

## REPORT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	10 July 2024
<b>Application Number</b>	PL/2023/03024
<b>Application type</b>	FULL
<b>Site Address</b>	East Farm, Codford St Mary , Wiltshire , BA12 0LN
<b>Proposal</b>	Installation of a solar photovoltaic scheme together with landscaping and associated infrastructure
<b>Applicant</b>	J.M. Stratton & Co
<b>Town/Parish Council</b>	Codford Parish Council
<b>Electoral Division</b>	Wylve Valley – Cllr Christopher Newbury
<b>Case Officer</b>	David Cox

### Reason for the application being considered by Committee

This application has been 'called in' for Committee to determine at the request of the local Wylve Valley Division Member, Cllr Christopher Newbury, for the following reasons:

- Scale of development
- Visual impact upon the surrounding area
- Relationship to adjoining properties
- Design and general appearance
- Environmental or Highway Impact

### 1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to assess the merits of the proposal against the policies of the development plan and other material considerations and to consider the recommendation that the application should be approved subject to conditions.

### 2. Report Summary

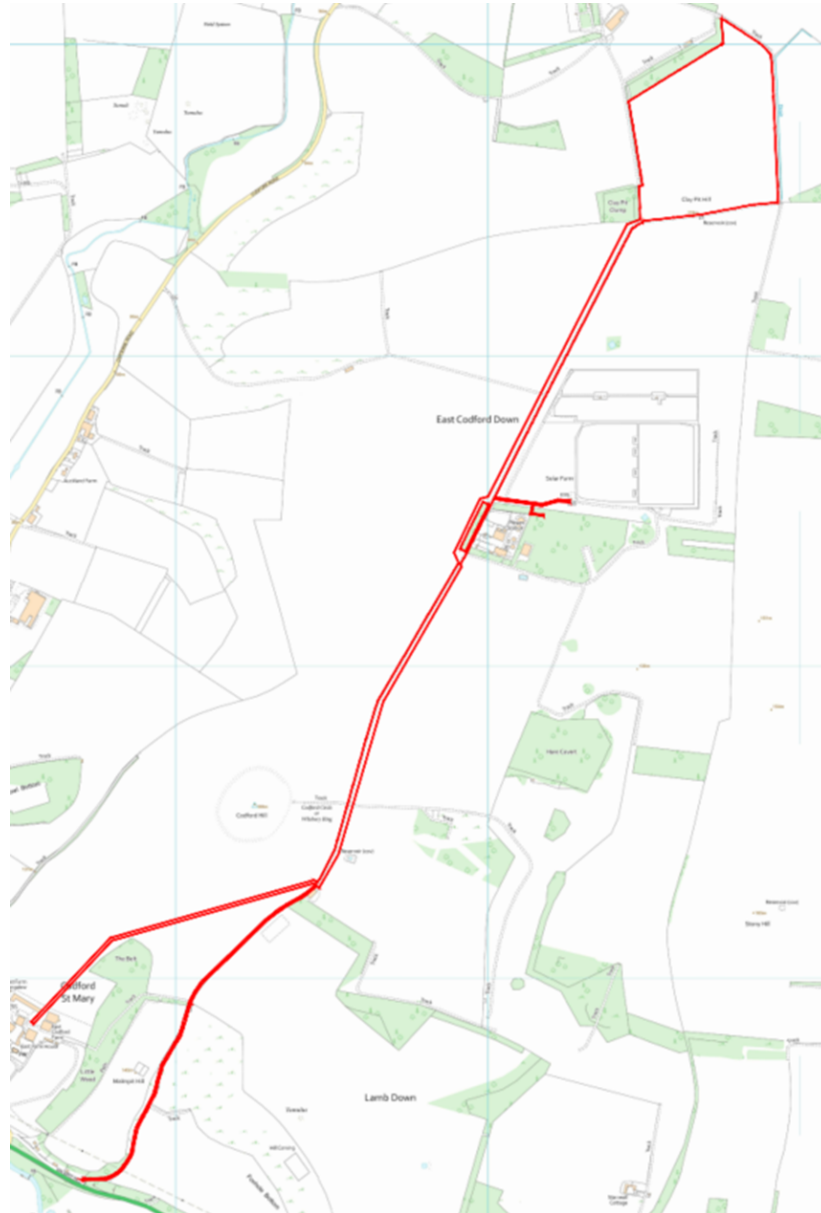
The key determining planning issues are considered to be:

- Principle of development
  - *i) Renewable Energy*
  - *ii) Whether the proposal would result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land;*
  - *iii) Cumulative Impact of Solar Farms in Wiltshire*
- Landscape Impact
- Impact on biodiversity
- Impact on neighbouring amenity
- Noise impact on potential residents
- Archaeology and any other historic impact

- Flood Risk and Drainage

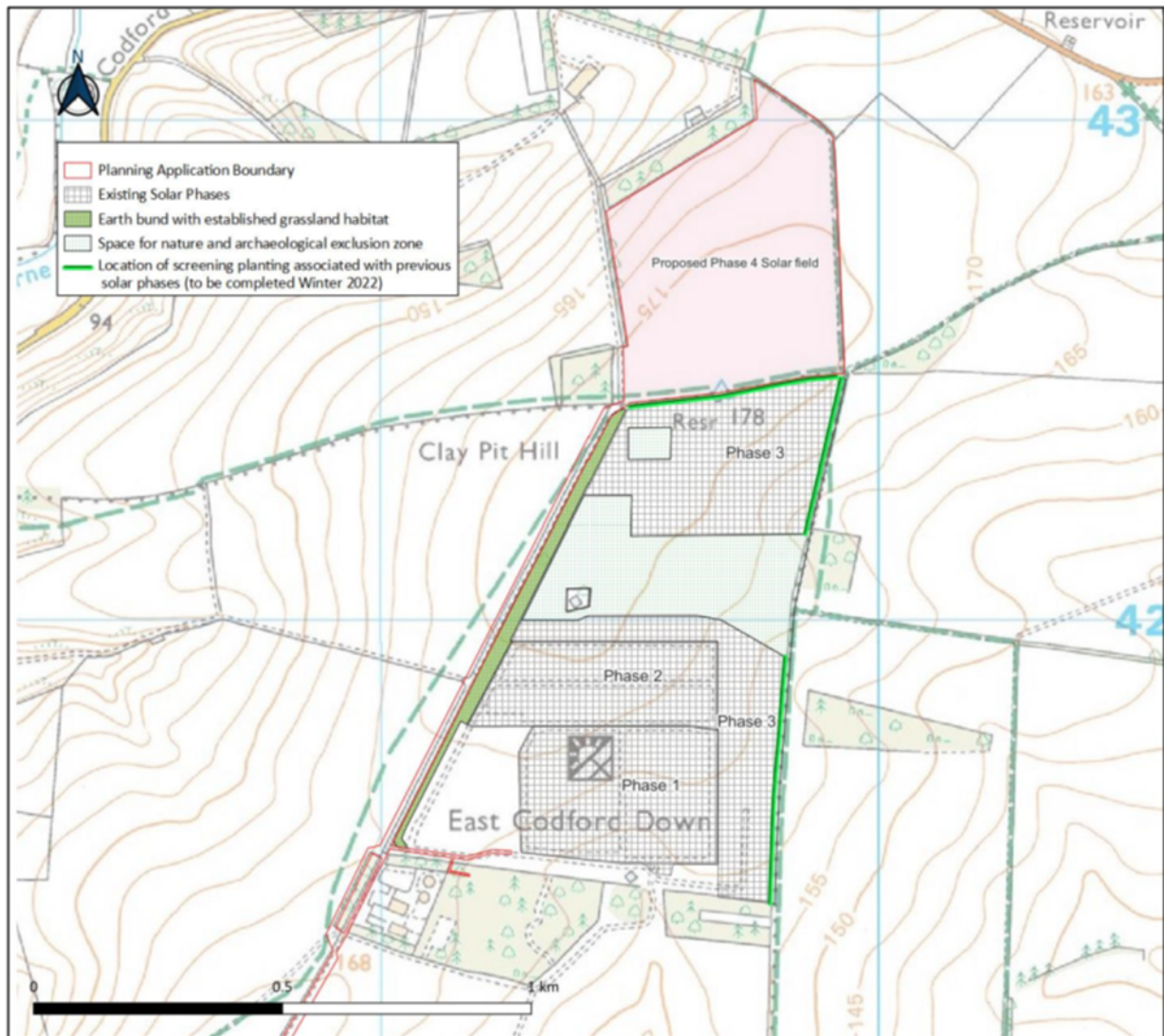
### 3. Site Description

The application site is located within the Salisbury Plain open countryside, and on land located broadly between Codford St Mary and Chitterne. The application site for the solar panels is approximately 22 hectares, but the access track and cable route would extend for approximately 3km towards Codford (as illustrated by the red outline shown below). The site has been used previously to grow cereal and 'other' cereal crops.



***Full Site Location Plan (illustrating the access road from Codford St Mary and proposed cable route that diverts into the applicants farmyard)***

The land to the south of the application site (and due to the previous applications of the applicants) has seen quite an intensification of development over the last decade including a biomass digester, glasshouse development, three phases of solar parks and a bund with a length of approximately 920m (as seen on the next page).

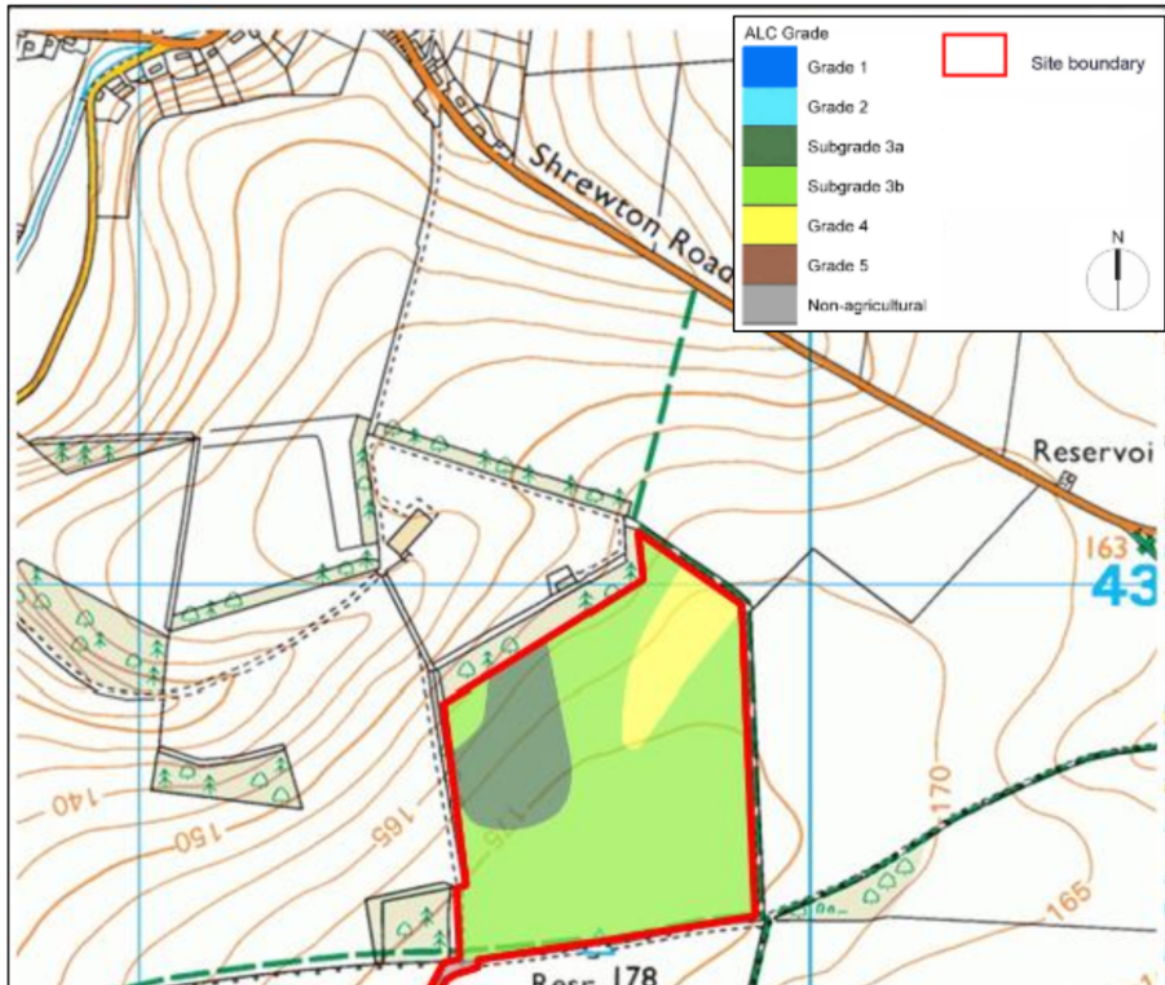


**Figure 2.2 Proposed Development and Surrounds**

**Extract from Environmental Statement showing the application site, the digester and solar phases 1-3 – NOTE the glasshouses are not shown but are located in the white area with the word ‘East’.**

The application site area comprises of approximately 22 hectares of what Council records show to be ‘grade 3’ agricultural land. In the supporting Environmental Statement, it confirms that approximately 3.4 hectares of land is classified as 3a (c15.4%) with the rest (84.6%) being 3b and grade 4 as shown in the map image below. The Environmental Statement confirms;

*“The isolated pocket of subgrade 3a is enclosed by tree planting to the north, by a farm track and tree planting to the west, and by moderate quality subgrade 3b land (and some grade 4) to the south and east. Therefore, for practical farming purposes, the versatility of the subgrade 3a on site is restricted, and it is not practicable to utilise the subgrade 3a land differently from the subgrade 3b land.”*



**Applicants submitted Plan showing the application site's 3a and 3b (and class 4) land**

The Environmental Statement also sets out that the agricultural land assessment was carried out by;

*“Rob Askew, Director of Askew Land and Soil, a fellow (F.I. Soil Sci) of the British Society of Soil Science (BSSS) and a Chartered Scientist (CSci). Rob has over thirty years of experience in environmental research and consultancy, including the role as the past President of the institute of professional Soil Scientists (IPSS), which is now the professional practice committee of the BSSS.*

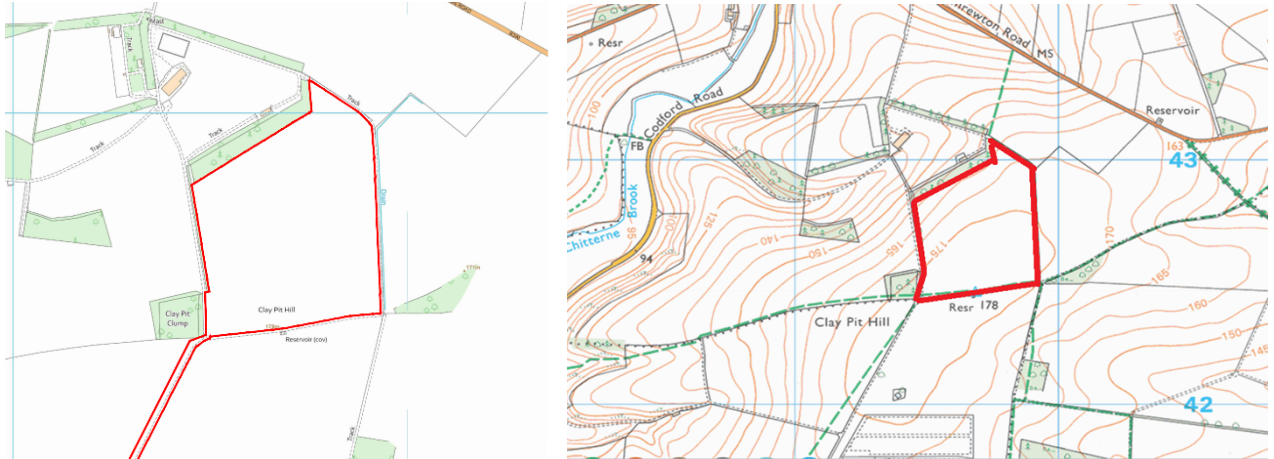
*Following the submission of the EIA scoping report, the following baseline work was undertaken to inform the assessment and further determine the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) for the study area. Detailed ALC of 22-hectare study area (based on a 100m grid survey pattern). A soil profile data/auger boring log was prepared to determine the ALC grades of agricultural land over the site.*

*Less than 16% of the phase 4 solar field is classified as best and most versatile land.”*

The Council's own mapping system only details that the land is 'grade 3' and does not have the detail as to whether its 3a or 3b. DEFRA's 'magic maps' also does not map this specific site. Therefore, the applicant's submitted statement is considered to be the only available accurate assessment of the site's agricultural grading.



The southern end of the main solar panel part of the application site is located on the highest part of 'Clay Pitt Hill', which is marked at 'Resr 178' as seen in the map image below. The application site then slopes down northwards by approximately 13m (to the 165-contour line) mainly towards Chitterne to the north and Codford Road to the west. The site does also fall slightly to the northeast towards the B390 Shrewton Road. The field to the north of the application site which abuts the B390 itself, falls quite steeply from approximately 165m down to circa 125m.



**Part of the Site Location plan and Council mapping image of the site**

There is a honeycomb of public rights of way (the green dash lines on the mapping image above) that pass immediately alongside the southern and eastern boundaries of the application site (CHIT14 and CHIT13) which also link into other public rights of way, most notably WYLY1 and WYLY9 which pass alongside the existing solar phases and CODF10 which passes the glasshouses and biomass digester.



**View from CHIT13/14 in south eastern corner of the application site looking west along CHIT14 with solar phase 3 on the left**



***View from CHIT13 in the south eastern corner of the application site looking north west towards northern boundary***



***View from and of CHIT13 in south eastern corner of the application site looking north along eastern boundary***





***View From CHIT13 looking north towards B390 with Chitterne (out of view) to the left***



***View from CHIT13 looking at northern boundary of the site – this is where the new woodland planting would be located to link with existing woodland in the foreground***



**Google Street view image from (blue arrow) on the B390**

Despite the application site sloping northwards down towards the B390, due to slope becoming steeper away from the application site itself, the southern edge of the application site, and even the small woodland, is not readily visible from the B390 Shrewton Road. In order to just see the southern edges of the application site, one must travel approximately 675m out from Chitterne along the B390 and up the hill towards the 'reservoir tank'. The distance to the application site from the Google street image below is approximately 360m. Note that this is only the edge of the application site, and not the edge of the proposed solar panels.



**Google Street view image from (blue arrow) on the B390**

It is only once near the top of the hill, near the reservoir tank, when views of the actual application site from the B390 are possible, as seen in the image on the next page. The distance to the application site from the image below is approximately 425m.





**Google Street view image from (blue arrow) on the B390**

The application site is approximately 2.2km north of the National Landscape (previously the Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) but is within a “*Special Landscape Area*” a saved policy (C3) from the West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004.

#### **4. Planning History of Application Site**

PL/2022/02628 - EIA Screening Opinion for proposed installation of a solar photovoltaic array and associated infrastructure – EIA Required

ENQ/2022/00444 – Installation of Solar Array and associated infrastructure

These adjoining sites are also of relevance in relation to the cumulative impact of development.

##### Anaerobic Digestion Facility

W/11/00745/WCM - Demolition of redundant dairy unit, development of Anaerobic Digestion Facility, installation of underground electric cable, improvement of existing private road and associated landscaping works – Approved with conditions

20/02704/WCM - Variation of conditions 12 and 13 of W/11/00745/WCM to allow vehicle delivery movement from 07:00 on weekdays and to allow 50 vehicle movements per day (Mon to Fri) and 12 on Saturdays – Approved with conditions

##### Glasshouses

15/11066/FUL - Erection of glasshouses and associated works – Approved with conditions

18/02195/FUL - Erection of Glasshouses and associated works – Approved with conditions

##### Solar Phases 1-3

13/05001/FUL - Erection of up to 22,000 ground mounted solar panels, landscaping and associated works – Approved with conditions

18/00292/SCR - EIA Screening Opinion for proposed glasshouse and solar farm development – EIA not required

19/11700/FUL - Erection of solar panels and associated works – Approved with conditions

19/03576/FUL - Resubmission of 18/03167/FUL - Erection of Solar panel – Approved with conditions

PL/2021/06698 - Variation of condition 2 (amendment to plans) pursuant to application number 19/11700/FUL –(Erection of solar panels and associated works) – Approved with conditions

PL/2021/07491 - Variation of condition 2 (amendment to plans) pursuant to application number 19/03576/FUL –(Resubmission of 18/03167/FUL - Erection of Solar panels) – Approved with conditions

## **5. Proposal**

The proposal is for the installation of a solar farm of up to 18MW of generating capacity, comprising the installation of ground mounted south facing solar photovoltaic panels and associated infrastructure (including 4 battery storage units). There would be approximately 34 CCTV cameras and 8 transformers, enclosed by deer fencing and a substation outside of the fenced area.

The site would be accessed via Malpitt Hill from Codford, which shares the access route to the anaerobic digestion plant and all associated movements with the glasshouses.

Due to the cumulation with the anaerobic digestion plant, glasshouses and solar phases 1-3, it was concluded in application PL/2022/02628 (EIA screening) that the proposal would be EIA development, which would need an Environmental Statement to include the specific details of;

- Landscape and visual impacts
- Impacts to historic environment and
- Impacts on agricultural land

An Environmental Statement has been submitted with the application. The application has been submitted with these main documents (full document list is found in condition 2);

*Environmental Statement - Non-Technical Summary*

*Environmental Statement - Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*

*Environmental Statement - Chapter 7 Historic Environment*

*Environmental Statement - Chapter 8 Agricultural Land*

*Environmental Statement - Chapter 9 Conclusions*

*Environmental Statement - Appendix 2.1 Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)*

*Environmental Statement - Appendix 2.2 Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)*

*Environmental Statement - Appendix 7.1 Historic Environment Assessment*

*Habitat Regulations Assessment (Stone Curlew)*

*Transport Statement*

*Ecological Impact Assessment – dated May 2023*

*Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Version 1.0 – dated September 2021- Daniel Ahern Ecology*

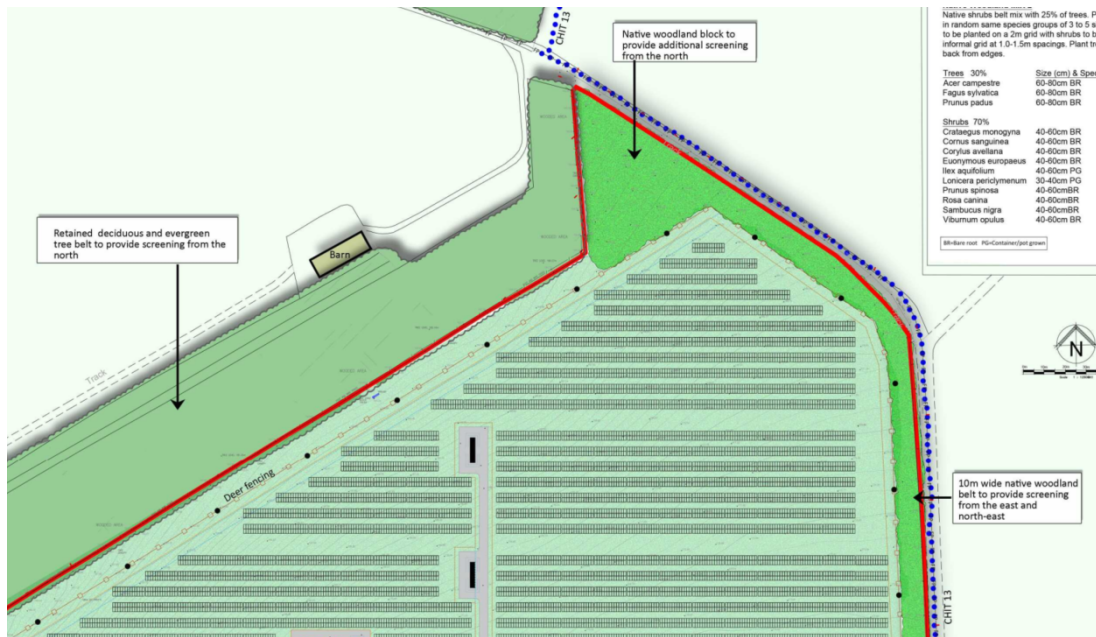
*Bio-diversity Metric Calculations Tool*

*Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy*

*Addendum to Environmental Statement and Design and Access Statement*

For the avoidance of any doubt, when this application was first received the description included a 'nutrient credit scheme'; however, due to issues with Natural England as how to calculate and





**Extract from Proposed Landscaping Plan**

The existing tree woodland to the west and north would be retained, with a native woodland block planted in the northern 'triangle' part of the site and with a 10m wide woodland belt on the eastern boundary. The southern boundary would have a native mixed field hedge planted. The deer fencing would be erected on the inside edge of the proposed planting.

## 6. Planning Policy

### National Context:

National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

Planning Policy Framework and Planning Policy Guidance

Habitats Regulations

### Written Ministerial Statement 15 May 2024

On 15 May 2024, the government announced in a written ministerial statement cautioning against approving the construction of solar farms on farmland and advised councils to consider the 'cumulative impact' of new solar farms.

The ministerial statement states;

*"Food security is an essential part of national security. This Government is fully committed to delivering robust UK food security and recognises its paramount importance to our national security. This is reflected in our commitment to maintain the current level of food we produce domestically. Heightened geopolitical risk has brought this into sharper focus and we think it is more important than ever that our best agricultural land is protected and our food production prioritised.*

*Similarly, we have seen our energy security threatened following Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine with the government spending over £40bn to pay up to a half of people's energy bills. We are*



*combatting this by racing ahead with deployment of renewable energy; nearly half of our electricity today is produced from renewables which is up from only 7 percent in 2010. Solar power is a key part of the Government's strategy for energy security, net zero and clean growth. This position was reinforced in the new National Policy Statement (EN-3), published in January this year, which stated that "Solar also has an important role in delivering the government's goals for greater energy independence and the British Energy Security Strategy states that government expects a five-fold increase in combined ground and rooftop solar deployment by 2035 (up to 70GW)".*

*Government recognises that, in some instances, solar projects can affect local environments which may lead to unacceptable impacts for some local communities. The planning system is designed to balance these considerations against the need to deliver a secure, clean, green energy system for the future.*

### **Protecting the Best Agricultural Land**

*The new National Policy Statement that we published in January makes clear that "applicants should, where possible, utilise suitable previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land. Where the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to higher quality land avoiding the use of "Best and Most Versatile" agricultural land where possible. The Government in Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan clarified that while "solar and farming can be complementary" developers must also have "consideration for ongoing food production."*

*Nevertheless, in balancing both the need for energy security and food production, we are concerned that as large solar developments proceed at pace, more of our 'Best and Most Versatile' (BMV) land could be used for solar PV instead of food production. I am therefore setting out further detail about how our policy on balancing these competing priorities is intended to be applied.*

*As is outlined in the National Policy Statement, the starting position for solar PV developers in taking forward Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects is that applicants should seek to minimise impacts on the best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification) and preferably use land in areas of poorer quality.*

*The National Policy Statement can also be a material consideration in determining applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and is broadly consistent with the approach to agricultural land in the National Planning Policy Framework which states that "Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside the other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development".*

*This means that due weight needs to be given to the proposed use of Best and Most Versatile land when considering whether planning consent should be granted for solar developments. For all applicants the highest quality agricultural land is least appropriate for solar development and as the land grade increases, there is a greater onus on developers to show that the use of higher quality land is necessary. Applicants for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects should avoid the use of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land where possible.*

*For Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, including those already in the system, the National Policy Statement and from today this WMS are likely to be important and relevant considerations in the decision making process. The Government will keep under review the evidence base underpinning the National Policy Statement published in January.*

## **Addressing Cumulative Impacts**

*While the total area of agricultural land used for solar is very small, and even in the most ambitious scenarios would still occupy less than 1% of the UK's agricultural land, we are increasingly seeing geographical clustering of proposed solar developments in some rural areas, such as in Lincolnshire. When considering whether planning consent should be granted for solar development it is important to consider not just the impacts of individual proposals, but also whether there are cumulative impacts where several proposals come forward in the same locality.*

*In parallel, my Department will be expanding the Renewable Energy Planning Database to include additional information on the types of agricultural land used by existing solar projects and those in the planning pipeline. This will enable us to carefully monitor the use of land by renewable projects in all regions of the UK.*

## **Improving Soil Surveys**

*The Government has heard concerns about the perceived inaccuracy and unfairness of soil surveys undertaken as part of the planning process for solar development. The Government will address this by supporting independent certification by an appropriate certifying body, subject to relevant business case approval, to ensure Agricultural Land Classification Soil Surveys are of a high standard, requiring surveyors to demonstrate meeting an agreed minimum requirement of training/experience. We will also seek to ensure consistency in how data is recorded and presented, so that reports on agricultural land classification are consistent, authoritative and objective.”*

### Local Context:

On 21 May 2024 Wiltshire's full Council met and carried the following motion;

*“Whilst not opposed to the principle of the development of solar farms in line with the National Planning Policy Framework this Council is increasingly concerned at the concentration of solar farms, battery storage and associated infrastructure in Wiltshire. Some villages are now completely surrounded by solar farms and their continued concentration represents a significant cumulative impact and industrialisation of the countryside.*

*Wiltshire Council therefore calls on the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to define more closely what is meant by ‘cumulative impact’ regarding solar farms battery storage and associated infrastructure and to take clear steps to ensure that solar developments are more evenly spread across the UK and not concentrated in specific areas effectively industrialising the countryside.*

*We would also ask for clarity of the priority given to ensuring that food production and farming are not destroyed as industries in specific areas through an excessive concentration of solar farms given the massive impact that would have on the rural way of life in villages that have been farmed for time immemorial.”*

Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) adopted 2015;

CP1 – Settlement Strategy; CP2 – Delivery Strategy; CP31 – Spatial Strategy for the Warminster Community Area; CP42 – Standalone Renewable Energy Installations; CP50 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity; CP51 – Landscape; CP52 Green infrastructure; CP57 – Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping; CP58 – Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Landscape; CP60 – Sustainable Transport; CP61 – Transport and Development; CP62 – Development Impacts on the

Transport Network; CP64 – Demand Management; CP65 – Movement of Goods; CP67 – Flood Risk

Paragraph 1.3 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) key principles that underpin the strategy to help build more resilient communities are identified including:

*“Working towards lowering Wiltshire’s carbon footprint through the appropriate location of development, and through renewable energy and sustainable construction.”*

Paragraph 1.10 states: *“The overarching priorities are to help build and protect resilient communities through..... tackling the causes and effects of climate change”*

Paragraph 2.10 states: *“Climate change is a central issue to be addressed by the WCS..... The basis of this strategy is to achieve sustainable patterns of development in order to reduce carbon emissions.”*

The WCS sets out that addressing climate change as a strategic objective stating at paragraph 3.5 that: *“Climate change is possibly the greatest long-term challenge facing the world today.”*

Core Policy 42 sets out that the principle of stand-alone renewable energy projects is acceptable and will be encouraged and supported. It sets a clear criteria-based framework to encourage greater investment by the renewable energy industry within Wiltshire. In addition, the Wiltshire Core Strategy contains specific policies in relation to biodiversity (CP50), green infrastructure (CP52), high quality design (CP57), flood risk (CP67) and water resources (CP68). These all relate to reducing Wiltshire’s contribution to climate change and/or adaptation. To be compliant with these policies regard should be had to the implications of the development on climate change. As set out previously climate change is the central issue to be addressed by the development plan.

Wiltshire Council Climate Strategy – Adopted February 2022

West Wiltshire District Plan 1<sup>st</sup> Alteration (2004) ‘saved policies’ C3 - Special Landscape Areas.

Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment ‘High Chalk Plain A3’

West Wiltshire Character Assessment ‘I2 Cope Hill Down Chalk Downland’

Wiltshire and Swindon Waste Core Strategy 2006-2026

WCS5: The Wiltshire and Swindon Waste Hierarchy and Sustainable waste Management

WCS6: Waste Reduction and Auditing

Emerging Wiltshire Local Plan Review (Regulation 18 consultation undertaken, draft submission pending). Also relevant is the evidence base including a study by LUC on renewables.

Codford St Mary Parish Council has not started its own Neighbourhood Plan (and neither have neighbouring Parish’s Chitterne or Wylve).

Cranbourne Chase AONB Management Plan 2014-2019

## **7. Consultations**

For the avoidance of any doubt when this application was first received the application description was for *“Installation of a solar photovoltaic and concurrent nutrient credit scheme, together with landscaping and associated infrastructure.”* However, following complications with Ecology and how to process the nutrient credit scheme, the applicants decided to withdraw the nutrient credits

from the application. The application was subsequently re-consulted to all parties on 10 April 2024 with the updated application description.

Codford Parish Council: No objection

Wylve Parish Council: No comments received

Chitterne Parish Council: No comments received

Wiltshire Council Climate Team Officer: Supportive

*The climate team actively and strongly encourages developers of all scales to put the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change as a golden theme to run through their development project. This is a proposal that is crucial in supporting the council's goal to seek to make the county carbon neutral by 2030. This is a goal set out in the adopted Climate Strategy. The Climate Strategy is part of the council's constitution and is a non-statutory plan of equal standing as the Business Plan. Delivering on the council's climate change commitments will support the delivery of the Business Plan including its own reiteration of the commitment to reducing the county's carbon footprint, an action derived from the council's 2019 acknowledgement of the Climate Emergency.*

*In short, Wiltshire Council has embedded addressing climate change into its constitution and needs to use its spheres of influence, such as its regulatory planning powers to affect positive change. Its statutory planning decision tool, the Wiltshire Core Strategy, provides a positive framework for standalone renewable energy proposals such as this.*

*The proposal will generate a significant amount of renewable energy, which the developer reasonably concludes will provide enough power to service the equivalent of around 5,870 typical homes. This will save significant tonnes of carbon dioxide, annually, by reducing the need to generate electricity through the burning of fossil fuels. The burning of fossil fuels results in the emission of greenhouse gases. The science of climate change is now irrefutable, the emission of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, through human activity is demonstrably warming our climate. The consequences of this negatively impacts our economy, our society and our environment. This is an issue at the heart of sustainable development. The delivery of sustainable development is what underpins the planning system. Therefore, the NPPF is clear at paragraph 152 that the planning system needs to support the transition to a low carbon future through shaping places in ways so as to contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gases.*

*The provision of renewable energy will be key in meeting this challenge. For example, the UK government sets out in various documents including the March 2023 document, Powering Up Britain that we will need to aim for a 5-fold increase in solar PV generation by 2035. This means for the UK will need up to 70GW of power, enough to power around 20 million homes. Place this into a Wiltshire context, where solar PV has historically been by far the greatest source of renewable energy (Wiltshire County Report – Wiltshire Carbon Emissions Baselines and Reduction Pathways, March 2022), and is set to remain so, then this proposal would represent an early and significant contribution to net zero ambitions. Whilst the council's evidence on the delivery of solar PV in Wiltshire has been strong, this is not reflected in other forms of renewable energy, for example wind. The UK government reviewed its national position in the NPPF in 2023, but did not reverse its 'de-facto ban'. The carbon reduction pathway for Wiltshire sets out a reliance on wind coming forward and this now seems unlikely. So, realistically, solar PV will be the main source of renewable power for Wiltshire in the foreseeable future and will need to compensate for the lack of other renewable energy sources in Wiltshire in the transition to net zero. The transition pathway includes ambitious targets for roof-mounted solar as well as ground-mounted solar. So, it is not reasonable to consider that roof-mounted solar alone can deliver anywhere near the electricity required to meet future demand. In short, a net zero future for Wiltshire will mean we need more*



*solar on the roofs of buildings (new and existing) and we will need more standalone installations too (both brownfield and greenfield).*

*Without these types of proposals coming forward now then society will have an unrealistic task of firstly reaching net zero, but also then adapting to the environmental consequences of delayed action. This will include more extreme weather causing overheating and flooding. This proposal does not only seek to provide renewable energy, it also addresses the well acknowledged issue with renewable energy that is intermittent supply. This is achieved through the concurrent delivery of battery energy storage. This is a significant benefit of the scheme.*

*It must be considered in the scope of any planning balance that in Wiltshire, like much of the country there are problems with providing grid connections for all types of development. As such, having a proposal in a location where a point of grid connection can be achieved is important and should be afforded weight in any planning judgment.*

*The developer has clearly set out a range of benefits from this scheme beyond addressing climate change. This proposal will not only help to decarbonise the grid by the 2035 UK Government target, but it will also support energy security by reducing our reliance of fossil fuels, which are often bought from foreign markets that have become increasingly volatile driving higher energy prices. Furthermore, of particular note is that the scheme will help to delivery biodiversity net gain and allow intensively managed farm land to regenerate. The related benefit here is that it will support planning objectives around phosphorous and nitrogen in the River Avon catchment. This all relates to addressing the concurrent Ecological Emergency and might allow further appropriate housing development to meet local needs.*

*Of course, as with any major development proposal there is a need for trade-offs and planning judgement to be exercised. The mitigation hierarchy should be followed and if residual impacts are found in any planning assessment, then the council should be positive and proactive in any discussions with the developer to mitigate as far as practically possible. If harm remains, then each benefit of the scheme needs to be apportioned positive weight in favour of granting approval. The annual carbon reductions of this scheme for example ought to be afforded significant weight because climate change is the central issue to be addressed by the development plan and the importance of the issue has only increased since the extant plan was adopted in 2015.*

Wiltshire Council Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Officer: No objection subject to informative

*“The site abuts bridleways CHIT 13 and 14 and the proposed cable route crosses CHIT14 and may also cross bridleways CODF9 and 10. The routes of the paths can be seen on our online rights of way map. The fencing around the site is set back from the adjacent bridleways and I note the applicant proposes to plant a native hedge on the south side of the site, which is adjacent to bridleway CHIT14. I can’t see this proposed hedge marked on the layout plan but if it is to be planted on the south side of the fencing it should be regularly cut back by the landowner to ensure it does not reduce the width of the bridleway.*

*The applicant should check the cable route against the online rights of way map as any work requiring excavation of the bridleway must not take place without authorisation and a temporary closure. If a temporary closure is required during the works this must be applied for 3 months before any work is carried out.”*

Wiltshire Council Landscape Officer: No objection

*The planning application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement with a chapter on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. It has been prepared by a qualified landscape architect and follows current best practice and published guidelines. It is appropriate and proportionate to the scale of the development.*

*The site is an agricultural field currently in arable production within the large scale open farmlands of Salisbury Plain. It is bounded to the north and west by existing woodland/vegetation and open to the east and south defined only by PROW CHIT13 and CHIT14 respectively. To the south of CHIT14 are the existing solar arrays, glass house and biogas plant. The site is located within the locally designated Special Landscape Area and the AONB/NL is located approx. 2 km to the south. Due to distance and intervening vegetation there is no intervisibility between the site and the AONB/NL. Existing vegetation to the north and west of the site and proposed planting to the eastern and southern boundaries serves to reduce negative landscape character and visual influence to the immediate vicinity and wider landscape.*

*I consider that the impacts to the fabric of the site and its inherent landscape character will experience harmful effects through the change of use from an agricultural field to a solar array. This harm is technically temporary and reversible if, at end of life, the solar farm is fully decommissioned. The landscape mitigation strategy will introduce new elements of planting which will provide positive outcomes through the enhancement of landscape character and biodiversity beyond the lifespan of the array.*

*For a period of 4 months significant adverse landscape and visual effects are expected during the construction phase with the introduction of machinery, activity relating to the installation of the panels, fencing and other infrastructure. The adverse nature of the effect decreases with distance (proximity to the site) and time (operation) as the new mitigation develops.*

*It is expected that by year 8 – 10 the landscaping will have grown to a sufficient height to screen the development. No significant residual effects are expected for local landscape character areas with some residual benefits for landscape elements and biodiversity as the landscape scheme matures.*

*Residual visual effects in close proximity to the site will be minor adverse at worse with longer views judged to be negligible. The LVIA has assessed that there will be no significant cumulative landscape or visual effects in combination with the above planning applications.*

Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Officer: General comments only

*The proposed development, phase 4 of a scheme, is located north of this National Landscape (NL) and just south of Chitterne. It is unlikely that the actual area of solar panels will be visible from this NL or that the panels will affect the physical landscape of this NL.*

*However, the connection cables appear to link back, underground, through this NL to East Farm at Codford. The cable trench is shown as passing to the south-east of the Scheduled Monument known as Codford Circle [and also as Wilsbury Ring on OS maps]. It is, therefore, likely that the cable trenches will pass through areas of archaeological interest. If you have not already done so, CCNL Partnership strongly advises seeking the views of your in-house archaeologists on any investigations or watching brief conditions that should be actioned.*

*The proposal would be to the north of the existing fields of solar panels, and considerably closer to Chitterne than Codford. It is located about 2km north of the AONB boundary, although the existing fields of PVs are considerably closer. The proposed development would add about 35% more to the area of solar panels. The cumulative addition, and associated industrialisation of the countryside, is significant. That would appear to be a permanent change as I have not read that the permission is being sought for a temporary permission.*

*The application area is given as 28.5ha and the actual field is a little smaller. It is, nevertheless, a large development proposal on a greenfield site. The location is quite elevated, meaning there are few viewpoints that would look down on the site. I also note that the topography has a slope north-westwards, generally away from this AONB. Nevertheless, as the photo from viewpoint 18 shows,*

*the existing panels are clearly visible as an unusual, hard, and glassy feature in an otherwise soft and undulating landscape from over 5km away.*

*There are a number of public rights of way both adjoining the site and converging upon it. The LVIA, as often happens with supporting documents, seems to under-estimate the extent of impacts on users of those rights of way and the extended cumulative impact in association with the already installed PV panels. The time, a decade, for mitigation / screening planting to take effect seems far too long for any location and definitely too long for one in a Special Landscape Area that is also the setting of an AONB.*

*The process could be speeded up by the use of more, larger, and pot grown plants. The proposed mixed hedges could also be reinforced by a spine of groups of standard trees. I do not see a separate landscape plan and specification apart from the one in the ES, so you may, for clarity and avoidance of doubt or misunderstanding, wish to have an updated landscape plan and specification. That would also 'knock on' to the LEMP which would need updating.*

*I must also advise you, although it is obvious to see, that the LVIA photographs were taken at a time in autumn 2022 when the hedges and trees were still in leaf. That situation provides considerable screening and does not provide the 'worst case scenario' set out in the standard guidance on the LVIA process [GLVIA 3rd Edn]. The conclusions regarding visibility and the scale of impact do, therefore, have to be questioned.*

*There also seem to be some inconsistencies within the submitted documentation which, in turn, raise concerns about the attention to accuracy and detail across the submissions. For example, the Planning Statement at 2.12 says:*

*The site, a mix of Grade 1, 2, subgrade 3a and subgrade 3b agricultural land, is located within the rural chalk downland on the Salisbury Plain and forms part of a special landscape area, typified by rolling and open downland topography forming a series of rounded hills, ridges and dry shallow valleys.*

*That indicates that the site is 'best and most versatile land' that should not, NPPF 175, be used for development.*

*However, the ES Appendix 8.1 Agricultural Land Classification indicates most of the field is grade 3b. However, that is not entirely logical as the text indicates that the grading is due to the wetness / droughtiness of the land but the grading tables show the primary reason for the low grades is the stoniness of the soil. That is to a considerable extent counteracted by the laboratory analysis of the submitted soil sample which shows the soil to be 90% fine particles [ $< 0.06\text{mm}$ ].*

*The proposal would add significantly to the extent of industrial development, effectively a substantial power station, in a Special Landscape Area and setting of an AONB. The decisionmakers should reflect on whether or not a proposal for an overall development, of the scale that would be achieved if the current proposal is approved, would be approved as a single large development now.*

Wiltshire Council Conservation Officer: No objection

*"Satisfied that the proposals would have no adverse impact on any listed buildings, conservation areas or undesignated built heritage assets. The potential for wider landscape impacts and views across the Plain deserve careful consideration by our landscape specialist."*

Wiltshire Council Archaeology Officer: No objection subject to condition.

*"I have agreed with the consultant that the area of archaeological interest (identified as Site 49 in Chapter 7: 'Historic Environment' of the document entitled 'Codford Solar Farm – Phase 4 – Environmental Statement' that is attached to the application) is to be included in the proposal, but on the proviso that a no-dig approach is adopted to this part of the solar field as an acceptable means of preserving the archaeology 'in situ'. This is conditional on the CEMP containing specific reference to the use of tracked mechanical plant in this zone, working in the area in dry conditions and the use non-intrusive panel fixings with all cabling above ground. The appointed archaeologist for the project will also undertake intermittent visits to monitor compliance. There will also be a need to provide an Archaeological Management Plan for the long-term management of the site, to include restoration of the land, should it ever necessary.*

*In regard to the construction of tracks, batteries and transformer storage areas of the solar field the topsoil stripping ahead of construction will be undertaken under direct archaeological control under a Strip Map and Sample (SMS) approach and any significant archaeological deposits excavated and recorded prior to installation of new facilities. There is no requirement for any archaeological monitoring of the panel installation nor the area to be used as a temporary construction compound which will not be soil stripped, but stoned-up for use.*

*In regard to the 'export' cable route. The construction technique for this part of the scheme is still uncertain, but impacts on the buried archaeology are considered low. The fall-back position will be that areas identified as being of archaeological potential will be monitored under an archaeological watching brief, unless the technique involves an 'unmonitorable' method.*

*As a result of these discussions, I would now advise that two conditions are attached to any planning permission that may be issued, one covering the provision of an Archaeological Management Plan (AMP), and one covering the proposed SMS excavation and possible archaeological monitoring of the 'export' cable route."*

Wiltshire Council Ecology Officer: No objection subject to conditions

*In reference to the email Planning Application ref: PL/2023/03024: Codford PV: Supplemental information, Date: 05/04/2024 13:43 The justification that "breeding bird surveys were not considered necessary given the large amount of bird data returned from the record search with WSBRC" is not supported. A large number of biological records for a species should indicate further surveys are required unless any potential impacts can be avoided.*

*The response from the RSPB and Natural England provides reasonable certainty that significant impacts to stone curlews will likely be avoided. The relevant construction phase surveys and avoidance measures will need to be secured by condition.*

*A test of likely significance has been carried out by the relevant Competent Authority (Wiltshire Council) as required by Regulation 63 Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. This concluded that, any temporary construction impacts and operational impacts would be de-minimus.*

**The HRA has concluded that the application is not likely to have significant impacts on the SPA and Appropriate Assessment is not required.**

*Sufficient information has been submitted in the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) to determine this application however further detail is required, which will need to be conditioned.*

*Sufficient information has also been submitted in the Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) to determine this application, but a compliance report will be required and conditioned.*



Natural England: No objection

*With regard to the solar farm element of the proposals, we welcome the location which appears to avoid impacts on sensitive ecological receptors. Despite its proximity to Salisbury Plain SPA/SAC/SSSI we agree that adverse impacts on the stone curlew population are unlikely and may be screened out of further assessment.*

*All measures within the CEMP should be appropriately implemented to ensure impacts on protected species are minimised.*

*Natural England also welcome the biodiversity enhancements associated with the scheme, including native woodland and hedgerow planting. The final landscape scheme should be agreed by your authority's Ecology Team.*

Wiltshire Council Public Protection Officer: No observations to make.

Wiltshire Council Highways Officer: No objection subject to condition.

*In view of the accompanied Transport Statement, I confirm that access via Malmpit Hill is considered acceptable.*

## **8. Publicity and subsequent representations**

The application was advertised by:

- press notice,
- site notice,
- publication to the Council's website,
- posted neighbour notifications, and
- notification to interested local organisations and parties.

No letters of objection or support received.

## **9. Planning Considerations**

Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 require that the determination of planning applications must be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Any conflict identified with development plan policy must be attributed the appropriate weight in consideration of the planning balance. Section 19 of this Act also places a legal duty on development plan documents, taken as a whole, to include policies designed to secure development that contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change.

### 9.1 Principle of the Development

#### i) Renewable Energy

The principle of development is established by existing policy in the Core Strategy (CP42) where the development of 'standalone renewable energy installations', is supported subject to the identified criteria. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate how impacts on the following factors have been satisfactorily assessed, including any cumulative effects, and taken into account:

- i. The Landscape, particularly in and around AONBs*
- ii. The Western Wiltshire Green Belt*
- iii. The New Forest National Park*

- iv. *Bio-diversity*
- v. *The Historic Environment including Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting*
- vi. *Use of the local transport network*
- vii. *Residential amenity, including Noise, Odour, Visual Amenity and Safety*
- viii. *Best and most versatile agricultural land*

*Applicants will not be required to justify the overall need for renewable energy development, either in a national or local context.*

The site does not lie within or anywhere near the Western Wiltshire Green Belt, New Forest National Park, or the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site. It also not within an AONB or the setting of an AONB although the access route (and cable route) does pass through the AONB. The full landscape impact will be assessed in the next section of the report as will the impact on residential amenity.

The NPPF also supports the principle of development. Paragraph 157 of the NPPF states;

*“The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk 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 163 states;

*“When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:*

*a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to significant cutting greenhouse gas emissions;*

*b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable”.*

The Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) states:

*“Increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses. Planning has an important role in the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure in locations where the local environmental impact is acceptable”* Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 5-001-20140306.

Officers repeat the advice given in the recent ministerial written statement that;

*“Similarly, we have seen our energy security threatened following Putin’s illegal invasion of Ukraine with the government spending over £40bn to pay up to a half of people’s energy bills. We are combatting this by racing ahead with deployment of renewable energy; nearly half of our electricity today is produced from renewables which is up from only 7 percent in 2010. Solar power is a key part of the Government’s strategy for energy security, net zero and clean growth.”*

Accordingly, it is clear that the principle of renewable and low carbon energy development is supported by the Government at national level and at a local level by the relevant Core Policy 42 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (and emerging policy).

Wiltshire Council is carrying out a Local Plan Review. A suite of ambitious new and replacement policies to further reduce Wiltshire’s contribution to climate change and foster better community

resilience to impacts from climate change are part of the Review. The direction of travel is reflective of wider strategic policy already adopted by Wiltshire Council, such as the Wiltshire Climate Strategy, adopted February 2022. This builds on the Council's February 2019 resolution to acknowledge a climate emergency and subsequent commitment to seek to make the county carbon neutral by 2030.

In the evidence base for the Local Plan review, a research study by the LUC on renewables sets out a range of options that would need to happen in order to generate 80% of projected energy needs by 2050. It calculates that greenfield solar schemes will need to produce approximately 1530MW of further capacity in addition to roof mounted solar, hydro schemes, biomass schemes and wind turbines. By means of comparison the Lime Down Solar Park scheme in Chippenham (being considered under the National Infrastructure application process) would produce 500MW of power, slightly less than a third of the required estimate, which is itself only part of the overall required energy mix. Therefore, this proposal for 18MW will help to meet some of this demand, in a location, that despite its rural character, is not considered to be in an overly sensitive area.

For the avoidance of any doubt, the evolving Local Plan has not yet determined whether to set the above figures as policy, but as an evidence base it can be used as a material consideration in the determination of this application.

#### ii) Protecting Best Agricultural Land and soil survey

WCS CP42 (viii) already sought to protect the *best and most versatile agricultural land* but the 15 May 2024 Written Ministerial Statement goes further to state that;

*“Where the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to higher quality land avoiding the use of “Best and Most Versatile” agricultural land where possible.”* Officer emphasis added.

The LUC research sets out the scale of renewable energy requirements just for Wiltshire to be able to meet 80% of projected energy needs by 2050 and suggests that greenfield sites would likely need to contribute c1530MW of additional energy as part of the overall mix. As set out by the Climate Officer, it is highly unlikely that sufficient previously developed land, brownfield land or industrial land would be available at scale to achieve this. Therefore, the first part of the test *“where the proposed use of any agricultural land is shown to be necessary”* is considered to have been met.

Furthermore, approximately 85% of the site would not be the best agricultural land (comprising of grade 3b and grade 4 agricultural land). Officers also submit that it is not reasonable, or effective to retain the grade 3a separate from the solar farm, as it would be tucked in between two tree belts and would also reduce the potential MW output from a part of the application site that has the best screening. Therefore, it is further considered that the proposed use of agricultural land in the specific context of 3a grade land has also been shown to be necessary and that its not reasonable to exclude the 3a grade land from the application site.

Whilst it is unfortunate that approximately 3.4 hectares of grade 3a would be part of the application site, it is at least at the lowest end of the *‘best and most versatile agricultural land’* scale (and not grade 1 or 2).

Furthermore, whilst permanent planning permission is sought, ground mounted solar panels would not indefinitely render the agricultural use of the land obsolete as the panels could be removed and the land brought back into use; effectively leaving the land fallow. Whilst other applications that this Committee has heard have granted temporary 40-year permissions (e.g. PL/2021/06112, *Land at Forest Gate, Pewsham, Chippenham*), it has to be noted in this context that solar phases 1-3 have not added temporary permissions but have added decommission conditions (which are

recommended in conditions 9 and 10). Should solar power become obsolete or no longer part of the required energy mix, the landowner has the option to decommission the solar park and return the land to agricultural use. The Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) details that the development should ensure that the soil quantity and quality is safeguarded during construction and de-commissioning phases.

In Chapter 8 of the applicants Environmental Statement (ES), "*Agricultural land*", it is confirmed that their assessment was carried out by a suitably qualified professional who is a Fellow at the British Society of Soil Science. The Council has also not appointed its own consultant to independently verify the applicants soil grading submission and submit that the 'independence' of the assessor can be relied upon. The ES further confirms that every hectare was sampled on a regular grid within the application site.

Officers duly acknowledge that the external National Landscapes Officer (for the Cranborne Chase area) challenges some of the reasons for the 3b classification:

*"However, that is not entirely logical as the text indicates that the grading is due to the wetness / droughtiness of the land, but the grading tables show the primary reason for the low grades is the stoniness of the soil. That is to a considerable extent counteracted by the laboratory analysis of the submitted soil sample which shows the soil to be 90% fine particles [ $< 0.06\text{mm}$ ]."*

Having been on the application site (and many times on the adjacent sites) the case officer can confirm that the fields have always been littered with fairly large stones. Whilst there is some concern over the soil sample to be 90% fine particles, it is not considered that these comments would warrant grounds in which to refute the conclusions of the submitted assessment. It should also be noted that approximately 15% of the application site was also found to be grade 4 agricultural land, to which the National Landscapes representative does not specifically challenge as being incorrect.

It is therefore submitted that approximately 85% of the application site is of poorer quality land and that this meets the Written Ministerial Statements instruction to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land where possible. It is submitted that losing 3.4 hectares of grade 3a agricultural land would not warrant the refusal of the application.

The specific testing of the 'grade 3' agricultural land was not carried out for solar phases 1-3 but given the findings of the tested land, Officers consider that it is not unreasonable to consider that similar ratios could have applied, potentially including grade 4 land (when the Council's own mapping system covers the whole solar phases 1-3 as being simply 'grade 3' agricultural land).

A recent appeal decision (28 May 2024) for a solar farm in West Somerset is of particular relevance as to how Local Authorities should assess the accuracy of applicant's soil quality surveys. The appeal is appended to this report and Officers submit that paragraphs 20-32 are key.

In paragraph 23 of the appended appeal the appellants submitted an Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) report where the soil's properties and profile at 63 locations across the site were examined using a Dutch (Edleman) soil auger. The report concluded that the site comprised of entirely lower quality grades 3b and 4 agricultural land and does not therefore comprise of "*best and most versatile*" agricultural land.

Officers note that whilst the appeal had some conflicting information (paragraph 24) as to whether the appeal site was BMVAL, the Inspectorate concluded in paragraph 27 that evidence submitted by the appellant (the ACL) report would likely to be the most accurate.

In Paragraph 28 the Inspector further goes on to state that how agricultural land is used is not a matter subject to planning controls "*the specific way agricultural land is used is not a matter that is*

*subject to planning controls. For example, there would be nothing in planning terms to prevent the farmers and/or landowners<sup>6</sup> using the fields that form the appeal site solely for the grazing of sheep at present or even leaving them fallow.”* And that in paragraph 29;

*“the fact that the proposal would limit the ability to carry out any arable farming does not, in my view, mean that it results in the loss of agricultural land when it can still be used for other agricultural purposes...Furthermore, the proposal would not be detrimental to the soil quality, so a return to arable production at a later date would still be possible.”*

It is submitted that the same could apply to this application in that the land could still have some, albeit limited, agricultural use whilst the solar panels are in place and would not harm the quality of the grade 3a or 3b land.

Paragraph 30 states;

*“In terms of the 2024 WMS, I note that the Government has ‘heard concerns about the perceived inaccuracy and unfairness of soil surveys undertaken as part of the planning process for solar development’. However, in this instance there is no evidence that the soil surveys and the person(s) undertaking them were not suitably qualified – in this case they are members of the British Society of Soil Science – and as such I see no reason to doubt the veracity of the soil analysis and evidence undertaken by them.”*

This reaffirms Officers decision not to request or undertake a further independent analysis of the submitted ACL Report in chapter 8 ‘Agricultural Land’ in the Environmental Statement as the report has already been compiled by a qualified and independent professional;

*“Rob Askew, Director of Askew Land and Soil, a fellow (F.I.Soil Sci) of the British Society of Soil Science (BSSS) and a Chartered Scientist (CSci). Rob has over thirty years of experience in environmental research and consultancy, including the role as the past President of the institute of professional Soil Scientists (IPSS), which is now the professional practice committee of the BSSS.”*

### iii) Cumulative Impact of Solar Farms in Wiltshire

Officers duly acknowledge that this recommendation has come before Committee before the government has provided any further guidance following the WMS (and at the time of writing of this report the general election is underway). Therefore, Officers have provided their own analysis and consideration of cumulative impacts of solar farms in Wiltshire.

The WMS instructs Local Authorities to;

*“When considering whether planning consent should be granted for solar development it is important to consider not just the impacts of individual proposals, but also whether there are cumulative impacts where several proposals come forward in the same locality.”*

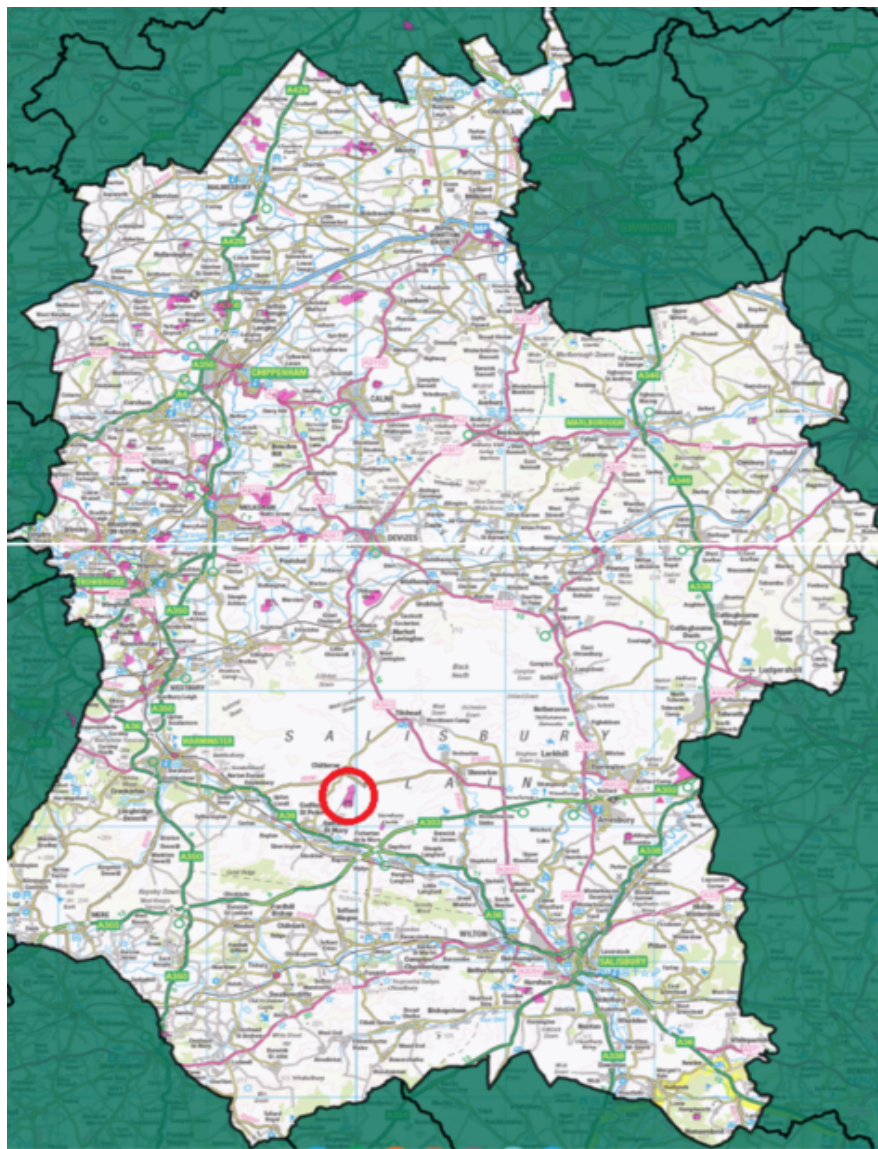
And Wiltshire Council’s motion raises concerns that;

*“Some villages are now completely surrounded by solar farms and their continued concentration represents a significant cumulative impact and industrialisation of the countryside. Wiltshire Council therefore calls on the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to define more closely what is meant by ‘cumulative impact’ regarding solar farms battery storage and associated infrastructure and to take clear steps to ensure that solar developments are more evenly spread across the UK and not concentrated in specific areas effectively industrialising the countryside.”*

The WMS refers to *'cumulative impacts of several proposals on the same locality'* and although 'locality' is not defined, Officers interpret this to mean being in close proximity or the same 'neighbourhood' to each other rather than being 'county wide'. This is echoed by Wiltshire Council's motion as it specifically mentions and offers a definition of its own in that *'some villages are now completely surrounded by solar farms and their continued concentration represents a significant cumulative impact and industrialisation of the countryside'*. Officers interpret that this means that the existing solar farms have only industrialised those specific areas of open countryside rather than the overall open countryside of Wiltshire.

The image below shows the locations and extent of each planning application for solar farms in Wiltshire (in pink) but doesn't distinguish whether those applications were approved or refused. However, it is understood that there are *'more than 40 working solar farms'* in Wiltshire. In addition to this application there are three other live solar farm applications;

- PL/2023/08481 - Land at Red Barn, East of Kington St Michael, Chippenham – 40MW
- PL/2023/10394 - Land South of Salisbury Road, nr Homington, Coombe Bissett, Salisbury – 30MW
- PL/2023/10332 - Land South of Potterne Park Farm, nr Potterne, Devizes – 49.9MW

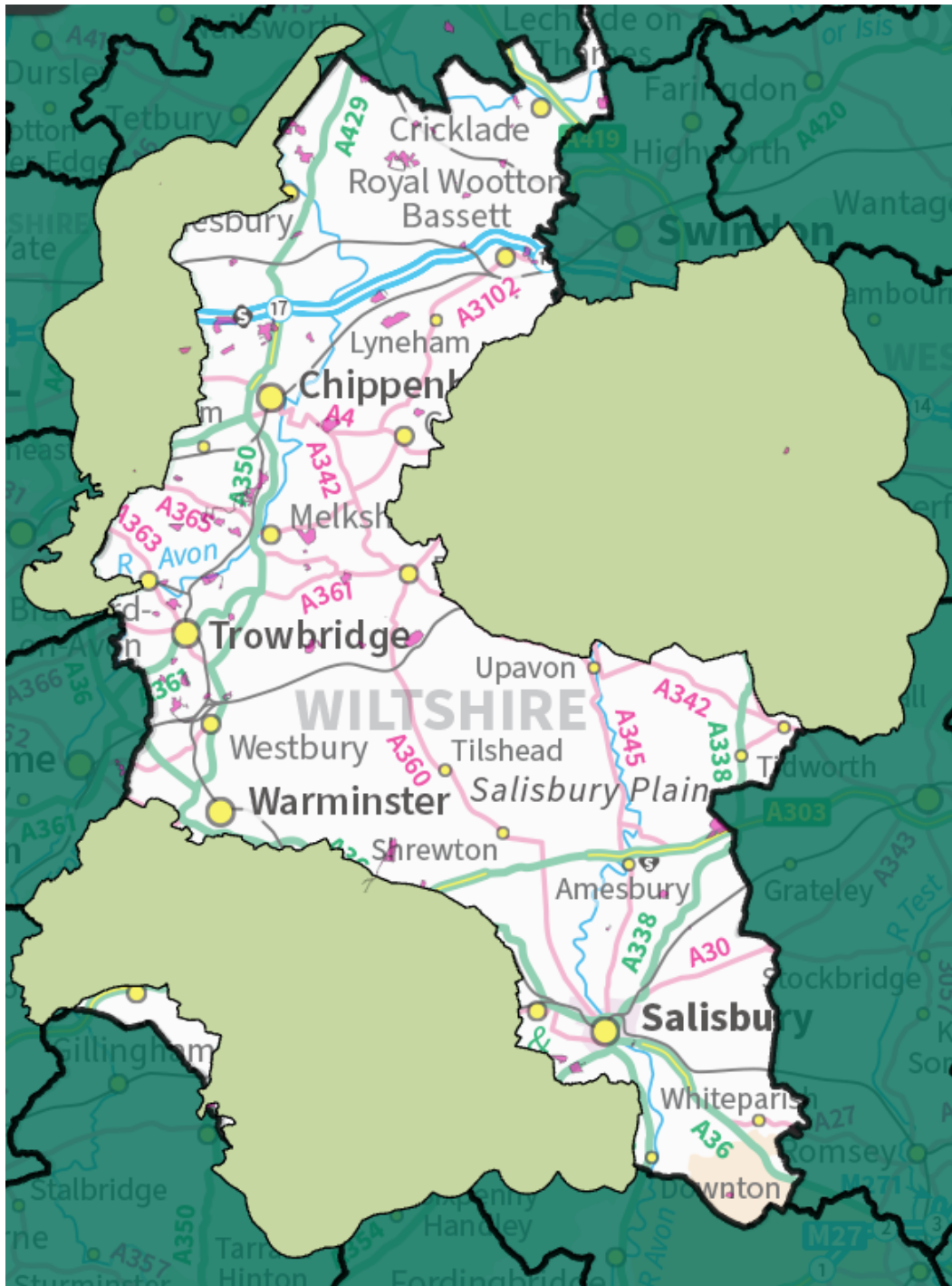


**Locations of all planning applications for Solar Parks in Wiltshire (Pink infill with the application site and phases 1-3 in the red circle)**



It is submitted that the majority of the solar parks are to the north and central western part of the County with very few sites in the east and in the south of the County. The application site is within the southern part of the County (as circled in red).

It is also submitted that one of the reasons as to why these locations within Wiltshire have been developed is due to the three National Landscape designations (formally Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs and Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs), where the image below shows how they have effectively channelled the majority of existing solar parks into the space in-between. Officers note that there have been some permissions within the National Landscape Areas (given permission between 2012 and 2014).



Locations of all planning applications for Solar Parks in Wiltshire (Pink infill) with National Landscapes shown as light green

However, even with the National Landscape restrictions (and Salisbury Plain), the central south and south east part of the County has not had many applications for solar farms.

It is duly acknowledged that whilst the Council did require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for this application due to its cumulative impact on the landscape; this was only in the context of screening against the EIA regulations. The EIA regulations are not policy to be applied in relation to WCS core policies CP42 and CP51, or to the WMS and the Wiltshire Council motion.

It is also acknowledged that there has already been a fairly large 'industrialisation' of development adjacent to the application site but as will be discussed in the landscape section of the report, due to the fairly isolated location of the application site away from residential properties and with hard and soft landscaping, the actual impact on the landscape from the glasshouses and phases 1-3, on rural character has been acceptable.

It is submitted that that the southern part of Wiltshire has not seen 'several' applications in the 'locality' and that whilst this proposal would see the combined development of approximately 83 hectares, it would not have any discernible or harmful cumulative impact on the open countryside. Officers submit that the existing development has been successfully introduced into the countryside and that this proposal would also have very limited impacts on the landscape or on the character of the open countryside. The site is relatively well hidden and proposed woodland and hedge planting to help further screen phase 4 from CHIT13 and from views from the B390.

Therefore, the principle of development for this renewable energy scheme is considered to be supported. The lack of community objection by the Parish Councils or third-party representations at least suggests that there are no objections to locating this quantum and scale of development at this location and in addition to the existing solar development.

## 9.2 Impact on the Landscape and Cumulative Landscape Impact

Core Policy 51 states that:

*"Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures. This advice is echoed in paragraph 174 of the NPPF."*

Core Policy 57 states that:

*"New development must relate positively to its landscape setting and the existing pattern of development by responding to local topography to ensure that important views into, within and out of the site are to be retained and enhanced. Development is required to effectively integrate into its setting and to justify and mitigate against any losses that may occur through the development."*

Saved policy C3 of the West Wiltshire District Plan 1<sup>st</sup> Alteration 2004 states;

*"The landscape character of Special Landscape Areas \*The Salisbury Plain\* will be conserved and enhanced and development will not be permitted which is considered to be detrimental to the high quality of these landscapes."*

*Proposals for development essential to the social and economic well-being of the rural community or desirable for the enjoyment of its amenities will be permitted having regard to highways, access, scale, design, materials, location, siting, landscaping and other appropriate environmental considerations."*

For the avoidance of any doubt, the Saved C3 policy boundary covers the majority of the Salisbury Plain, extending to the eastern edges of Westbury and Warminster, extending to the eastern boundary of Tidworth and the northern boundary of Sailsbury.

Paragraph 180 of the NPPF states;

*Planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

*a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*

*b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*

“Valued landscapes” is not defined in the NPPF and the NPPG does not provide guidance either. The post-amble to Saved Policy C3, sets out that *“in addition to the nationally important AONBs (national landscapes) a number of other parts of the District are recognised as being of County Wide landscape importance. The District Council values the landscape character as a local designation which complements the AONBs.”* Therefore, under this policy it could have been considered that the application site is a ‘valued landscape’.

However, Wiltshire Council’s Local Plan review Pre-submission draft 2023 recommends deleting saved policy C3 as the policy relates to the former district council special landscape areas which have been replaced by the Landscape Character Assessments and the Wiltshire Landscape Strategy. This ‘local designation’ therefore is due to be deleted, which would remove the above assumption that the application site should be considered as a ‘valued landscape’.

Furthermore, case law suggests that to be a ‘valued landscape’ a site should have ‘demonstrable physical attributes’ (Stroud v SoS). It is not considered that the specific landscape of the application site or its immediate surroundings has demonstrable physical attributes, and additionally to which little harm would be caused. The National Landscapes Officer concedes that the application site is not visible from the National Landscape boundary and would therefore have no impact on it.

It is submitted that even if Members were to consider the application site as a valued landscape (to which the Council’s Landscape Officer and National Landscape Officer have not claimed it to be a valued landscape) planning decisions should protect the landscape, to which it is submitted that this application would achieve.

The Council’s Landscape Officer offers no objection noting the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) contained within the Environmental Statement. The LVIA acknowledges that there are many close distant views due to the public rights of way, but there are limited middle distance views and fewer long distance views (of over 3km towards the far eastern sections of the site). The LVIA also confirms the case officer assessment in the introduction that views from Chitterne and up the B390 are limited due to existing vegetation and ridges (and land contours).

As set out in the Landscape Officers consultation response, the immediate impact of phase 4 solar park would cause harm by virtue of the change of use from agriculture to a solar array. However, with the proposed landscaping strategy, the site would become screened in time, notably in views from CHIT13 and CHIT14.

Whilst it would take 8-10 years for the new landscaping to be fully realised, it would eventually reduce any close proximity impacts to ‘minor adverse’ with longer views reduced to ‘negligible’. It is also submitted that the new landscape woodland planting would be in character and in context of the existing woodlands that are of no distinct pattern or arrangement in this landscape. It should

also be noted that solar parks will be in situ for 25-40 years (potentially longer should they be needed for the future energy mix) meaning that the benefits of the proposed landscaping would be realised relatively early in the lifespan of the proposed development.

With regard to 'cumulative impacts', Officers submit that this needs to be considered in the immediate context of phases 1-3 (and anaerobic digester and glasshouses) but also on a County Wide level.

It is duly acknowledged that some Council's receive more applications than others leading to a potential concentration or 'clustering' due to being rural authorities – which according to [www.greenmatch.co.uk](http://www.greenmatch.co.uk) "*Solar farms are not evenly distributed across the UK. The South West region has the largest share of new solar photovoltaic (PV) capacity*". Furthermore, an article in the Independent states that 8 of the 10 largest solar parks in the UK were already in Wiltshire, with 42 in operation in the County <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/wiltshire-james-gray-roman-b2522264.html>

However, the majority of these solar developments in Wiltshire are understood to have been in the Chippenham, Trowbridge and Melksham areas with relatively few in the southern part of the County. This is understandable given the Salisbury Plain and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs and North Wessex Downs National Landscape designations which would logically concentrate such developments into the spaces in between.

The application site therefore offers something of an opportunity to be able to locate this development (to which there is evidenced need for a lot more capacity by 2050 and to also secure energy security) without causing demonstrable harm to the landscape – and with no received public objections. Therefore, from a County wide cumulative impact perspective, it is not considered that this would add further to those experienced concentrations to which the Written Ministerial Statement is concerned.

In an immediate local context, the total amount of land that the digestion plant, glasshouse and the first three phases of Solar parks would amount to approximately 83 hectares, which is duly acknowledged to be a large area. However, the glasshouses and solar phases 1-3 are screened from the west by a large bund, of approximately 900m in length and is considered to be successful in merging into the wider landscape and from the landscaping that has been carried out on it.

Views from the eastern side along WYLY9 and WYLY1 of phases 1-3, are much more open as the landscaping has yet to mature, but even so it is not considered that even with the overall size of the existing phases, that the scheme causes demonstrable harm to the landscape. The view below illustrates how the solar panels are dark and assimilate reasonably well into the naturally dark background of the woodland areas behind and surrounding the site.



***View from WYLY1 looking south with Phase 3 to the right with the anaerobic facility in the woodland behind***

However, solar phases 1-3 and the glasshouses were all contained within the confines of a very large single field; to which the topography and existing (and implemented) landscape features helped to mitigate the development into the wider landscape. It is noted, however, that this proposal breaks out from the original field boundary and across an access track (which is shared with CHIT14) and into a field that then slopes down the northern side of Clay Pitt Hill. Despite this it is submitted that the impacts on the immediate and wider landscape would be similar to the relatively successful introduction of phases 1-3 and the glasshouses and that existing landscaping and the topography of the site naturally helps to screen the medium and long distance views into the site. Officers also note that there are few, if any, residential buildings that are able to see the site.

Despite the 'cumulative impacts' of the four solar phases being deemed to be EIA development, the impact that would be caused to the landscape and residential receptors would be very limited.

### 9.3 Impact on biodiversity

In carrying out its statutory function, the local planning authority must have sufficient information to judge whether the proposal would be likely to result in any adverse impact to protected habitats or species, in line with the NPPF and with CP50 WCS (2015). Core Policy 50 provides the Council's stance on biodiversity and how development must take into consideration the importance of such features and species using an area, how they can be maintained and where it is deemed necessary to alter a feature, appropriate mitigation. Core Policy 50 also requires all development to demonstrate no net loss of biodiversity and for major applications such as this the expectation is that development will deliver a net gain. The NPPF also encourages applications to deliver measurable net gains (para 180d). For the avoidance of any doubt, this application is exempt from having to deliver 10% net biodiversity gain due to having been submitted long before the cut off date.

The Council's Ecology Officer has carefully considered the application to which they have carried out a Habitats Regulation Assessment and concluded that there would be no likely significant impacts on the Stone Curlew/Salisbury Protection Area and that an Appropriate Assessment is not required. Therefore, Natural England do not need to be re-consulted as there is no Appropriate Assessment in which to consider.

The Council's Ecology Officer is also satisfied that the application would deliver a bio-diversity net gain.

#### 9.4 Impact on neighbour amenity

The proposal would not cause any harm to neighbouring amenity, however, during the construction period all vehicles would use Malmpit Hill in Codford to access the site. There are 4 houses on Malmpit Hill which have endured the construction vehicles of phases 1-3 and of the glasshouses.

Malmpit Hill also has the daily anaerobic digester traffic which is understood to be 50 vehicle movements per day from 07:00 on weekdays (Mon to Fri) and 12 movements on Saturdays. The glasshouses are conditioned to only operated between 0730 to 1800 Monday to Friday and 0900 to 1500 Saturday and Sunday, with the total number of HGV movements limited to 4 movements per day for no more than 4 days in any given week.

It is duly noted that these houses will again be affected by construction traffic but officers submit that the construction period would be limited and normal frequency of traffic would resume once complete. Officers also investigated the possibility of a condition that banned the use of Malmpit Hill for construction traffic, but unfortunately Malmpit Hill's connection onto the A36 is the most efficient route for construction vehicles. To divert construction traffic to a northern access from the B390 or from Codford Road, would require either a lengthy diversion and having to drive through Codford and potentially Chitterne, which would be less desirable from a construction point of view but would also affect more residential properties in the process. Additionally, as a more logical route is available (i.e. via Malmpit Hill), and with the daily anaerobic digester and glasshouse movements, enforcing any such condition would not be possible.

#### 9.5 Impact on designated heritage assets and Archaeology

The Council's Archaeology Officer requested a geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation of the proposed solar panel field and for the cable route in the ENQ/2022/00444 preapp. These investigations have recorded the presence of a substantial settlement site dating from the Iron Age (c.700BC - AD43) on the site of the proposed solar farm. As a result, a 'no-dig' approach is required in this part of the site as an acceptable means of preserving the archaeology in situ.

Furthermore, the Council's Conservation Officer has no objections stating that they are "*satisfied that the proposals would have no adverse impact on any listed buildings, conservation areas or undesignated built heritage assets*".

#### 9.6 Flood Risk and Drainage

CP 67 of the WCS states that all new development will include measures to reduce the rate of rainwater run-off and improve rainwater infiltration to soil and ground (SUDs) unless site or environmental conditions make these measures unsuitable.

It is recognised that solar farms are considered to have a relatively low risk in relation to their contribution to surface water flooding, and that surface water flood risk mitigation measures should be in place. It is acknowledged that the site does not fall within a flood plain and is located in Flood Zone 1 which is the lowest designation of flood zone and one wherein development such as that proposed is acceptable in principle.

The application site is also not subject to surface water or groundwater flood risk (with the 2019 Strategic Flood Risk assessment finding that ground water level is at least 5 metres below ground surface).



The submitted Flood Risk Assessment states that surface water will be managed by swales and infiltration and the current greenfield run off levels will be maintained. Furthermore, with the additional woodland and hedgerow planting, this would help absorb surface water from the site.

#### 9.7 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The proposal is not CIL development.

### **10. Conclusion**

The proposed development is for the installation of a renewable led energy scheme comprising ground mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with transformer stations and ancillary infrastructure. It is considered that the proposed development is sustainable development that will make a significant contribution to the supply of renewable energy helping to reduce carbon emissions required to meet the Climate Change Act 2050 net zero target and Wiltshire's own commitment to being carbon neutral by 2030.

The government's energy security strategy, published in April 2023, contained various measures to deal with the UK's energy crisis and achieve its net-zero targets, including a pledge to ramp up solar power capacity from 14 gigawatts (GW) to 70GW by 2035. To further underline this the Climate change act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 raised the duty of the Secretary of State to ensure that the net UK carbon account for the year 2050 is at least 100% lower than the 1990 baseline (previously 80%).

It is considered that the principle of the proposed development is in accordance with current national and local planning policies, which are supportive of renewable energy schemes. The proposal is a large scheme that would provide a valuable contribution towards cutting greenhouse gas emissions. This attracts considerable weight in the overall planning balance, along with other benefits such as the ecological enhancements and biodiversity net gain that would be secured by the development, and associated local economic benefits associated with the construction phase. Wiltshire Council's motion also confirms that the Council is "... *not opposed to the principle of the development of solar farms in line with the National Planning Policy Framework*".

There is the potential for an effect on the landscape which is not unsurprising given that national and local policy recognise that large scale solar farms may result in some landscape and visual harm. However, in this instance the topography, existing screening and proposed landscape mitigation would lead to very limited and highly localised landscape and visual effects, and these would be progressively mitigated by additional planting. These factors lead to the conclusion that the proposal would not conflict with local or national policy.

It is also submitted that the proposal would not be in conflict with either the Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) or the Wiltshire Council Motion. As confirmed by the Climate Change Officer it is unlikely that rooftop solar panels alone would not meet the MW requirement and it's also considered unlikely that sufficient previously developed land would be found at scale. Therefore, it's not 'possible' in this instance to find alternatives to agricultural land. The accuracy and independence of the ACL report and the findings of the agricultural grades is accepted as being accurate, meaning that approximately 85% of the application site does not propose using "*best and most versatile*" land. Whilst it is unfortunate that 3.4 hectares of grade 3a land is proposed to be used it is not considered reasonable or practicable to exclude this from the scheme given its relatively small size and being located next to woodland belts which would restrict access. Additionally, by removing the grade 3a land would reduce the MW output, from a location that benefits from the best screening when viewed from the public rights of way and wider landscape.

Whilst it is duly acknowledged that there would be immediate local cumulative impacts from the development this site has seen, it is submitted that the existing (and proposed) development has



integrated well into the landscape and has not caused undue harm. The lack of objections to this application emphasises the success of the existing development in this regard. Whilst there is no definition of '*locality*' from the WMS, it is understood to mean as being in the 'same neighbourhood' rather than being County wide; and Wiltshire Council's motion echoes this with "*some villages are surrounded by solar farms*". Therefore, it is understood that Wiltshire Council's concerns relate to several applications being located in the immediate same area.

The southern part of Wiltshire has not had the same level of solar development as seen in the central and northern areas. It is submitted that it cannot be reasonably concluded that there has been a harmful 'cumulative impact' in this part of Wiltshire and that the proposal would cause a harmful impact either 'locally' or on the general industrialisation of the countryside in Wiltshire.

Independent resources confirm that ground-mounted solar panels currently cover just 0.1% of all land in the UK. Further, even with government plans to significantly scale up solar in line with its net-zero target, it is expected to bring this up to just 0.3% of the UK land area. This is the equivalent to around 0.5% of the land currently used for farming and roughly half of the space taken up by golf courses.

It is considered that the proposed development can be undertaken without having an adverse impact on protected species or their habitat. The proposed scheme also includes the introduction of green infrastructure and habitat creation which are considered to represent an ecological enhancement. Subject to condition, the ecologist is satisfied that in combination, the measures proposed will ensure that the site retains the functionality of its habitats for wildlife. It is considered that the acknowledged benefit of the additional planting, which would remain after the end of the limited period, should be accorded significant weight and accordingly the unchallenged Biodiversity Net Gain is a further significant benefit that is accorded weight in this scheme.

It is acknowledged that during the construction period there could be some conflict between the existing residents on Malmpit Hill and any users of the local highways and the proposed construction traffic. This disruption, however, will be only for a relatively short period of time and there will be measures in place to minimise such disruption and inconvenience through the conditioning of a Construction Management Statement. With such conditions in place, it can be concluded that there would be no detrimental impacts to the highway network or to highway safety in general.

Further archaeological investigation will be required, and this can be controlled through condition. No harm would be caused to other designated heritage assets.

Whilst the scheme will lead to a small degree of very local and short-term negative impact on the landscape, the impact must be balanced by the benefits which would accrue from a renewable energy generator leading to less reliance on carbon. The proposed development would make a significant contribution towards Wiltshire's renewable energy target and as such it is considered that the overall environmental, economic and social benefits associated with the proposal outweigh any limited harm.

It is therefore considered that on balance the public, environmental and economic benefits of the proposal outweigh the limited harm identified. It is therefore recommended that the application is granted permission subject to conditions.

## **RECOMMENDATION –**

**Having taken into account the environmental information, it is recommended to grant full planning permission subject to the conditions set out below:**

## CONDITIONS

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and details:

Environmental Statement - Non-Technical Summary

Environmental Statement - Chapters 1-5

Environmental Statement - Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Environmental Statement - Chapter 7 Historic Environment

Environmental Statement - Chapter 8 Agricultural Land

Environmental Statement - Chapter 9 Conclusions

Environmental Statement - Appendix 1.1 Scoping Report

Environmental Statement - Appendix 1.2 Scoping Opinion

Environmental Statement - Appendix 2.1 Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)

Environmental Statement - Appendix 2.2 Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)

Environmental Statement - Appendix 7.1 Historic Environment Assessment

Environmental Statement - Appendix 7.2 Cable Route (Scoping Report)

Environmental Statement - Appendix 7.2 Archaeology Trial Trenching

Environmental Statement - Appendix 8.1 Agricultural land Classification Report

Environmental Statement - Photo sheets 1-19 Viewpoint Photography

Design and Access Statement

Habitat Regulations Assessment (Stone Curlew), Date: 10/05/2023 by Daniel Ahern Ecology

Habitat Regulations Assessment (River Avon) Date: 10/04/2023 by Daniel Ahern Ecology

Transport Statement

Ecological Impact Assessment Phase 4 - Codford Solar Farm, Date: May 2023 by Daniel Ahern Ecology

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Land South of Chitterne – Cable Route, Date: November 2022 by Daniel Ahern Ecology

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Version 1.0 – dated September 2021- Daniel Ahern Ecology

Bio-diversity Metric Calculations Tool 131223 (1) 4367 & (2) 4367

Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy

Site Location Plan (AEM018-SP-01\_rev04); PV panel Cross Section (AEM018-SD-01\_rev05);

Typical PV Panel Cross Section (AEM018-SD-02\_rev01); Container Elevations (Battery Transformer and Customer Switchgear (AEM018-SD-03\_rev03); Internal Access Track (AEM018-SD-04\_rev01); Cable Route Plan (STR\_20.22\_PV4 Rev 2); and Deer Fence Detail (252 – 3) -all received 10 May 2023

Site Layout Plan (AEM018-PL-01\_rev09); Proposed Battery Section Drawing (AEM018-EL-01\_rev04) – received 17 May 2023

Solar Panel Manufacturer Details – Deep blue 3.0 – received 19 May 2023

Baseline Map (crop plan); Addendum to CEMP app B (J M Stratton and Co); Addendum to LEMP and ES Statement Addendum to LEMP (Landscape Proposal Plan (Fig 6.3); Framework CEMP (by Chapman Lily Planning Ltd (dated 28 April 2024); CEMP addendum App A (RSPB email); and Addendum to LEMP App 1 Figure 6.3 Mitigation rev C – all received 5 April 2024

Addendum to Environmental Statement and Design and Access Statement – Dated and received 9 April – removing ‘credit scheme’ references from the documents.

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

3. No development shall commence on site until an updated Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LEMP will include long term objectives and targets, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules for each ecological feature within the development, together with a mechanism for monitoring success of the management prescriptions, incorporating review and necessary adaptive management in order to attain targets.

The LEMP shall also include details of the legal and funding mechanism(s) by which long-term implementation of the plan will be secured. The LEMP shall be implemented in full and for the lifetime of the development in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To ensure the long-term management of landscape and ecological features retained and created by the development, for the benefit of visual amenity and biodiversity for the lifetime of the scheme.

4. No development shall commence on site until an Archaeological Management Plan (AMP) has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The AMP is to set out how archaeological Site 49 (as delimited in Chapter 7: ‘Historic Environment’ of the document entitled ‘Codford Solar Farm – Phase 4 – Environmental Statement’ that was attached to the application) is to be protected from physical impacts during the developmental and operational phases of the proposals.

REASON: To enable the protection of any matters of archaeological interest.

5. No development shall commence on site until:
  - a) A written programme of archaeological investigation, which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and
  - b) The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.

NOTE: The AMP and the SMS excavation and any archaeological monitoring are to be prepared and carried out by qualified archaeologists following the standards and guidelines of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA).

6. No development shall commence on site until a Construction Method Statement, which shall include the following -
  - the parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors;

- loading and unloading of plant and materials;
- storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development;
- the erection and maintenance of security hoarding including decorative displays and facilities for public viewing, where appropriate;
- wheel washing facilities;
- measures to control the emission of dust and dirt during construction;
- a scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from construction works; and
- measures for the protection of the natural environment.
- hours of construction, including deliveries; and a
- Pre-condition Survey: A photographic pre-condition (and post condition) highway survey;

shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority.

The approved Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in accordance with the approved Statement without the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To minimise detrimental effects to the neighbouring amenities, the amenities of the area in general, detriment to the natural environment through the risks of pollution and dangers to highway safety, during the construction phase.

NOTE: The applicant should be informed that the Highway Authority will pursue rectification of any defects identified by the highway condition survey which can be attributed to the site construction traffic under the provision of S59 of the Highways Act.

7. The development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the following documents:
  - Construction Environment Management Plan Including CTMP, Land south-east of Chitterne Dairy, Date: 28.04.24 by Chapman Lily Planning Ltd
  - Letter: Re: response to RSPB comments on Planning Application ref: PL/2023/03024, by J M Stratton & Co. Planning portal file name: "CEMP addendum App.B"

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and for the protection, mitigation and enhancement of biodiversity.

8. A CEMP compliance report shall be submitted the Local Planning Authority no later than the earliest of the following; three months after the completion of the development, or, the scheme becoming operational. The compliance report is to be completed by a suitably qualified ecologist/ECOW and to include photographic evidence.

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and for the protection, mitigation and enhancement of biodiversity.

9. In the event that the development ceases to be operational, then all associated development on, under or above the application site shall be removed from the site and the land returned to its former condition in accordance with a Decommissioning Plan to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of decommissioning, and within six months of the cessation of the use of the site.

REASON: In the interests of amenity of the Special Landscape Area and the circumstances of the use.

10. Prior to the development hereby approved being decommissioned, the applicant shall submit an ecological assessment and mitigation report for approval by the Local Planning Authority. The site shall then be decommissioned in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To ensure that protected species are not harmed through the removal of the equipment having regard to guidance contained in the NPPF.

11. No external light fixture or fitting shall be installed within the application site unless details of any existing and proposed new lighting has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority in writing. The submitted details will demonstrate how the proposed lighting will impact on bat habitat compared to the existing situation. The plans will be in accordance with the appropriate Environmental Zone standards set out by the Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP) Guidance Notes on the Avoidance of Obtrusive Light (GN 01/2021) and Guidance note GN08/23 "Bats and artificial lighting at night", issued by the Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals.

REASON: In the interests of conserving biodiversity.

12. Notwithstanding the details hereby approved, the finished colour for all cabins, substation containers, fencing and any other structure that forms a part of this development shall be finished in a dark green (RAL 6007) and shall be maintained as such thereafter.

REASON: In the interests of preserving the character and appearance of the area.

13. All landscape planting shall be undertaken in accordance with the Landscape Proposals – Mitigation plan (Figure 6.3) on page 43 of Chapter 6 of the Environmental Statement – Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and maintained as such thereafter.

All soft landscaping comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the completion of the development or in accordance with a programme to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

All shrubs, trees and hedge planting shall be maintained free from weeds and shall be protected from damage by vermin and stock. Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years, die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

All hard landscaping shall also be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a programme to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features and to ensure that the site is satisfactorily landscaped in order to support protected species and their habitats.

14. All deliveries of solar panels and any other associated construction materials of the development hereby approved shall be confined to between the hours of:

0730 to 1800 Mondays to Fridays; and at no times on weekends or bank holidays

REASON: In the interests of neighbouring amenity.

**INFORMATIVE:**

1. The applicants are respectfully advised that the proposed soft landscaping (the native woodland belt and native mixed field hedge) must be maintained as to not interfere or obstruct CHIT13 or CHIT14