 2030",*
>
> *"…clean [electricity] sources produce at least as much power as Great Britain consumes in total over the whole year, and at least 95% of Great Britain's generation…"*

The report is clear that this requires a deployment of 45-47GW of solar power by 2030 exceeding CCC's recommendation for the Seventh Carbon Budget.

Additionally, the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan emphasises that:

> *"it is important that government looks at a clean power system beyond 2030, where demand is expected to increase"*

6.6 Community Engagement

Pre-application community consultation and engagement have been undertaken in accordance with requirements of the NPPF, March 2025,:

> *"Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community." (Paragraph 40)*

The community engagement approach has also followed the consultation principles established within the Localism Act 2011 (Section 122) for consulting the public:

- 61W (2) *"The person must publicise the proposed application in such manner as the person reasonably considers is likely to bring the proposed application to the attention of a majority of the persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land*
- 61W (4) (a) *"Set out how the person may be contacted by persons wishing to comment on, or collaborate with P on the design of, the proposed development, and"*
- 61W (4) (b) *"Give such information about the proposed timetable for the consultation as is sufficient to ensure that persons wishing to comment on the proposed development may do so in good time."*
- 61X (2) *"The person must, when deciding whether the application that the person is actually to make should be in the same terms as the proposed application, have regard to any responses to the consultation that the person has received."*

Potterspury lays within the boundaries of the former South Northamptonshire district, therefore this SCI has been referred to (South Northamptonshire Council (SNC), 2020). This SCI presents the (former) local planning authority's strategy for community participation. This states that in respect of major developments;

> *"We encourage those submitting proposals for larger schemes or schemes of a sensitive nature to undertake consultation with the local community and other stakeholders before submitting a planning application. This will enable local people to influence proposals at an early stage."*

Community engagement has been undertaken throughout the process of preparing this planning application through:

- Discussions with the landowners and nearby residents;
- Discussions with local Parish Councils; and

- A public exhibition in March 2025 to engage with the local residents and stakeholders and address any concerns raised regarding the potential impacts of the Proposed Development.

Therefore, consultation for the Proposed Development has been undertaken in compliance with in accordance with requirements of the NPPF and the SCI.

6.7 Summary

The planning policy sets out the matters that are to be addressed in the design and mitigation of a Proposed Development. It is submitted that, through the design evolution process and as demonstrated in the environmental assessments undertaken and this report, the design of the Proposed Development, along with the prescribed mitigation, which where appropriate would be secured by conditions, satisfactorily address the environmental impacts.

It is clear that the Proposed Development would make a valuable contribution to meeting the renewable energy targets for the UK. The environmental impacts of the Proposed Development have been considered, along with the appropriate mitigation and enhancement. It is concluded that the Proposed Development is in accordance with NPPF and the Local Plan, when read as a whole and considering the planning balance of the minimised local landscape and heritage impacts identified.

7. The Benefits of the Development

7.1 Renewable Energy Generation

Climate change has been described as the greatest environmental challenge facing the world today. The burning of fossil fuels to produce electricity is a major contributor to climate change through the release of atmospheric CO_2) and other harmful gases known collectively as greenhouse gases.

As part of the response to climate change, the UK Government has entered into binding international agreements, committing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In 2019 the Climate Change Act was updated in include a target of net zero carbon emissions in 30 years, supported by more stringent, legally binding five-yearly carbon budgets.

The generation of electricity from renewable energy sources is one of the principal ways in which the Government targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to increase energy security within the current policy framework.

The Proposed Development would contribute to this by displacing fossil fuel-based generation of electricity through the generation of approximately 54,580MWh of electricity per annum, enough renewable electricity to meet the needs of approximately 10,500 homes per annum.

West Northamptonshire Sustainability Accord

West Northamptonshire Sustainability Report 2022/23 contains the following aims:

1. *"Net zero own emissions by 2030 and those of residents and businesses by 2045"*
2. *"Take a community leadership role for Sustainability in West Northants"*
3. *"Ensure all our Council strategies and policies are aligned to and contribute to the delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."*

In order to achieve the above aims, during the 2022/23 year, the Council and Northamptonshire Partnership Homes, which manages West Northamptonshire Council's council housing stock, purchased 24mkWh of energy from renewable sources (64% of the council's energy demand). As well as the commitment to purchase energy from renewable sources, the Council is also generating its own renewable energy through various solar arrays. During 2022/23 the Council generated 359,010kWh of renewable energy which reduced their demand for national grid energy. The number of buildings with small renewable energy generation systems will continue to increase further reducing electricity sourced from the national grid.

In support of these aims, in February 2022 the West Northamptonshire Council committed to work with a group of forward thinking local authorities and signed on to the UK100 pledge to enable communities to achieve 100% renewable energy across all sectors.

In November 2024, West Northamptonshire Council issued a second annual Sustainability Report to report on progress against the aims and Sustainability Pledges.

West Northamptonshire Council Climate Change Strategy

Plans to tackle climate change locally progress as West Northamptonshire Council's Climate Change Strategy is set to be published.

The strategy, which was approved at the Council's Cabinet on 4 March 2025, has been shaped with the help of local residents, businesses and key stakeholders. It outlines the Council's approach to

reducing locally produced greenhouse gases, improving air quality and placing people at the heart of the response.

As well as aiming to achieve net zero across the area by 2045, key challenges that are addressed within the strategy include energy, waste, buildings, transport, nature and the economy. With the help of partners and the community the Council is aiming to:

- Improve air quality across the area;
- Improve the energy efficiency of homes;
- Support the development of accessible and affordable public transport;
- Develop active travel routes;
- Support decarbonisation of businesses to reduce emissions;
- Encourage the development of high-quality sustainable employment;
- Increase accessibility and use of parks and green spaces;
- Ensure access to the benefits of action on climate change;
- Raise awareness and engage local residents and businesses on the climate emergency; and
- Support local food production.

7.2 Biodiversity Enhancement

The RSPBs 2023 'State of Nature' report found that approximately 60% of British wildlife is in decline, much as a result of agricultural intensification and subsequent habitat loss.

A number of national conservation bodies have identified the opportunity that solar farm development presents for providing substantial wildlife gains, due to the extent of the unutilised area between panel rows and bordering the installation, combined with the low levels of disturbance from humans or machinery.

This has been backed up by a number of case studies (Solar Trade Association, 2019) illustrating the benefits that existing solar farms are having in improving biodiversity and supporting wildlife.

The proposed habitat creation and enhancement measures will be set out in a Landscape and Ecological Mitigation Plan (LEMP) (refer to Figure 5: LEMP, R10 Landscape and Visual Assessment).

The measures outlined in the LEMP would result in a BNG of at least 10% in accordance with national policy requirements. The BNG calculations for the Proposed Development show an increase in BNG for area habitats of 61.88%, an overall BNG for linear habitat of 26.03% and an overall BNG for watercourse based habitats of 14.73%.

The full assessment of BNG for the proposed development is documented in the accompanying technical report (refer to 58754 R2 Yardley Road Solar Farm Biodiversity Net Gain Report).

7.3 Farm Diversification

Around half of all UK farms undertake some form of activity that is outside of the core business of farming in order to support farm operations – this is farm diversification.

Diversification can result in a more productive use of part of the farm estate and can provide a constant form of income to the farm as a balance to the traditional fluctuations in farm incomes; this can then be reinvested in farming activities.

Diversification into renewable energy will increase farm income security, reducing the farm owner's vulnerability to agricultural subsidy cuts and commodity price changes. Moreover, it can serve to protect the farming tradition by removing the incentive to sell parcels of land to maintain income for the benefit of the remainder of the holding.

Not only does the Proposed Development represent an opportunity for farm diversification, the modules have been designed to allow sheep to graze underneath the arrays. As such, agricultural processes can continue in conjunction with the Proposed Development in its operational phase.

In addition, solar farms do not result in permanent land use change with agriculture easily able to be reinstated following decommissioning of the development.

7.4 Social and Economic Benefits

There are likely to be work opportunities generated for local contractors during the construction and on-going operation of the solar farm. The specialist Engineering, Procurement and Construction firms engaged undertake detailed design and construction typically employ local contractors as part of their work force during the construction period.

Local contractors are likely to be engaged to undertake general maintenance activities on site.

The Proposed Development would also generate income for West Northamptonshire Council as a result of the energy generation rates.

8. Conclusion

The Proposed Development represents an increase in renewable energy generation with the potential to displace fossil fuel generation and provide enough clean energy to power 18,492 homes per annum.

Careful site selection and design has produced a scheme that maximises the potential to capture solar energy whilst minimising impacts on the environment and local landscape. The Applicant strongly views the Site as an appropriate site for a solar farm within the West Northamptonshire Council area.

As a result of the survey work, consultation and the need to maximise the output of the Proposed Development, the design has evolved since first inception. Design evolutions include the following.

- Construction access is proposed from the A508 and would not be through the villages of Potterspury or Yardley.
- Land immediately adjacent to Hesketh Road and Eastfield Crescent was removed from the original scheme due to proximity to a residential area. This followed initial conversation and feedback with the Parish Councils in 2021.
- Panels in the southernmost field (Furtho) were removed, due to proximity to the Medieval village, therefore, to reduce the impact on heritage assets this area would be retained within the red line boundary to provide a buffer the solar development but would also be used to provide additional BNG benefit to the scheme.

Following engagement with local stakeholders, landscape mitigation measures have been incorporated into the final design. These measures include the setting back of panels adjacent to the PRoW that traverse the Site and inclusion of new characteristic hedgerows with field boundary trees along development edges, to retain and enhance the amenity of public footpath users.

Other measures involve the management of existing field boundaries, allowing vegetation to grow out to mature heights of 6m and the inclusion of infill planting and gapping up to maximize screening potential of these boundaries.

In accordance with the Environment Act 2021, the proposed solar farm would exceed the minimum 10% BNG statutory requirement. BNG calculations indicate that the 10% threshold would be exceeded for habitats, hedgerows and waterways respectively.

Based on the assessments conducted including an LVIA; Glint and Glare; Ecology; and Cultural Heritage, the Proposed Development is considered to be compliant with both national and local planning policies. The assessments have identified that where the recommended mitigation measures are implemented, there will be no significant impacts as a result of the Proposed Development.

The Proposed Development is considered to provide substantial benefits to the area through the generation of clean renewable energy, biodiversity and landscape enhancement, and the creation of jobs in the local community in accordance with local and national planning policy.

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