

REPORT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	22 February 2023
Application Number	PL/2021/06112
Site Address	Land at Forest Gate, Pewsham, Chippenham, SN15 3RS
Proposal	The development of a solar farm of up to 49.9 MW of generating capacity, comprising the installation of solar photovoltaic panels and associated infrastructure including customer cabin, customer substation, DNO substation and equipment, inverter and transformer substations, spare part container, associated battery storage, access tracks, fencing, security cameras, landscape planting and associated works
Applicant	Eden (FG) Solar Ltd
Town/Parish Council	CALNE WITHOUT CP
Electoral Division	CALNE RURAL – Cllr Ashley O’Neill
Grid Ref	395,263 171,498
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Jonathan James

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The application has been called in before Committee by Cllr Ashley O’Neill in view of the public interest / strength of local feeling and landscape impact.

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of the 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 be approved subject to conditions.

2. Report Summary

The application has been the subject of consultation and publicity, including site notices, press notices, neighbour notifications and publications on the Council’s website. Representations have been received from approximately 155 third party objectors and approximately 229 third party supporters, although it should be noted that the overall total number of representations received exceeds these figures due to repeats at each re-consultation.

The application has been the subject of revisions - of particular note is the reduction in the area of land covered by the solar farm. The revisions have been subjected to appropriate re-consultation. The proposed development has been revised as follows:

- Removal of the four most easterly fields (part of the Stanley Abbey Farm Meadows County Wildlife Site) resulting in a smaller application site (area reduction of 22%)
- Realignment of the permissive footpath along the eastern boundary
- Replacement of single axis tracker panels with fixed tilt solar panels that are lower in height (height reduction of 14%)
- Minor alterations to the siting of the infrastructure elements (cabins and internal cable routes)
- Minor changes to the layout to alter the location of fence lines, principally along the eastern boundary

Changes previously made to the scheme are retained in the amended layout, as follows:

- Provision of additional planting to the rear of Forest Gate Business Park and along the hedgerow shared with Stanley Abbey Farm Meadows CWS
- Minor junction alteration to move the site access to the main part of the site slightly further north
- Provision of a wider corridor adjacent to the fuel pipeline crossing the site (the route of which has been confirmed through on-site investigation and is agreed with the pipeline provider Exolum)
- Minor changes to alignments of internal access roads and cable routes such that they cross the pipeline at 90°
- Revisions to the siting of the hedgerow and trees adjacent to the existing public footpath to create a wider corridor

The main issues to be considered are:

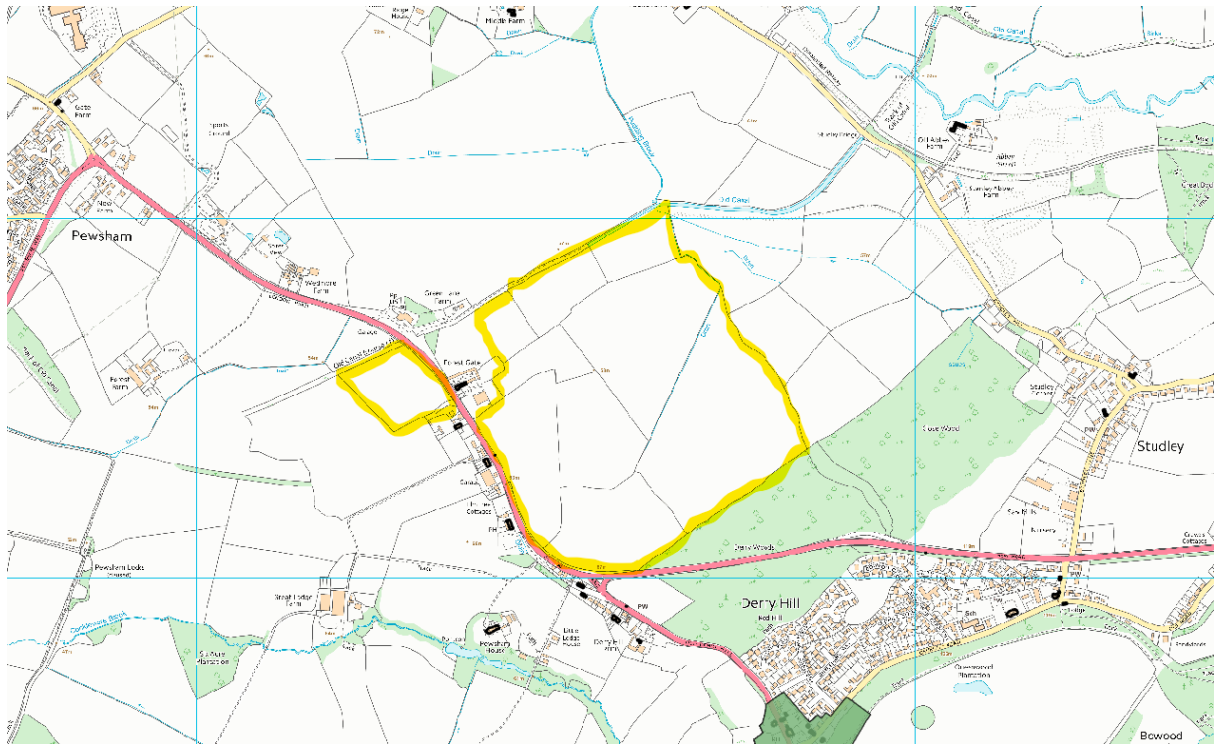
- Whether the proposal is acceptable in principle;
- Whether the proposal would result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land;
- Whether the proposal would be harmful in terms of its landscape and visual impact;
- Whether the scheme would give rise to an adverse impact on residential amenity;
- Whether the proposal would have an adverse impact upon highway safety or public rights of way;
- Whether the scheme would cause harm to protected species and/or their habitats;
- Whether the scheme would cause harm to the historic environment; and
- Whether the proposal would result in any other adverse environmental impacts.

3. Site Description

The application site is located within open countryside on land to the north of the A4 (New Road) which approaches Pewsham from the south-east; Pewsham is approx. 945m away to the west of the site. To the east is Studley (approx. 756m) and to the south-east is Derry Hill (approx. 386m). The A4 bounds the southwest of the site and sub-divides one part of the solar farm a small section to the west of the site. The A4 forms part of the 'freight route network' for Wiltshire and access into the site would be off this road.

Within close proximity to the north and southeast are priority habitats (deciduous woodland and lowland meadows) these are also recognised County Wildlife Sites 'Stanley Abbey Farm Meadows and 'Derry and Close Woods', the woods are also recognised as 'ancient woodland'.

Whilst the site is not located within any designated protected landscape; the north-eastern boundary of the site is adjacent to a County Wildlife Site and this area formed part of the original area of the solar farm but has subsequently been removed from the scheme.



**Site location – site outlined in yellow
Bold black denotes location of listed buildings**

Along the sites northern boundary is a 'historic canal route', which forms part of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal 'protected route', and along the A4 to the southwest of the site are six listed buildings. There is a public right of way (CALW86) that runs along the south-eastern part of the site. There is an oil pipeline that runs through the site.

4. Planning History

There is no relevant planning history pertaining to the application site (i.e. no previous applications submitted on the site that are of relevance to the proposal now).

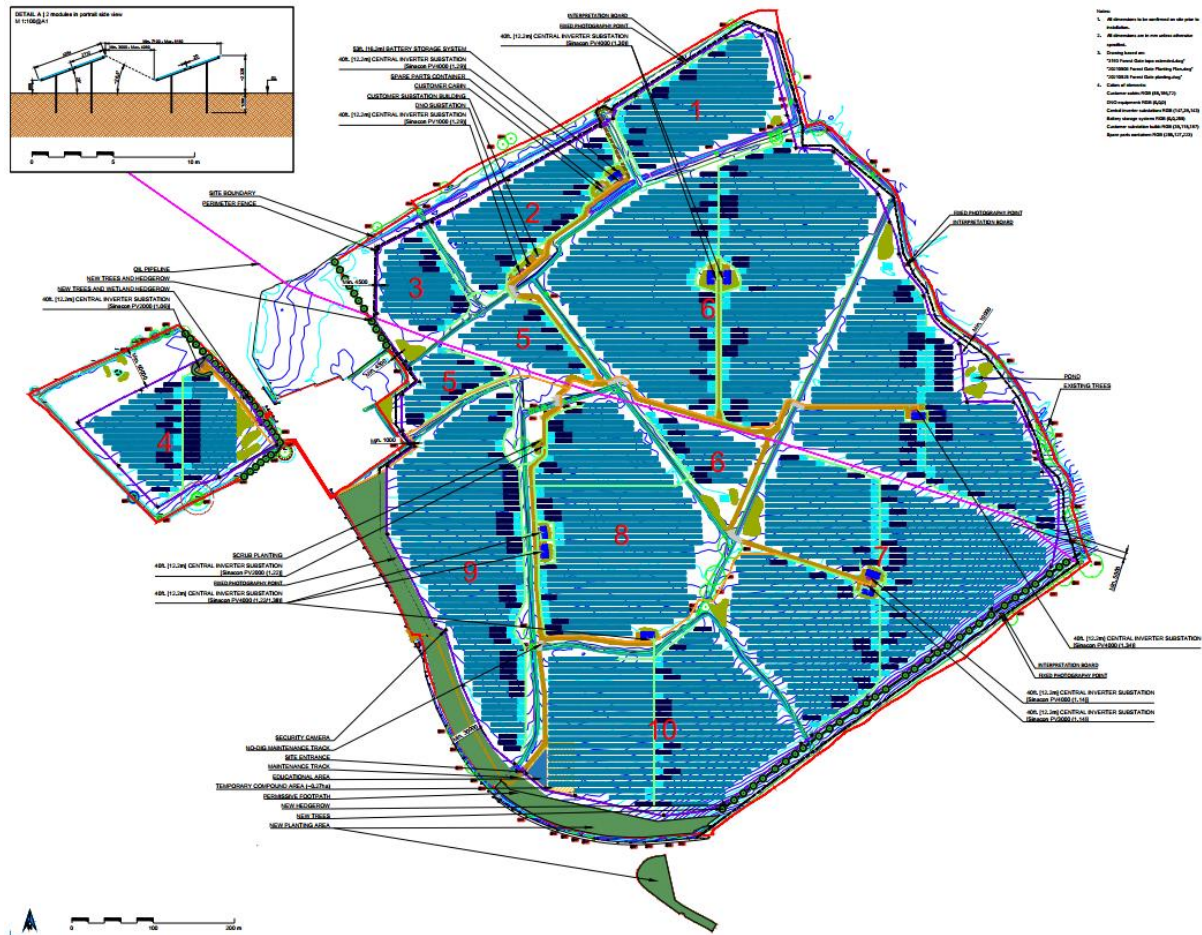
5. The Proposal

The proposal is for the installation of a solar farm of up to 49.9MW of generating capacity, comprising the installation of solar photovoltaic panels and associated infrastructure including customer cabin, customer substation, DNO substation and equipment, inverter and transformer substations, spare part container, associated battery storage, access tracks, fencing, security cameras, landscape planting and associated works.

The northern separate solar array would include an access off the adjoining A4, with a track to a 'central inverter station' to the north point of the site. Along the surrounding fence would be 8 security cameras. New planting would be included along the sites eastern and southern boundaries and within the site.

'Fixed tilt bifacial panels' would be installed throughout the site, as detailed in drawing no. EDR1004-203. These replace the previously proposed tilting single axis bifacial tracker panels. The solar panels would be laid out in west-east rows across the site, with panels facing south. The distance between the rows of solar panels would be between 3m and 4.08m.

Bifacial solar panels are panels that can capture sunlight on either side. Since they're made to be completely transparent, usually glass. They tend to have higher efficiency compared to monofacial panels since they can capture light on the two surfaces.



Map – proposed site layout

Whilst, the overall solar farm and associated infrastructure would cover an area of 63.97 ha, the solar panels in isolation would cover 22.65 ha, equating to approximately 35.4% of the site, with a total ground disturbance of below 1%. The associated infrastructure would cover around 0.12ha of the site.

The proposal includes the following associated infrastructure:

- 12 central inverter and transformer substation cabins (each 12.2m x 2.44m and 3.1m high)
- One Distribution Network Operator (DNO) station (6.1m x 4.12m and 2.93m high)
- One customer cabin (12m x 4.54m and 2.77m high)
- One customer substation (6.59m x 2.65m and 3.64m high)
- One spare parts container (6.1m x 2.44m and 3.11m high)
- 18 battery storage containers (each 16.15m x 2.44m and 3.0m high)
- Deer proof fencing along the site boundary with access gates (at approx. 2.0 – 2.1m high)
- Secured security cameras (from the plans approx. 45 to the main compound and 8 to the smaller compound to the west – the cameras are placed around the security compound at intervals)
- Intruder detection system (IDS) fence sensor

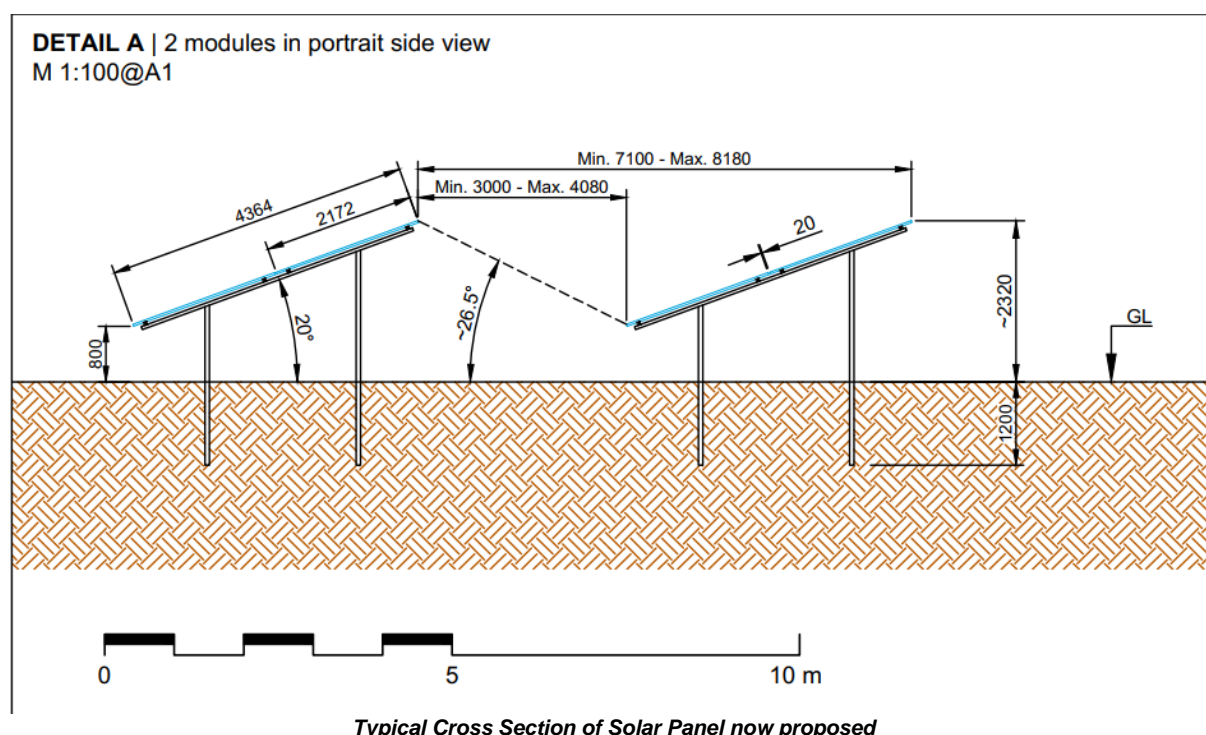
An 'Educational Area' would be situated to the south of the site, near to the entrance and there would also be fixed photography points with information boards around the edge of the site.

[See Appendix 1 for typical details of the above operations]

The DNO, customer substation, and spare parts container would be located to the north of the site, although set well away from the boundary. The central inverter cabins and battery storage containers would be located at appropriate positions across the site (in central locations with solar panels around them). The colour of the cabinets and battery storage containers would be dark green (RAL 6007).

The fencing would be deer fencing with wooden timber posts and galvanised high tensile deer fencing mesh as illustrated on drawings EDR1004-214 Rev C and EDR1004-217 Rev B. The fence would not breach the hedgerows but would have security rods through the hedge that would allow the passage of wildlife along the hedgerows. The fence would be raised above ground level by 100mm to allow for the movement of small animals, reptiles and amphibians across the site. Two different heights of CCTV poles are proposed; for more visually sensitive areas in proximity to residential properties and adjacent to bridleways a height of approximately 2m would be used, with taller poles (approximately 3m) across other parts of the site. The CCTV would be mounted on wooden poles as illustrated on EDR1004-215 Rev G.

The solar panels (which will be bifacial) would be mounted on a metal framework, south facing fixed on a 20° tilt. The framework of the panels would be driven into the soil, removing the need for deep foundations. The maximum height would be approximately 2.32m, similar to the height of other ground mounted panel solar farms permitted in Wiltshire, but lower than originally proposed. The solar panels would be designed to benefit from maximum sun hours, with surfaces that are dark grey/black in colour and have non-reflective coatings.



The grid connection point would be approximately 3km from the site at the existing SSE substation on Cocklebury lane, in the northeast of Chippenham. An indicative cable route has

been assessed within the Environmental Statement and the final cable route would be the subject of a separate planning application. The first part of the route would pass through agricultural fields before reaching Stanley Lane to the west of Hither House. It then follows the highway east for a short distance before turning north along a farm track. The route subsequently turns northwest and shadows the route of the cycle path or in the adjoining agricultural fields. The cable route would be directionally drilled under the River Avon and the railway bridge or utilise the bridge itself.

The proposed solar farm would generate sufficient renewable electricity to power the equivalent of approximately 13,825 typical homes and thereby contribute to the national target to generate 32% of overall energy generation from renewable energy.

The scheme has undergone some revisions, including the reduction of the total area of land proposed for the solar farm and the submission of additional information following concerns and objections raised on the scheme. The necessary and appropriate consultations have taken place and it is on the revised/additional details that the recommendation to grant planning permission is made.

6. Planning Policy

Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2026, made 2018 (CCNP)

- Policy GA1 – Sustainable Transport
- Policy GA2 – Highway Impact
- Policy BE1 – Integration and Landscaping
- Policy BE4 – Heritage Assets
- Policy NE2 – Setting of Calne and Calne Without
- Policy NE3 – Biodiversity
- Policy NE4 – Energy Conservation

Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015 (WCS)

- CP3 – Infrastructure Requirements
- CP34 – Additional employment land
- CP42 – Standalone renewable energy installations
- CP50 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- CP51 - Landscape
- CP52 – Green Infrastructure
- CP53 – Wiltshire’s Canals
- CP55 – Air Quality
- CP56 – Land Contamination
- CP57 – Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping
- CP58 – Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment
- CP60 – Sustainable Transport
- CP61 – Transport and New Development
- CP62 – Development Impacts on the Transport Network
- CP64 – Demand Management
- CP67 – Flood Risk
- CP68 – Water Resources

Saved Policies for the North Wiltshire Local Plan

- NE12 Woodland (saved Local Plan policy);

- NE14 Trees, Site Features and the Control of New Development
- NE18 Noise and pollution
- T5 Safeguarding

Wiltshire Local Transport Plan 2011 – 2016: Car Parking Strategy (March 2011).

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2 - Managing Significance in Decision taking in the Historic Environment HE 2015).

The site is located in countryside, however, there are identified heritage assets within the general area, including archaeology, Grade II Listed Buildings and Derry Hill Conservation Area, approx. 525m to the southeast. From the point of view of the historic environment, a primary consideration is the duty placed on the Council under sections 16, 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving any listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses and the setting of conservation areas.

7. Consultation responses (a summary of the comments provided)

Calne Without Parish Council – Support

The Parish Council resolved to support the application by nine votes to three, with one abstention. In supporting the application, the Council considered the contribution that the development would make towards climate change targets, and that the application contained positive proposals to mitigate the impact on the local environment.

In writing to you to express our support for the application, we further request that, in granting planning permission, Wiltshire Council should ensure that commitments made by Eden FG Solar Limited within the application should be addressed through legally enforceable planning conditions and agreements.

These commitments include those made in respect of the construction, commissioning, operation and decommissioning of the solar farm, and include:

- *The scheduled planting programme, including screening to mitigate the visual impact of the proposal.*
- *Biodiversity improvements and biodiversity management plan.*
- *New permissive recreational footpaths and bridleway.*
- *Archaeological mitigation.*
- *Establishment and administration of the Community Benefit Fund, Educational Fund and community investment opportunity.*
- *Recycling of materials and end-of-life decommissioning.*

We acknowledge that concern has been raised about the extent of solar farm developments in Wiltshire and will also be writing separately to the Cabinet Member for Development Management, Strategic Planning and Climate Change, requesting that Wiltshire Council undertake a strategic review of solar energy generation potential within the county, to establish a strategy for the optimum capacity, taking account of Climate Emergency Commitment,

impact on communities and competing land priorities, and work with local communities, landowners and the energy sector to establish the optimum locations for this capacity.

Biddestone Parish Council – Support

Biddestone Parish Council supports the development of the Forest Gate solar farm. We recognise the urgency of the UK moving to 100% renewable energy generation to address the climate emergency, and large scale solar is an essential part of this. We are reassured by the developer's plans to mitigate the visual impact of the site and to deliver a significant net biodiversity gain, while allowing the low grade agricultural land to continue to be used for sheep grazing. We also recognise the significant community benefits that will be delivered locally. We urge Wiltshire Council to develop a comprehensive plan for renewable generation within Wiltshire of which these sites will form a part, but which will also need to include onshore wind generation.

Wiltshire Council Highways: No objection subject to conditions

The proposed revisions to the application relate to the re-introduction of previously proposed ecological enhancements in the form of three ponds in the eastern part of the site with areas of scrub planting, and other areas of scrub planting. The highway related matters are unchanged by the proposed amendments, and therefore I maintain my previous recommendation of no highway objection is raised subject to conditions.

Previous comments - following the submission of further detail / revised information, the previous objections have been removed.

With regard to the revised information received on 9th June 2022 in support of the above planning application. Such documents, in relation to highway and transportation matters, are: Further Post-Submission Response to Matters Raised by Consultees June 2022; Construction Traffic Management Plan, May 2022; Transport Statement, May 2022; and letter from Terence O'Rourke dated 1 June 2022 (Reference: 264801).

As previously stated, the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) informs the number of deliveries to be 1,283 over a 6 ½ month construction period, with an average of 8 deliveries (16 HGV movements) per day. The Deliveries Schedule at Appendix D indicates that week 4 of the construction programme will have the most deliveries with an average of 21 deliveries per day (42-two-way movements). The highest levels of weekly deliveries will fall within weeks 2 (121 deliveries), 3 (115 deliveries) and 4 (126 deliveries), and then towards the end of the build programme, at weeks 21 (112 deliveries) and 22 (110 deliveries).

In addition to the HGV movements to and from the site, it has been confirmed that a tractor and trailer will be required to move equipment and materials between the eastern and western parcels of land during the construction phase, through 21 one-way movements (42 two-way movements).

The CTMP has provided updated vehicle swept path analysis at the two points of access which indicate that the proposed form of access for the eastern parcel is suitable to accommodate HGV movements. The access to the western parcel will require an HGV to cross the opposing carriageway when exiting the site, and it is proposed that this will be managed by the Construction Traffic Manager.

On the basis that only one delivery to the western parcel will be made by a HGV for the delivery of a substation, this is considered acceptable. The other movements by tractor and trailer can be achieved without impacting on the opposing carriageway.

The total number of construction staff on site has been advised to be approximately 300, although a maximum of 200 staff are likely to be on site at any one time, with an average daily number of 100-150.

It is advised that staff will be accommodated in a local hotel and transported to the site by minibus, with other sub-contractors being encouraged to travel together to site. It is understood that it is anticipated that no more than 20-30 construction staff will be working at the western parcel at any one time, and such staff would be expected to be transported by minibus from the eastern parcel.

At the present time, it is understood that there is no appointed contractor, and therefore the exact numbers of contractor staff and associated vehicle movements cannot be confirmed. However, a Construction Management Statement, which would confirm the exact levels of contractor staff and vehicle movements, will be conditioned as part of any approval, and an application to discharge such a condition will be required to be submitted and approved prior to any construction commencing.

Conclusion - The revised Construction Traffic Management Plan submitted May 2022 has responded to the comments previously made in respect of the swept path analysis for HGV turning movements, and clarity of the movements and the management for both access points. The proposed timing of deliveries has been amended so as not to interfere with the main drop off and pick up times associated with St Mary's School on Rowden Hill. Having regard to the above, I would therefore recommend that no highway objection is raised subject to the imposition of conditions.

Wiltshire Council PRoW Officer: No objection to the application and no further comments based on the revised documents provided

Wiltshire Council Public Protection: No objection

Conditions should be imposed in relation to air quality during the construction phase and noise impact.

North Government Pipeline and Storage System (Exolum Pipeline): Objection withdrawn

Natural England: No objection

The proposed amendments to the original application are unlikely to have significantly different impacts on the natural environment than the original proposal. Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites.

WC Landscape Officer: No objection/comments;

I am happy with the revised landscape drawing that once again has the full ecological enhancements shown on it and have no further landscape objections to the revised scheme.

The site sits to the North of Pewsham and to the south of the Wilts and Berks Canal alignment within the Avon Vale Countryside Character Area. There is a PRoW that runs along the southern boundary of the site (CALW86). The site also sits across the Stanley Abbey Farm Meadows County Wildlife Sites which extends across to the east as well. The Derry Woods County Wildlife site runs along the southern boundary of the site up the northern slopes of Derry Hill. The Grade 1 listed Boward Park and Gardens is approximately 680m to the southeast. The site sits within the Calne Without Parish and is covered by the Calne Neighbourhood Plan.

The Plan states:

'The River Marden valley provides an important pastoral landscape with open views along the river valley. The valley is important in landscape terms with a locally distinctive pattern of natural features and contains important historical features, notably the line of the Wilts and Berks Canal and the former Chippenham to Calne railway line.'

Policy NE2 of the Calne Neighbourhood Plan also notes:

Proposals for new development must respect the pastoral setting of Calne & Calne Without and accordingly must assess and address, with mitigation where appropriate, their impact on:

- the sensitive rural edges of the town and villages where views both in and out and*
- linkages are an integral part of the character of these places; and*
- the physical separations between communities; and*
- the dominance of the natural features that provide the setting for these settlements*
- such as the valley setting of Calne below rural hilltops; and*
- the un-urbanised qualities of the country lanes; and*
- tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and*
- motion.*

Wherever possible, development should deliver enhancements to the landscape character including well integrated additional planting.

'In the River Marden Valley proposals for new development must assess and address, with mitigation where appropriate, their impact on the character, appearance, setting, recreational use and tranquillity of the valley ...'

I have read through the revised submission from the applicant and am pleased to see the additional landscape works suggested along the green infrastructure corridor across the site and at various other locations. I also note the confirmation of colour swatch for cabinets and battery storage containers. I would also ask that CCTV camera poles be similarly treated in RAL 6007 dark green. With regards my comments regarding the Wilts and Berks Canal the applicant has demonstrated that the Green Infrastructure associated with the alignment will be conserved and enhanced. I will let the heritage officer deal with any further outstanding issues regarding the setting of the canal.

I would also ask that it is confirmed that screw piles be used for the array foundations in order to reduce the amount of concrete required for the development and the subsequent easier restoration back to agricultural land at the end of the sites operational life. I am happy for these small outstanding issues to be covered as reserved pre-commencement clarifications.

Wiltshire Council - Lead Local Flood Authority: No objection

Although the developer has proposed to add three ponds to the site, these appear to have been included solely to deal with concerns about biodiversity as part of the environmental assessment. It might be possible for the developer to take advantage of these ponds to help create some extra capacity to offset the likely increase in runoff resulting from climate change factors (which was the main concern in the previously recommended drainage conditions), however no elements of the drainage benefits of these ponds is highlighted within the most recent documents submitted.

As such, there is no change to the previously recommended drainage conditions for the proposed development.

Support subject to conditions; the submitted FRA's have been reviewed. Core Policy 67 (flood risk) specifically states that "All new development will include measures to reduce the rate of rainwater run-off and improve rainwater infiltration to soil and ground (sustainable urban drainage) unless site or environmental conditions make these measures unsuitable". In Section 7.9 of the FRA it is stated that runoff will mimic the existing situation by draining towards the existing watercourse and field ditches. Details of the site drainage routes have not been provided and as such details of these field ditches and the interaction with the watercourse should be provided. Consideration could be given to utilising these existing drainage ditches to provide additional storage to mitigate the increase in runoff resulting from climate change (10% uplift). It is noted that a small proportion of the site is located within a high risk pluvial flood zone (1 in 30 year risk) and that solar panels and the associated infrastructure will be located in this area. Section 6 of the FRA states that the panels in these areas will be resilient to minor flooding and immersion and that all cabling/connections will be protected. Given the lack of infiltration potential over most of the site (mudstones and clays), the developer should ensure that the existing drainage ditches have suitable outlets into Pudding Brook. It should be ensured that these can cope with the 10% climate change uplift and achieve a 50% drain down time of less than 24 hours. This may require controlled outflows that allow runoff to reach the watercourse at a rate no higher than the existing site runoff for each plot. It is noted that the construction methodology is likely to depend on the time of year that construction commences, as such the details of the construction and a suitable management plan should be provided when there is more certainty. It is noted that pollution risks are not considered within the FRA.

Wiltshire Council Ecology – No objection

The re-instatement of 3 ponds and a scrape with associated scrub planting into the layout is welcomed and when considered alongside previously agreed mitigation will add to scheme wide biodiversity benefits. This is confirmed by submitted BNG calculation that predicts an overall gain of 17.53% in habitat units and 15.83% in hedge units. The conditions recommended in comments from Ecology made on 12/12/2022 are still relevant and should be applied to any approval however the listed compliance documents should be amended to ensure the most recently submitted versions are listed. I have no further comments on this application.

The reports submitted in support of the application were reviewed including the ecological and biodiversity survey work; whilst areas of land included the County Wildlife Site (CWS), concerns were raised at the proposed development and further detail was required.

The development covers 10 fields which, except for those within Stanley Abbey CWS, are reported as of low ecological value with hedges and mature/ veteran trees at the boundaries. The PV layout retains the majority of hedges and mature and veteran trees and in some locations provides buffers along features recognised as of value to biodiversity. Those measures to mitigate impacts on biodiversity and provide enhancement that have been incorporated into the development are welcomed. The application has now removed the Stanley Abbey Farm Meadows (CWS) from the scheme, which in turn has removed the objections on this part of the site.

Derry Wood CWS and Close Wood CWS are two areas of broadleaved ancient woodland that border the Site to the south. In line with current .GOV guidelines the development seeks to provide a minimum 15m no development buffer from the woodland edges to mitigate potential impacts on the trees and shrubs within the woodland and mobile species (such as bats that it supports). As requested this buffer must be clearly shown on the submitted plans.

An acceptable level of baseline survey for bats has been carried out and found the Site supports a bat assemblage of regional value including foraging and commuting Annex II species lesser horseshoe, greater horseshoe and barbastelle. The majority of bat activity is reported to be associated with the four fields within Stanley Meadows CWS specifically the hedges connecting woodland to the south with the old canal to the north. This area of land has now been removed from the scheme.

The protected species great crested newts have been recorded in a pond at the [north-west] boundary 50m no development buffer is provided around this pond and RAMs recommended to mitigate any residual impact on this species. These measures must be included within the CEMP.

Although a schedule of monitoring is provided in the Survey and Monitoring Section of the Biodiversity Management Plan (Wychwood Biodiversity, June 2021) it will need to be amended to address changes to the scheme required to lift the objection. This can be secured by condition.

A condition is required to ensure an appropriate decommissioning and restoration plan is submitted to and agreed with the council a minimum of 12 months prior to decommissioning. The condition must ensure the plan will supported by an impact assessment based on up to date baseline survey and carried out according to the current guidelines. It must set out clear aims of restoration to benefit key habitats and species.

Wilts and Berks Canal Trust: Comments

The northwestern boundary of the site adjoins the boundary of over 500m of the route of the Wilts & Berks Canal. The restoration of the canal is protected by Core Policy 53 and any aspect of the proposed solar farm scheme which contravenes this policy should not be permitted. WBCT needs to maintain access to the canal for restoration; such access should be conditioned. The new information does not change the views of the trust as expressed in previous correspondence. However, exchanges with the applicant since then have resulted in some clarification of the protection afforded to the canal restoration.

Canal and River Trust: No comments

Based on the information available, the Canal and River Trust do not own or manage any canals effected by the proposal and therefore have no comment to make on the proposal. Support the comments of the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust.

Gardens Trust: No comment;

This application which affects Bowood, an historic designed landscape of national importance which is included by Historic England on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade I.

We have considered the information provided in support of the application and on the basis of this confirm we do not wish to comment on the proposals at this stage. We would however emphasise that this does not in any way signify either our approval or disapproval of the proposals.

Historic England: Comments;

On the basis of this information, we do not wish to offer any comments. We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers, as relevant. It is not necessary for us to be consulted on this application again, unless there are material

changes to the proposals. However, if you would like detailed advice from us, please contact us to explain your request.

WC Conservation – Comments

..... I can see that the height of the panels has been reduce to 2.32m and that they are fixed. The video taken when travelling by road down the hill was carried out when leaves were still on the trees and stops at the point where the solar park would become visible to the right hand side of the road. The photomontages in the landscape visuals do not include the site closest to the heritage assets, but it is noted that the land is slightly lower than the road level, so the prominence of the solar panels would be less than would be the case if the ground level was equal or higher than the road.

The proposals would cause harm to the setting of the heritage assets through loss of rural character and agricultural appearance. The harm caused would be less than substantial, at the lower end of the scale.

It is for the planning officer to evaluate the proposals and decide whether the public benefits outweigh the harm that would be caused.

Should the officer be minded to approve these proposals, I would ask that the removal of farm be conditioned once it is no longer in use.

Wiltshire Council Archaeology: No objection

The archaeological potential of the site has already been characterised by an archaeological desk-based assessment and a geophysical survey and further refined by an archaeological trial trench evaluation undertaken as part of the pre-application process.

Taking on board the information produced from these stages of work we are in a position to advise that a PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS comprising three phases should be undertaken to mitigate damage to archaeological remains. This PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS should be secured via a condition to be attached to any planning permission that may be issued.

Additional consultations response:

Comments received have queried whether consultation with the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) has taken place. The following response is provided.

The application has been consulted on in accordance with the requirements of ‘Schedule 4’ (consultations before the grant of permission) as set out in “The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015”. The Order does not require the Dorset and Wiltshire fire and rescue service (DWFRS) to be consulted on the proposed scheme.

The Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) are not a statutory consultee and therefore it is not incumbent on the local planning authority to consult with them on a planning application. The proposal will need to meet the necessary requirements of the Building Regulations 2010 – Approved Document B (volume 2 – 2019 edition) as administered by the Building Control Authority and will need to comply with the statutory responsibilities that the DWFRS enforce.

National Farming Union (NFU) – Supports; the NFU responds on the agricultural implications for this scheme. The farming community continues to face formidable challenges with

increasing regulation, volatile markets and fluctuating farming returns; and in response farmers have to consider the resources available to them and new ways of developing their businesses. This will include the need for modern agricultural buildings / farming practices and adaptation through innovative opportunities. Playing a part of the green revolution which the agricultural sector has a vital role to play, not only by reducing the carbon footprint of farming practices as set out in the NFU Net Zero ambition, but also by utilising agricultural land to produce green energy in all its forms by working to the strengths of the farms offerings and location. The NFU supports this project because of the benefits it will have on the farming business. In addition, it will help to enhance natural capital and contribute towards national goals for renewable energy and greenhouse gas reductions such as the government target to achieve “Net Zero” for greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

8. Publicity

The application was advertised initially by way of a site notice and neighbour notification letters. An advert was also placed in the press for the application. There have been a series of amendments to the application which have been consulted upon.

Included at appendix 2 of this report are representations, in full, made by Local Councillors both supporting and objecting to this scheme.

The application has been the subject of consultation and publicity, including site notices, press notices, neighbour notifications and publications on the Council's website. Representations have been received from approximately 155 third party objectors and approximately 229 third party supporters, although it should be noted that the overall total number of representations received exceeds these figures due to repeats at each re-consultation.

The following is a summary of the points raised by third parties -

OBJECT

Contrary to Policy

- Industrialisation of farming land is an unacceptable use
- Land should be retained for growing crops
- Out of line with the Governments strategy to combat climate change, not part of the Government's 10 point plan to combat Climate Change

Need/Location

- Focus should be on off shore wind and protecting and restoring our natural environment
- Solar panels should be put on roof tops and not agricultural land
- Should be on brownfield land
- Land should be used for growing trees
- Solar panels inefficient and unreliable
- Grade 3a / 3b land should be protected until technology is better
- What happens to energy production in 40 years time when the land is returned to nature
- Not supported by local residents
- No need for further solar farms in Wiltshire

Drainage / Flooding

- Site prone to local flooding

- More panels on a smaller site will lead to an increase in surface water runoff / flooding

Ecology / Environment

- Panels cannot be easily recycled
- Cleaning agents will impact on water courses etc.
- Reject the application and there will be no harm to the environment or need for compensation
- Negative impact on wildlife
- Negative impact on kites, red kite, kestrels, grazing deer and owls
- Chemicals within the panels will leach out into the water system and environment
- Environmental impact
- Cause soil erosion
- Loss of habitat to wildlife
- Submitted detail is speculative, true impact unknown

Pollution/Environment

- Noise pollution
- Air pollution
- Unacceptable background noise
- Impact on public rights of way
- Loss of green infrastructure
- Pollutants from fires on the proposed units
- Safety issues relating to storage batteries
- Disposal of waste, no recycling of solar panels

Neighbour Amenity

- Loss of views
- Impact from noise
- Impact on local residents and visitors to the area looking out over the industrial style development
- Impact on adjoining land uses (keeping of horses)
- Noise and air pollution
- Safety of local residents from accidents involving batteries
- Loss of privacy from CCTV security cameras
- Glint and Glare issues
- Wildlife given more consideration than neighbouring properties

Landscape and Visual Impact

- Scale of development – visual impact
- Regular arrangement, long rows, industrialisation of the countryside
- Scale too large, result in a visual impact, visually intrusive
- Over power the hamlet
- Does not respect character of the village
- Discordant element at odds with the historic and mature landscape
- Battery storage buildings are ugly and should be buried
- Security fencing and measures will give a prison impression
- Visible from surrounding public view points
- Impact on users of the public right of ways

- Site is on rising land that will make it highly visible within this landscape
- Land is flat but surrounding area is hills, site will be highly visible
- Eyesore within the area
- Loss of 'greenfield land'
- In an area of outstanding natural beauty
- Cumulative impact
- Proposed planting will not be effective for many years
- Inadequate/ineffective screening
- Effect is permanent change to the landscape character
- Coalescence of villages, rejected under application 15/11153/OUT
- Sprawl of development
- Green space will be lost forever

Impact on heritage

- Impact on heritage, strict rules on allowing changes to their setting
- Many homes and building on the A4 and in Old Derry Hill are Grade II listed, proposal will impact on their setting
- The proposed screening does prevent impact on heritage or its setting
- Impact on archaeology

Highways impact

- Increase in traffic movements
- Access is in a dangerous location near a bend on the A4
- Increase in traffic will be detrimental to highway safety
- Flooding from solar panels on to the A4
- Glare from panels will impact drivers
- Impact on highways safety, A4 is a fast road

Other matters

- Revised plans do not address objections raised to date
- Lack of details in support of the application, fire risk assessment, etc
- Lithium batteries can catch fire
- Pollution to the atmosphere
- Reduce food security, through loss of agricultural land
- Land should be used for the growing of crops
- Carbon footprint, unethical production and transport of these products
- Cumulative carbon impact
- Solar technology is not sustainable
- Parish Council does not represent local residents
- Food security crisis, agricultural land should be reserved for farming
- Cable route should form part of the application as an integral part of the development
- Ineffective public consultation
- Alternative technologies such as tidal, wind and hydroelectric more appropriate
- Plant more trees for carbon catchment
- Support cleaner, greener, carbon free fuel, such as nuclear sites, wind turbine and hydro
- Surface water flooding occurs

Note: Comments made relating to anti-corruption / anti bribery within the submitted third party responses suggesting monetary payments to councils on awarding planning consent is

inaccurate and unfounded. A community sum may be payable between the developers and the parish council for the benefit of the community; such sums however do not form a part of this application and are not payable to Wiltshire Council.

CPRE – Objection.

The site lies in open countryside and the proposal is for a commercial generating and storage electricity development within the countryside, which, will change the character of the environment for at least 40 years. The changes would impose on the landscape substantial built form all features that would be incongruously different from the present land-cover of the site. No need for this site within this location and no evidence of alternative sites has been offered. The availability of a grid connection within the vicinity is not in itself justification. Whilst temporary the period of 40 years is in effect permanent and leave the land vulnerable to future development. The need for land for food production will become increasingly acute. Claims that the land will be reversed to its former state after 40 years are insufficient to mitigate the scale of permanence and reference to mitigation impact admits by definition that those impacts would be of sufficient severity to need relief. New green planting would be required along the hedgerows etc to mitigate the incongruent fencing, panels, structures and development, this would not allow for the existing open vistas to be enjoyed or support biodiversity. The Government's Planning Practice Guidance emphasises:

- *the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections.*
- *cumulative impacts require particular attention, especially the increasing impact that wind turbines and large-scale solar farms can have on landscape and local amenity as the number of turbines and solar arrays in an area increases.*

The cumulative impacts of the development on the area in association with other solar arrays and other built form will have an adverse impact and add to the sequential cumulative effects. This can build up over a period of time. It is considered that the area is already overloaded with solar developments to the extent that there has been a substantial alteration of the landscape resource and views or visual amenity. The accumulation of effects over time from successive individual developments has generated a sense of "industrialisation" alien to the character of the surrounding countryside.

The application is a commercial venture by Eden Renewables Ltd. It is not community-led, though considerable efforts have been made to consult local residents, community funds totalling £800,000 over the 40-year life of the development have been promised, and 20% community ownership has been offered.

The scheme would not generate a reliable source of renewable energy for the local community but would output to the National Grid. Claims of employment are not specific and unsupported and given the nature of development unlikely to be local.

The fact that there are existing arrays within 10km of this site does not support the addition of a further array. On the contrary, precisely because the proposed development would have an incremental effect on the industrialising impact of previous planning decisions, this proposal should be rejected. The limited benefits do not outweigh the significant harm.

SUPPORT

Policy

- Supports the renewable energy policy

Need / Location

- Wiltshire Council declared a climate emergency
- Climate emergency, urgently need renewable energy to secure the UK's energy supply and to reduce carbon emissions
- The land used is low grade (3b) agricultural land
- Community fund of over £800,000 for the lifetime of the project
- Grazing of the land below the panels can continue, win/win
- Farm diversification
- Solar farm gives farmers a steady income, secure for the future
- Solar fast to install and genuinely low carbon
- This site lends itself well to the installation of a solar farm. It is in the south of the country and so has more sun than further north

Environment

- Climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and health of the planet
- Solar helps to reduce climate change
- Generate enough power for over 13800 homes and save over 20,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year
- Make a major contribution to Wiltshire Council's 2030 Net Zero target

Highways

- Solar panels are inert, temporary, recyclable, quiet and so vehicle movements on site would be minimal.

Ecology

- Solar farms have limited impact on biodiversity and can be used concurrently with animal grazing or wildflower growth
- Boost biodiversity gain through wildflower meadows
- Enhanced tree and hedge planting
- Land left to go fallow, will rest it and enhance soil quality
- The project also helps to address another urgent problem, that of the extinction of species
- Wildflower meadows and hedge planting will increase biodiversity, and help support the insect populations we depend on for our food supply
- Bird life and diversity will be improved

Visual impact

- Protect our green spaces; sacrificing a piece of land now will ensure we protect all our other greenery
- considerable steps to minimise the visual impact of the farm have been taken
- Lies next to the busy A4 road so is not impacting on what might be called unspoiled landscape
- Screening will minimise any visual impact
- Worrying about a few panels in a field, or how they look, is insignificant compared to the damage of floods and harms of drought
- If Chippenham is able to build massive housing estates with properties that are not built with solar panels and EV charging etc., how can there be an objection on to this proposal on the grounds of spoiling the countryside.

Other

- Educational opportunities
- Calne Without Parish Council and a great many local people coming out in support of this application

- Opportunity for the local community to invest in the scheme and share the benefits
- Solar farms produce electricity 4 times cheaper than gas
- Contribution to 'green' jobs
- Partnered with Zero Chippenham and there are opportunities for community share offers as well as the educational and other community help that will be made available to the directly affected community
- Many people facing fuel poverty as a result of rising energy costs
- My house is immediately across the A4 from the proposed site. I have no objection.
- I object to not having a future. I really object to my children not having a future
- It keeps me, my children and grandchildren alive in the future

Zero Chippenham – Support

Climate change is an existential threat to all of us and is happening faster than predicted: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-57988023>; <https://rmets.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/joc.7285>

Decarbonisation needs to take place urgently and at scale, and we all need to play our part. Wiltshire Council, Chippenham Town Council and surrounding town and parish councils have declared a Climate Emergency and committed to working towards decarbonising the county and their local areas by 2030.

Zero Chippenham is a local community group dedicated to achieving net zero carbon through practical action. We have our own Solar Panel Community Discount Scheme (working with local residents in Chippenham and Calne, with the support of Sustainable Calne) and a Tree Planting Scheme, working with local farmers and landowners, and the Town Council. We have been in discussions with Eden Renewables regarding a community/ shared ownership stake in Forest Gate Solar Farm of up to 20%. Our involvement (along with any Community Energy partners) would ensure that a share of the financial benefits would be reinvested for the good of the local community and local economy. Local people would be able to take a stake in the project and earn a fair return. It would help ensure that the local community would be able to positively influence the wider environmental benefits of the project.

Our understanding of the benefits of the proposed application include:

- *The generation of green electricity that will make a significant contribution to decarbonising Wiltshire, potentially generating enough green electricity to power 13,800 homes and saving approximately 20,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year;*
- *The use of single axis solar tracker technology to maximise efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme;*
- *Substantial biodiversity net gain (27% habitat and 13% hedgerow) with wildflower meadows to benefit insects/ wider pollination benefits;*
- *Improved access, including a new bridleway and new footpath around the perimeter;*
- *The opportunity for local people to take a stake in the project and earn a fair return via the Community Energy element of the project;*
- *A community fund that can be reinvested in local climate change, social and environmental projects;*
- *Potentially more than £800,000 of local benefits;*
- *A well thought out plan for the site, which would seek to minimise landscape impacts and maximise social and environmental enhancements.*

From a planning perspective, our understanding is that:

- *The application complies with the NPPF and Wiltshire Council's Core Policy 42;*
- *It supports Wiltshire Council's Local Plan in achieving the requirements of the Climate Change Act, which require it to align with national carbon reduction targets (ref. letter from Client Earth to Wiltshire Council in Sept. 2019)*
- *It supports Wiltshire Council's Climate Emergency declaration and commitment to decarbonise the County;*
- *It would be sited on low grade (ALC grade 3b) agricultural land that has relatively low agricultural value;*
- *It would continue to use the land for sheep grazing throughout the life of the project;*
- *It is guaranteed to return the site to agricultural use after the scheme expires (in 40 years);*
- *It will protect this land from urban development and support Wiltshire Council's Green and Blue Infrastructure strategy.*

The community energy sector spent over £3 million in community benefits in the UK in 2020 but it has become harder for communities to develop their own solar schemes since the withdrawal of government subsidies, hence partnering with an experienced developer like Eden Renewables is a sensible way forward for ensuring local involvement and benefits. Eden Renewables' ethos prioritises community benefits, biodiversity and ongoing agricultural use, alongside clean energy, and aligns well with that of Zero Chippenham. Forest Gate Solar Farm, with its close proximity to Chippenham, should provide a good opportunity for local people to get directly involved in supporting the transition to net zero carbon by generating renewable energy in sustainable way.

Should the application be granted planning permission, we anticipate further discussions with Eden Renewables and developing an opportunity for local people to invest and benefit from this initiative. Our involvement, and that of any community energy partner organisations, will be dependent on viability of the project and Eden Renewables keeping its commitments in terms of the scheme's deployment and the benefits stated in the application.

9. Planning Considerations

9.1 Principle of Development

The NPPF advocates the primacy of the development plan and, first and foremost, decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise (Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004). Any conflict identified with development plan policy must be attributed the appropriate weight in consideration of the planning balance.

Turning to the development plan (the WCS), the site lies within countryside and Core Policy 42 of the strategy supports the development of 'standalone renewable energy installations', 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. Biodiversity*
- v. The historic environment including the 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. As such it is considered that points i, iv, v, vi, vii and viii should carry the greater consideration and will be covered within this report. The principle of standalone renewable energy is accepted provided the relevant criteria are met.

The provision of standalone renewable energy installations is supported in both the NPPF and CCNP (Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan). Paragraph 152 of the NPPF states that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate. It should help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

The CCNP, which has undergone public/community consultation and was made in 2018, indicates the community aspirations and Town and Parish Council ambitions to develop opportunities for the production of renewable energy. The creation of opportunities for developing renewable and sustainable energy sources in Calne and Calne Without has been a priority for the Town Council in recent years. Ground solar technology is recognised as a technology of great potential and sites within the Calne and Calne Without area have been recognised with potential for standalone Solar's including at Forest Gate.

Locally, Wiltshire Council has made a firm commitment to becoming a carbon neutral council by 2030 and the Council's adopted ECO (Energy, Change and Opportunity) Strategy sets out a clear commitment to increase the uptake of renewable energy. Action to tackle climate change through energy efficiency and renewable energy generation are intrinsic to how Wiltshire Council wants to develop, as is set out in the Council's Climate Strategy Delivery Plan 2022-2024.

Paragraph 158 of the NPPF 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 cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and

b) Approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas'.

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'.

Accordingly, it is clear that the principle of renewable and low carbon energy development is supported in principle by the Government at national level and at a local level by the relevant Core Policy (42) of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and by the community's aspirations and ambitions within the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan.

9.2 Landscape and Visual Impact

Core Policy 57 'Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping' of the WCS lays down the requirement for good design. Core Policy 51 'Landscape' of the Wiltshire Core Strategy outlines that development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character. The policy requires applications to demonstrate how development proposals conserve and where possible enhance landscape character through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures.

The site sits to the south-east of Pewsham and to the south of the Wilts and Berks Canal alignment within the Avon Vale Countryside Character Area. To clarify, the site does not fall within any protected landscape designation or within the setting of any protected landscape designation, such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There is a PRoW that runs along the southern boundary of the site (CALW86). The site also sits south of the Stanley Abbey Farm Meadows County Wildlife Sites which extends across to the east as well. The Derry Woods County Wildlife site runs along the southern boundary of the site up the northern slopes of Derry Hill. The Grade I listed Boward Park and Gardens is approximately 680m to the southeast. The site sits within the Calne Without Parish and is covered by the Calne Neighbourhood Plan. Views into and across the site from public rights of way and public vantage points exist and the creation of the solar farm will change how this landscape is perceived.

Therefore, the concerns raised by local residents at the potential visual impact that the development of this site would have on the landscape and wider area is acknowledged. These concerns are that the scale of development, with uniform panels aligned in rows across the site would create a visual impact on the area out of character with the rural landscape and create an incongruent development which would be highly visible within this location; the screening is considered inadequate and will not be effective for many years and ineffective out of season; the level of impact will be high and a permanent change on the landscape; the cumulative impact of the panels, structures and fencing would create an eyesore in this location and sprawl coalescing the built form together, as reflected in the decision of application 15/11153/OUT for new housing to the north of this site, which was turned down at appeal for the visual impact¹.

Letters of support recognise that considerable steps to minimise the visual impact have been taken, '... we need more clean energy, we must protect our green spaces and sacrificing a piece of land now will ensure we protect all our other greenery'; 'Not impact on unspoiled landscape'; 'Worrying about how they look is insignificant compared to the harm of climate change'.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body, whose statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development. Comments received from

¹ The Inspector's report, in fact, states "40. The Council consider that the proposal would reduce the separation between Chippenham and Derry Hill to the south east. The two areas are linked by London Road and Old Derry Hill. There is some sporadic development along this stretch of London Road and a cluster of dwellings in the vicinity of the junction between London Road and Old Derry Hill. Whilst this area has a distinctly rural character, there would remain sufficient separation to prevent any coalescence of the two settlements."

Natural England (NE) based on the plans submitted, considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites and as such do not object to this scheme.

Comments received from the Council's Landscape expert raise no objection to the proposed scheme. The revised submission includes the additional landscape works suggested along the green infrastructure corridor across the site and at various other locations. It is also noted that the confirmation of colour swatch for cabinets and battery storage containers has been provided. If approved, it is recommended that the CCTV camera poles be similarly treated in RAL 6007 dark green.

In landscape character terms, the site is agricultural with fields bordered on one side by the A4 with a business park, housing and a car sales room to the northwest. There are drainage ditches within it and the site is bound and subdivided by existing field hedging and trees – these features contribute to the character of the site and are features characteristic of the wider landscape type. Development of the field would see the loss of the site's agrarian character for the temporary period that the solar farm will be in operation. However, there would be no actual change to existing landscape features. With regard to the existing land uses adjoining the site, any sense of tranquillity within this location is recognised as degraded, for example from a truly isolated location.

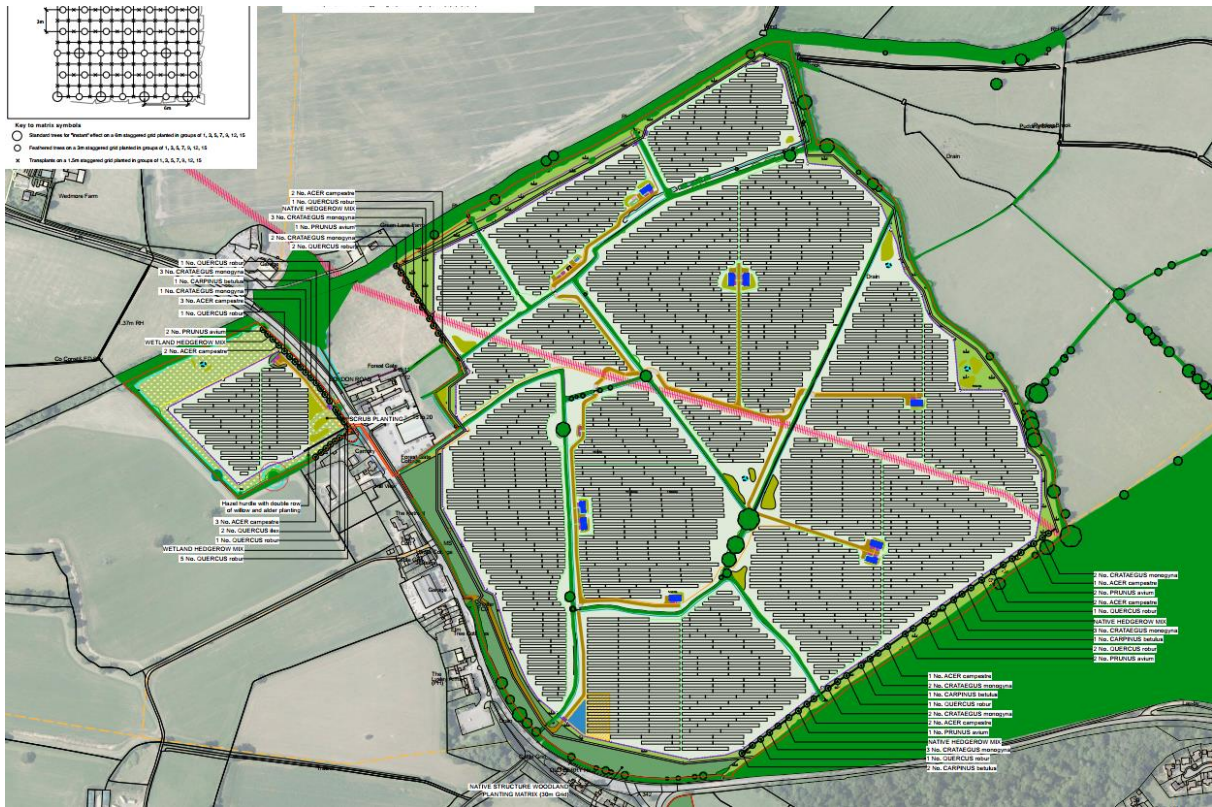
The scheme proposes units no higher than 3.2 metres and the associated cabins / containers no more than 3.6 metres high (customer cabin) and finished in a dark green colour; although each cabin / container will be set on a 500mm foundation. The proposed structures would be generally hedgerow height (for a tall hedgerow) and will be further screened through the use of trees, including woodland planting close to London Road and at the bottom of the field close to the junction of Old Derry Hill and New Road.

Cumulative impacts on visual amenity are where combined visibility occurs where the observer is able to see two or more developments from one viewpoint. Assessments should consider the combined effect of all solar farms and any other form of major development which are (or would be) visible from relevant viewpoints. Reference has been made to other solar farms and major housing development within the area, however, when travelling through the area and when viewing this site from more distance views there are no other solar arrays in view.

It is recognised that these types of development are very much low level and within this low lying, landscape with the degree of separation and intervening features between this site and any other major built form they are not experienced as a whole. On this basis it is considered that there is not a significant cumulative landscape effect through the proposed scheme.

This view is supported by the conclusions of the cumulative visual assessment that there will be no adverse cumulative landscape and visual impacts arising from the proposal with the identified similar development. As described any visual impact is experienced at a more local level from adjoining vantage points and some limited longer distance views. This conclusion is also supported by the comments received from both Natural England and the Council's Landscape expert both of which do not object to the scheme.

The scheme will retain much of the existing hedgerow and trees across the site and will enhance existing boundaries with additional 'native hedgerow' planting, interspersed with trees including the area of Woodland alongside London Road and close to the junction of Old Derry Hill and New Road. The existing hedgerows / trees will screen the proposed units to a degree and will break up views across the site. The enhanced and additional planting will also in time screen the development and will add to green corridors within this area. There will remain vantage points, albeit limited, from which parts of the site will remain viewable. The solar farm and planting will have ongoing management and maintenance.



Planting Plan

The application site does not lie within a protected landscape and it is considered that the proposal would not affect the setting of a protected landscape. The proposal retains much of the existing field pattern and boundary hedges and it proposes to reinforce these with new and supplementary planting.

It is recognised that the proposed development would temporarily alter the local landscape character. The greatest visual changes arising from the proposed development will be localised, registered by the nearest receptors along the adjoining rights of way and from some distant views from the north. However, it is agreed with the LVIA findings that no significant major adverse landscape or visual effects are likely to result from this development proposal apart from the obvious temporary change to the character and land use of the site itself resulting from the corresponding temporary loss of green field countryside.

Core Policy 42 states that proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site specific constraints, of which landscape impact is one. Core Policy 51 requires all new development proposals to conserve Wiltshire's landscape character and provide sufficient mitigation as far as possible to combat any negative effects. It is considered that through appropriate landscaping that the level of visual impact has been mitigated as far as possible for a scheme of this nature and there would be no unacceptable impact on wider landscape character. On balance the scheme is considered to comply with policy.

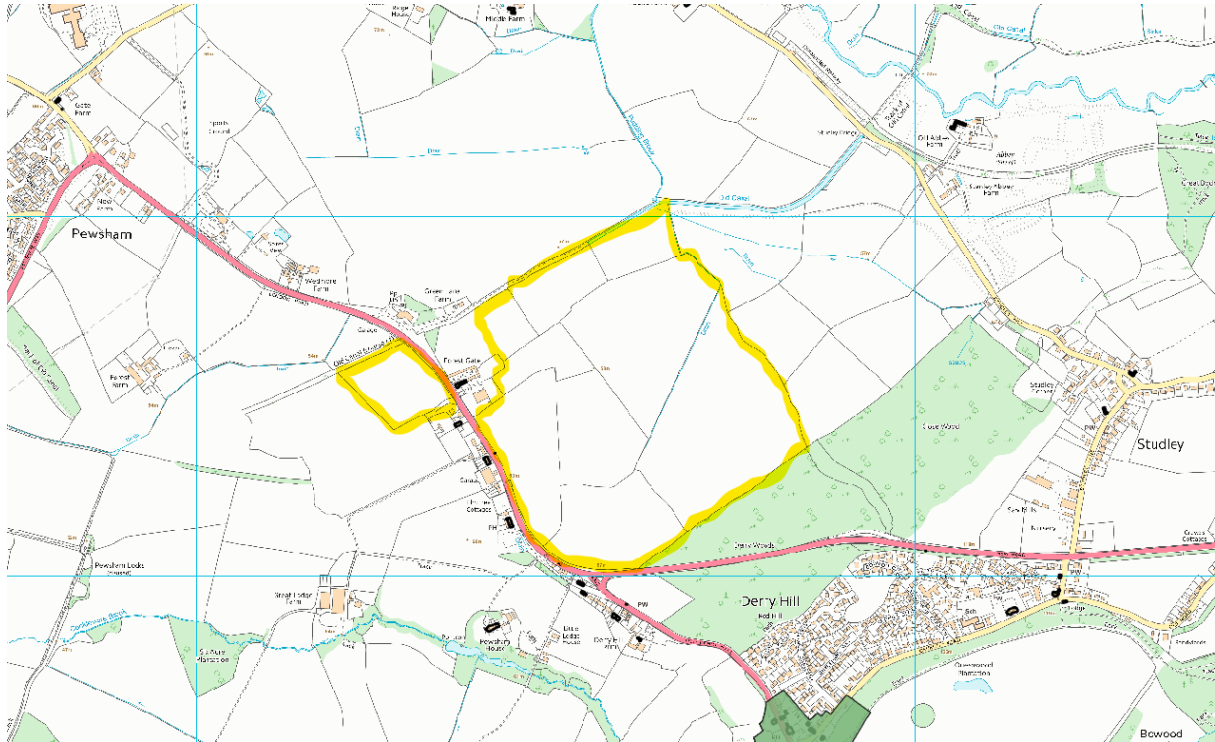
9.3 Heritage Impact

In determining this application, the Council has a statutory duty under section 16(2), 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard

to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and conservation areas or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Concerns have been raised at the potential for impact on the setting of listed buildings around the site. Concerns are also raised at the potential for impact on archaeology across the site.

There are heritage assets within the general area, including Grade II Listed Buildings and a Conservation Area (ref. Map below).



Map showing heritage in relation to the site – site outlined in yellow; bold black denotes location of listed buildings and green (darker shade) to the south is Derry Hill CA

Nearby Listed buildings –

On the south-western boundary of the site are a number of Grade II Listed properties. On the site boundary is the grade II listed 'Milestone' (opposite Upper Cottage). On the same side of the highway is 'Forest Gate Farmhouse and barn', also grade II listed and which lies approx. 70m from the boundary of the site. The properties on the opposite side of the A4 facing part of the site lie at distances ranging between 33 and 48m to the site boundary. These are 4, 5 Old Derry Hill, The Lysley Arms, Jeroans Upper Cottage, and Hill View.

These assets are all of domestic and/or 'country-cottage' scale with settings which reflect these circumstances. The significance of the assets is defined principally by their individual ages, characters and form rather than their group value or relationship with their wider surroundings, albeit that they are typically rural buildings/structures with a historical connection to the highway.

The solar panels and infrastructure proposed would be set away from the assets, in most cases on the opposite side of the intervening A4 and/or with wide intervening 'green' buffer zones and fences. The topography of the land slopes down from the A4, and this adds to the sense of separation. The CO acknowledges the revisions to the scheme that have taken place, including a reduction in the overall area of the proposed solar farm within the vicinity of

the assets, having fixed panels instead of rotating, and restricting the height of the panels to 2.32 metres. These changes are in response to the CO's original comments recommending that using solar panels that sit lower to the ground or are smaller so that they are lower would make them slightly less visible, thereby reducing the impact. The CO, therefore, raises no objections to the revised application insofar as it relates to these local assets, which have been identified as Forest Gate Farm and Hill View. They conclude that any 'harm' is 'less than substantial, and in the context of the A4 and other more contemporary developments in the locality – such as the car showrooms – is at the lower end of 'less than substantial' in any event. It should be noted that the applicant's desk-based assessment identifies two further listed buildings which would be similarly affected, which are Jeroans Cottage and The Lysley Arms. The assessment concludes that the harm would be less than substantial, at the lower end.

Derry Hill Conservation Area –

The CO originally considered that the site is very prominent in the views to and from the hills, but cannot be seen with the Derry Hill Conservation Area itself. The significance of the Derry Hill Conservation Area is defined by the close-knit grouping of mainly domestic-scale, historic buildings around the junction of Church Road with Devizes Road and Old Derry Hill, with the grand entrance gate/lodge to the Bowood Estate ('The Golden Gates') being the one exceptional, and dominating, feature. As the junction is at the CA's centre with the majority of the historic buildings facing inwards towards it, it is not considered that the outlying and distant application site has anything other than a neutral impact on the CA's significance. Whilst the grand Golden Gates building (which is also separately Listed Grade II*) is intentionally designed to be visible in more distant views from low lying land to the north and north west, those distant views towards the building are of an expansive hillside with the building atop the wooded hill, and in such a vast and panoramic situation the proposed development would not be a distraction to this view and there would be no impact on its significance.

Other conservation impacts –

Concerns were raised at how visible the site would be whilst driving along the A4 from Calne to Pewsham. The applicant has provided a video of this route which demonstrates that the site is not visible until you reach the bottom of the hill. The CO identifies that the video was taken when travelling by road down the hill and was carried out when leaves were still on the trees and stops at the point where the solar park would become visible to the righthand side of the road. During the case officer's site visit it was observed that on approaching the site from Calne along New Road (the A4) down adjacent to 'Derry Woods' the site does not become visible until reaching the bottom of the hill and looking north. It is considered that, having regard to the topography of the land and the existing wooded areas, that the site is not visible until you reach its southern point and then it appears in views to the right of the A4 whilst looking in a northerly direction.

Harm verses public benefit –

Para 199 of the NPPF states that *“when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance”*.

As the proposals will cause some harm, albeit less than substantial and at the lower end of the spectrum, paragraph 202 of the NPPF is engaged. Para 202 states that *“where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated*

heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use”.

As already set out, the development would result in some level of harm to the setting of heritage assets and a consequent impact on their significance. Given that there would be no direct impact on historic fabric, and that the key heritage significance of the assets would be preserved, the harm can be taken as “less than substantial harm” for the purposes of interpreting the NPPF, and at the lower end of the harm spectrum. In the context of paragraph 202 of the NPPF, the public benefits of the proposal would include the provision of a renewable energy scheme generating in the region of 49.9MW that would power in excess of 13,000 homes and save over 20,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year. There would also be net gain for biodiversity arising from the planned landscaping and ecological proposals which would be a substantial benefit. It is considered that the financial investment and the direct and indirect jobs during the construction phase, with a smaller number of jobs when the development is operational, would be a benefit of the scheme. The economic benefits are considered to carry a moderate weight in favour of the proposal. These public benefits outweigh the less than substantial harm to the built heritage assets identified, and accordingly tip the balance in favour of the proposal in the context of this particular consideration.

9.4 Archaeology

Third party concerns raised at the potential for impact on archaeology within the site are acknowledged. Due to conflict between the proposed development and the potential for archaeology on the county wildlife site to the northeast of the original site area, a removal of this area of land from the scheme was carried out.

An Archaeological and Heritage Assessment has been undertaken in support of the application. Comments received from the Council’s Archaeologist raise no objection to the proposed scheme subject to condition. The scheme has undergone significant revision following extensive discussion on the inclusion of a county wildlife section adjoining the site; subsequent to those discussions this area of land has now been removed. The archaeological potential of the site has already been characterised by an archaeological desk-based assessment and a geophysical survey and further refined by an archaeological trial trench evaluation undertaken as part of the pre-application process. Taking on board the information produced from these stages of work we are in a position to advise that a programme of archaeological works comprising three phases should be undertaken to mitigate damage to archaeological remains. This programme of archaeological works should be secured via a condition to be attached to any planning permission that may be issued.

It is recognised that further archaeological investigation relating to the cable run when an appropriate application is submitted would be required. It is clear, based on the Archaeologist’s comments, that the application can be approved subject to conditions, with appropriate mitigation where necessary to meet the requirements of both local and national policy.

9.5 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.

Concerns have been raised at the potential for impact on flooding from the development site onto the adjoining highway.

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.

Comments from the LLFA drainage officer support the scheme subject to conditions, relating to further detail into surface water disposal, including runoff rates, storage volumes, and a construction management plan. The submitted FRA's have been reviewed. In Section 7.9 of the FRA it is stated that runoff will mimic the existing situation by draining towards the existing watercourse and field ditches. However, details of the site drainage routes have not been provided and as such details of these field ditches and the interaction with the watercourse should be provided. Consideration could be given to utilising these existing drainage ditches to provide additional storage to mitigate the increase in runoff resulting from climate change (10% uplift). It is noted that a small proportion of the site is located within a high risk pluvial flood zone (1 in 30 year risk) and that solar panels and the associated infrastructure will be located in this area. Section 6 of the FRA states that the panels in these areas will be resilient to minor flooding and immersion and that all cabling/connections will be protected. Given the lack of infiltration potential over most of the site (mudstones and clays), the developer should ensure that the existing drainage ditches have suitable outlets into Pudding Brook. It should be ensured that these can cope with the 10% climate change uplift and achieve a 50% drain down time of less than 24 hours. This may require controlled outflows that allow runoff to reach the watercourse at a rate no higher than the existing site runoff for each plot. It is noted that the construction methodology is likely to depend on the time of year that construction commences, as such the details of the construction and a suitable management plan should be provided when there is more certainty. It is noted that pollution risks are not considered within the FRA.

Based on these comments the request for further detail by condition is considered necessary and reasonable to impose and the applicant has indicated that they are willing to accept the recommended conditions. With such conditions in place to control the points identified within the LLFA comments, it is considered that the development would accord with the requirements of paragraph 167 of the NPPF that is, that the development would not lead to increased flood risks elsewhere and with Core Policy 67 of the WCS.

9.6 Ecological Impact

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 (CP) 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 175 d) and the government has signalled its intention to bring forward legislation to require development to deliver 10% net biodiversity gain.

Objections received raise concerns at the negative impact on ecology, biodiversity and the environment. There will be a loss of habitat to wildlife and the uncertainty post decommission. The scheme could cause soil erosion and potential pollution through chemicals leaching into the soil. This is countered through supporting arguments that the development will result in biodiversity net gain through new habitat creation (tree and hedgerow planting and wetland

creation), enhancements to soil quality where permanent grassland will be created making a major contribution to tackling both the climate emergency and the ecological emergency.

Comments received from Natural England do not object to the proposed scheme in relation to the impact on protected nature conservation sites.

The application has been submitted with supporting full ecological assessments, biodiversity management plan, mitigation measures, tree survey, ecology biodiversity metric and planting plan. The submitted reports/plans have informed the conclusions reached on this scheme.

The application has been reviewed including the ecological assessment and species specific and habitat survey work. The application has undergone extensive discussion due to the conflict between the county wildlife site, archaeology and the proposed development; as such, the scheme has been reduced in scale removing the CWS out of the development area.

Comments originally received from the WC Ecologist identify that concerns were raised at the proposed development and further detail was required. The development covers 10 fields which, are reported as of low ecological value with hedges and mature/veteran trees at the boundaries. The PV layout retains the majority of hedges and mature and veteran trees, provides buffers along features recognised as of value to biodiversity and includes habitat creation in the form of new woodland, hedge and scrub planting, the creation of wetland features and instillation of bat and birds boxes. Those measures to mitigate impacts on biodiversity and provide enhancement that have been incorporated into the development are welcomed. The application has now removed the Stanley Abbey Farm Meadows (CWS) from the scheme, which in turn has removed the previous objections on this part of the site.

Derry Wood CWS and Close Wood CWS are two areas of broadleaved ancient woodland that border the Site to the south. In line with current government guidelines the development seeks to provide a minimum 15m no development buffer from the woodland edges to mitigate potential impacts on the trees and shrubs within the woodland and mobile species (such as bats that it supports).

An acceptable level of baseline survey for bats has been carried out and found the Site supports a bat assemblage of regional value including foraging and commuting Annex II species lesser horseshoe, greater horseshoe and barbastelle. The majority of bat activity is reported to be associated with the four fields within Stanley Meadows CWS specifically the hedges connecting woodland to the south with the old canal to the north. The fields in the CWS have now been removed from the scheme and the connecting hedges and old canal are afforded an extended 10m buffer.

The protected species great crested newts have been recorded in a pond at the north-western boundary. A 50m no development buffer is provided around this pond and RAMs recommended to mitigate any residual impact on this species. These measures must be included within the CEMP.

Although a schedule of monitoring is provided in the Survey and Monitoring Section of the Biodiversity Management Plan (Wychwood Biodiversity, June 2021) it will need to be amended to address changes to the scheme required to lift the objection. This can be secured by condition. A condition is required to ensure an appropriate decommissioning and restoration plan is submitted to and agreed with the council a minimum of 12 months prior to decommissioning. The condition must ensure the plan will supported by an impact assessment based on up to date baseline survey and carried out according to the current guidelines. It must set out clear aims of restoration to benefit key habitats and species.

It is considered that the PV layout retains the majority of hedges and mature and veteran trees and provides buffers along features recognised as of value to biodiversity. Measures to mitigate impacts on biodiversity and provide enhancements are identified: these include habitat creation and enhancement of grassland. Such measures are considered acceptable and welcomed. Subject to condition, the WC Ecologist is satisfied that in combination, these measures will ensure that the site retains the functionality of its habitats for wildlife and will result in no net loss in biodiversity. The conditions are considered reasonable and necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms and in order to comply with both Local and national policy.

It is considered that subject to these conditions, 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. It is considered that the proposed development accords with Core Strategy Policy 50 and requirements in Section 15 of the NPPF.

9.7 Agricultural Land

Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of higher quality. For planning applications, specific consultations with Natural England are required under the Development Management Procedure Order in relation to best and most versatile agricultural land. These are for non-agricultural development proposals that are not consistent with an adopted local plan and involve the loss of twenty hectares or more of the best and most versatile land. Whilst this site does not fall within either of the above criteria, Natural England (NE) has been consulted on this application as it is EIA development.

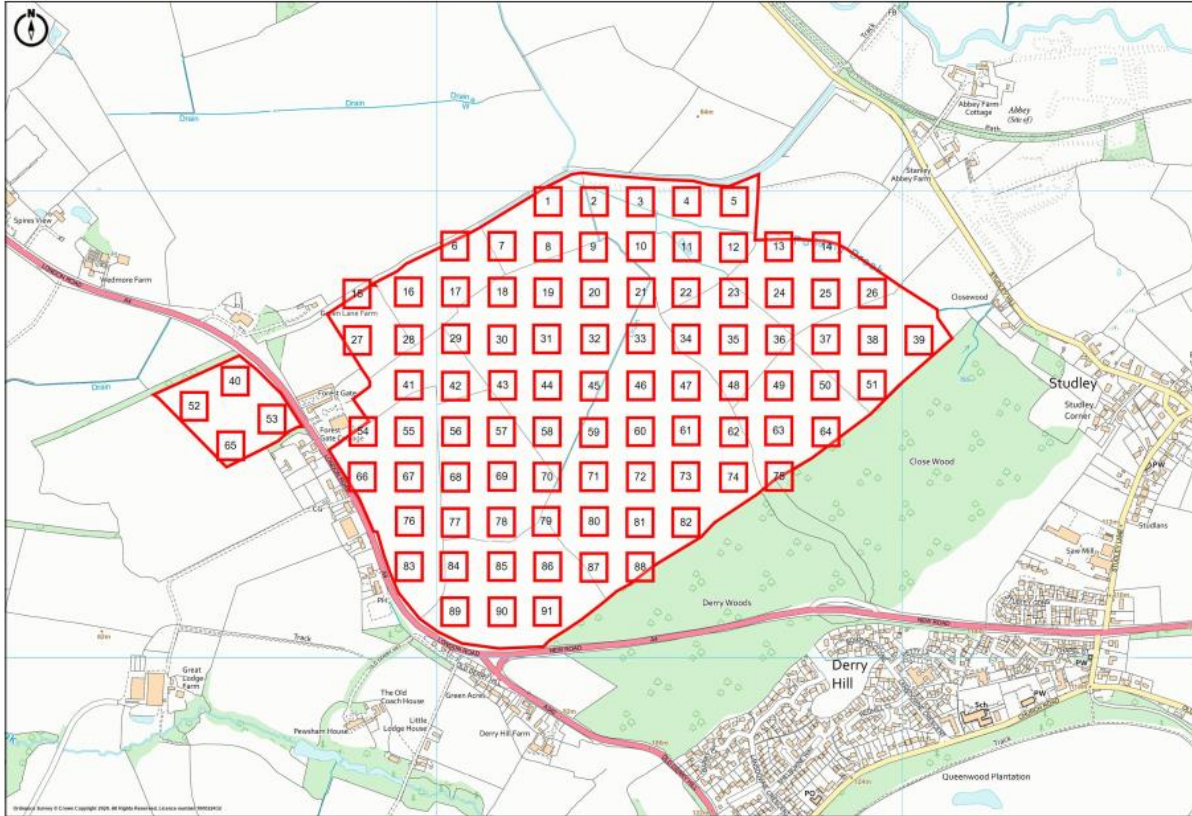
The proposed development is supported by Core Policy 42, which states that standalone renewable installations, amongst other criteria, shall demonstrate how impacts on (viii.) “best and most versatile agricultural land” have been satisfactorily assessed.

Objections received raise concerns at the loss of productive agricultural land through the industrialisation of the land by creating a solar farm. It is argued that the land should be retained for growing crops and that it is inappropriate to replace arable land with a solar farm.

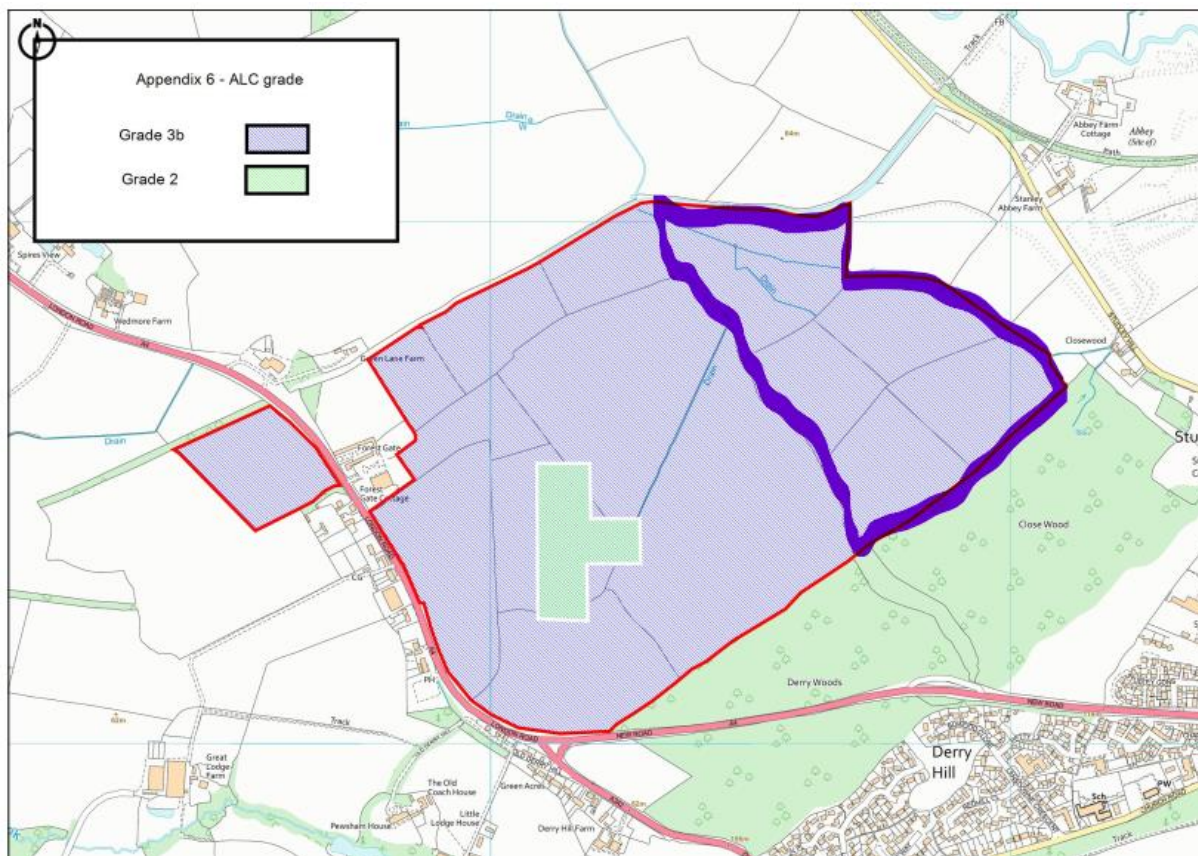
Supporters recognise that the land could still be put to agricultural uses such as livestock grazing and that the solar farm will create an alternative income for the farming business, a fundamental win/win.

The MAFF 1:250,000 map indicates that the site is Grade 3 land and this is reflected within the Council’s mapping system. An agricultural land classification report has been prepared in support of the application and clarifies that the site is predominantly classified as grade 3b agricultural land. Soil samples were taken across the site (ref. “Map of soil sampling points” below).

Appendix 1 - Map of sample points



With reference to the 'ALC Grade' map below the results conclude that the land is predominantly grade 3b with a central section to be Grade 2. The area of land identified as Grade 2 amounts to 4 ha, which falls well below the 20 ha threshold as set out by NE, with the remainder of the site (59.9 ha) at Grade 3b. There is no defining evidence submitted to suggest that the conclusions reached are incorrect.



Plan demonstrating grades of land – dark blue outlined area has been removed from the scheme

The NPPF defines the Best and most versatile agricultural land as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification; as such a part of this site does consist of the best and most versatile land (BMV). Core Policy 42 criteria (viii) requires consideration to the protection of the best and most versatile land. However, the size of area of Grade 2 land is not considered significantly large and is surrounded by lower grade land, this would be the defining factor in how this land could be reasonably farmed in the future. On balance the loss of 4ha is considered not so significant when weighed against the sustainable benefits of the proposed scheme. As described above 4 ha of grade 2 land falls below the 20 ha that Natural England are usually concerned about. In this instance Natural England has been consulted on this application and do not object to the proposed scheme.

It is acknowledged that the total area of the site is 63.9 hectares of land, however, the siting of the solar panels does not cover every square metre of the land and it is recognised that the land can still play an important part in both agricultural and environmental purposes. It is recognised that grazing can still take place across the land below the proposed panels and also where identified within the supporting ecological details that land can be rested and left to develop as wildlife meadow.

It is considered that the proposal would not result in a harmful loss of agricultural land and that it would not conflict with Local Plan policy. The temporary loss of grade 3b and a relatively small area of grade 2 agricultural land is not contrary to the policies as set out within the development plan and the framework and the benefits through the provision of a solar farm generating renewable energy in this location are considered to outweigh the temporary loss of this agricultural land. As such, the effect on and potential loss of agricultural land affords neutral weight in the planning balance.

9.8 Amenity of the area

Core Policy 57 of the WCS (2015) aims to ensure that proposed development would not have a detrimental impact to the amenity of adjoining buildings and uses. Core Policy 42 states the proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site specific constraints, including (vii.) “residential amenity, including noise, odour, visual amenity and safety”.

Concerns raised highlight unacceptable impacts on the occupiers of adjoining properties and users of the rights of way through for example glare issues, unacceptable outlook over area, loss of privacy and conflict with construction traffic. Concerns have been raised at battery safety and access for emergency services, including pollution from fire/explosions relating to the battery storage units.

Comments received from the Council Public Protection Officer clarify that they have reviewed the scheme/application. They do not raise any objections in relation to glint and glare issues. They recommend the imposition of conditions in the interests of the amenity of the area. It is during the construction phase that noise issues would likely have most impact and this would be limited to work day hours and only for a limited time during the construction phase. Therefore, it is considered that the proposal would not give rise to an adverse impact upon the reasonable living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings during the construction stage.

The proposed scheme is for the installation of solar panels with associated equipment, cabins, fencing etc. It has been suggested that there will be a loss of privacy from the proposed development. With regard to onsite construction workers during the construction phase. It is considered that the distances involved between the site and the nearest dwellings (in excess of 21 metres) would not result in a significant impact. Workers would also only be on site during the construction phase, with maintenance crews after this, as such there is no breach of policy on this point.

There should not be any overlooking or loss of privacy through the proposed security cameras that will be installed at the site entrance and at intervals around the perimeter. These will be kept to minimum but are necessary to deter intruders, theft and vandalism. Predominantly these will be viewing along the boundaries to monitor if persons are trying to gain unauthorised entry and will not be aimed at any nearby neighbouring properties. Bearing in mind the difference in levels, the topography of the land and the intervening boundary features (existing and proposed) and distance between the site and nearest properties, it is considered that there will be no significant impact on the amenity of the occupiers of any property.

It is considered that the noise assessment demonstrates there will be no significant adverse noise impacts on residential dwellings within the proximity of the proposed development. The assessment indicates that, for both day and night time periods, there is predicted to be a Low Impact in BS4142-terms with respect to noise. When the context of the assessment is fully considered and understood, the impact would equate to a No Observed Adverse Effect Level (NOAEL). The assessment identifies that the development will give rise to rating noise levels that are below the measured background sound level in the area, at the assessed residential receptors, thus giving rise to a Low Impact. Since the Proposed Development conforms to British Standard and National Planning Policy requirements, noise should not be a considered constraint to the approval of this Planning Application.

BRE guidance states that: *“Glint may be produced as a direct reflection of the sun in the surface of the solar PV panel. It may be the source of the visual issues regarding viewer distraction. Glare is a continuous source of brightness, relative to diffused lighting. This is not a direct reflection of the sun, but rather a reflection of the bright sky around the sun. Glare is*

significantly less intense than glint.” It adds that solar PV panels are designed to absorb, not reflect, irradiation.

As detailed in the submitted Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study (Sept 2022), solar reflections are geometrically possible towards some of the identified receptors. However, due to the screening proposed by the developer, no significant impacts are predicted for the surrounding roads, dwellings, and PRow's. No further mitigation is recommended. No significant impacts upon aviation activity associated with RAF Colerne and RAF Lyneham is predicted with respect to glint and glare and no detailed assessment is recommended.

The potential for impact on residents from construction traffic movements is acknowledged, during the construction phase there will be an increase in traffic. However, during the operational phase of the site, such movements will be low and will have no adverse impact on residents around the site. Whilst issues pertaining to conflict between construction traffic and local residents and other users of the area will be heightened during the short term period of the construction process, this will likely be a relatively short period of time.

The risk of pollution from fire, contamination etc are acknowledged; however, any large-scale battery installations in the UK must comply with stringent health and safety regulations, both during installation and operation. It is proposed that the batteries are securely housed in shipping containers, with safety measures including cooling systems to ensure they operate at safe temperatures. Fire detection and suppression systems, and continuous external monitoring will be included. The proposal will need to meet the necessary requirements of the Building Regulations 2010 – Approved Document B (volume 2 – 2019 edition).

Underlying all these matters is the fact that other regimes operate in this field to regulate the safe operation of such installations. National policy is clear that the focus of planning decisions should be on whether a proposal is an acceptable use of land, rather than the control of processes where these are subject to separate regimes. Planning decisions should assume that these regimes will operate effectively. For the above reasons there is nothing in relation to the safety of the installation which should weigh against the proposal in the planning balance.

The Council's Public Protection team raise no objection to the development subject to conditions relating to noise, air quality and the provision of a CEMP. These requirements are reasonable and necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms. On balance the proposed development is considered to comply with the criteria of Core Policies 57 and 42 of the WCS and that any limited impacts would not be so significant as to justify a reason for refusal in this instance. The significant benefits of providing a solar farm that can generate renewable energy for in excess of 13,000 dwellings per year is considered to outweigh any limited harm on the amenity of the area.

9.9 Highways

Core Policy 42 states the proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site specific constraints, including (vi.) use of the local transport network. Core Policy 60 Sustainable Transport supports the premise for development within sustainable locations and this will be achieved through assessing and, where necessary, mitigating the impact of developments on transport users, local communities and the environment. Core Policy 61 Transport and new development, amongst other criteria aims to ensure that the proposal is capable of being served by safe access to the highway network. Core Policy 62 clarifies that development provide appropriate mitigating measures to offset any adverse impacts on the transport network at both the construction and operational stages.

Concerns have been raised that the proposal would result in an impact on highway safety through the intensification of traffic onto a busy highway in conflict with existing traffic movements. Objectors consider that the access is in a dangerous location near to a bend.

Comments from the highway officer state that the principle of the proposed type of development is considered acceptable and meets many policy objectives. The nature of this type of development is understood to require intense activity during the construction period, but once constructed, it only requires limited maintenance.

The proposed routing of construction traffic is suggested to be from the M4, which would utilise the existing strategic lorry routes via the A350 and A4, but any deliveries from the south and east would also be able to be served by existing strategic and lorry routes within Wiltshire's Freight Strategy. The route for construction traffic is proposed to be signposted and all contractors and deliveries will be advised of the required routing prior to visiting the site.

The Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) informs the number of deliveries to be 1,283 over a 6½ month construction period, with an average of 8 deliveries (16 HGV movements) per day. The Deliveries Schedule at Appendix D indicates that week 4 of the construction programme will have the most deliveries with an average of 21 deliveries per day (42 two-way movements). The highest levels of weekly deliveries will fall within weeks 2 (121 deliveries), 3 (115 deliveries) and 4 (126 deliveries), and then towards the end of the build programme, at weeks 21 (112 deliveries) and 22 (110 deliveries).

In addition to the HGV movements to and from the site, it has been confirmed that a tractor and trailer will be required to move equipment and materials between the eastern and western parcels of land during the construction phase, through 21 one-way movements (42 two-way movements).

The total number of construction staff on site has been advised to be approximately 300, although a maximum of 200 staff are likely to be on site at any one time, with an average daily number of 100-150. Staff will be encouraged to travel to site together and/or in transport from local accommodation. No more than 20-30 construction staff will be working at the western parcel at any one time, and such staff would be expected to be transported by minibus from the eastern parcel.

The access to the eastern parcel is proposed via an existing field access, located adjoining the bus stop and is proposed to be upgraded to provide a 7.5m wide access road with appropriate radii for the type of vehicles that will be accessing this part of the site (HGV's and construction traffic). The access is proposed to have visibility splays of 2.4m x 120m in both directions, which is considered appropriate having regard to the speed limit on this section of road.

The access to the western parcel is proposed via an existing field access onto the A4, which is proposed to be upgraded with an appropriate wide access road and turning radii to accommodate the lesser vehicle movements for this site. The access is proposed to have visibility splays of 2.4m x 120m to the south and 2.4m x 160m to the north, which is considered appropriate having regard to the speed limits on this section of road.

In summary, the revised Construction Traffic Management Plan submitted May 2022 has responded to the comments previously made in respect of the swept path analysis for HGV turning movements, and clarity of the movements and the management for both access points. The proposed timing of deliveries has been amended so as not to interfere with the main drop off and pick up times associated with St Mary's School on Rowden Hill.

Whilst it is accepted that the construction period will inevitably result in some inconvenience and disruption to residents and users of the adjoining highway, it needs to be acknowledged that such inconvenience and disruption will be over in a relatively short period of time. There will be measures in place to minimise such disruption and inconvenience through the conditioning of a Construction Management Statement.

The conditions identified by the highway officer are considered reasonable and necessary, and it is therefore recommended that they are imposed on any permission given. 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.

It should also be noted that the NPPF states that “Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”

Given that it has been demonstrated that vehicle movements to and from the site by construction traffic can be appropriately managed, and the programme of works has set out a clear indication of the numbers of construction and delivery vehicles required to facilitate the development, it is considered that the impacts of the construction of the development would not result in a severe impact.

There are two public rights of way adjoining the site and the proposed development would not have a negative impact on their existing routes and the effects on their users has been considered acceptable. A new permissive path is proposed around the perimeter of the site, which, will include fixed photography points along its way. The existing footpath along the south-eastern boundary was proposed to be upgraded, however, the PRoW officer has clarified that they would not support the upgrade to a permissive bridleway and it should remain as a footpath. The screening along the RoW is considered to be acceptable.

The PRoW officer has indicated a contribution should be provided towards the canal upgrade. The applicant has stated that a voluntary community benefit fund for the development could provide a financial contribution if agreed by the funds administrators. However, there is no guarantee of this. With regard to Core Policy 53, whilst this supports the restoration of the canal, there is no requirement under this policy for development within the vicinity but which has no physical impact on the canal to provide any mitigation. As such it would be unreasonable to insist upon the requested contribution. Otherwise, the Council’s Public Rights of Way Team has raised no objection to the proposed development.

In light of the above, it is considered that the proposal would not have an adverse impact on highway safety or public rights of way and that it would accord with Core Policies 42, 60, 61 and 62 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

9.10 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

Not CIL development

10. Conclusion (The Planning Balance)

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, 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.

The applicants are in discussions with Zero Chippenham and continue to make progress around a shared ownership of the project. A new community benefit society is being set up to take this forward (Zero North Wiltshire) which will ensure the benefits of shared ownership will include the communities of Chippenham, Calne and the broader North Wilts area. If this community project is successful, it is conservatively expected to generate additional community funds of at least £1 million over the life of the project. Zero North Wiltshire's aim is that these funds would be used to provide fair access to solar, energy efficiency and EVs for local people, as well as other long-term environmental benefits. However, as this cannot be captured within the decision making process of this planning application no weight can be afforded this potential community benefit. It is however, considered important for Members to be aware of these additional benefits that lie beyond the planning system.

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.

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. But in this instance the topography, existing screening and landscape mitigation 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 considered that the proposal would not result in a harmful loss of agricultural land and that it would not conflict with Local Plan policy. The temporary loss of grade 3b and a very small amount of grade 2 agricultural land is not contrary to the policies as set out within the development plan and the framework and the benefits through the provision of a solar farm generating renewable energy in this location are considered to outweigh the temporary loss of this agricultural land. As such, the effect on and potential loss of agricultural land affords neutral weight in the planning balance.

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 substantial 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 / 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. The proposal would also ensure the long-term maintenance and improvements of the public footpaths which also carries minor weight in favour of the scheme. The proposed development would also provide local employment in the form of construction jobs and contribute to the economy which is afforded moderate weight as a benefit of the scheme.

It is further recognised that the greatest impact on the amenity of the area will occur during the construction through some likely impacts from noise and conflict with disturbance from the construction phase, but this can be managed by planning conditions. In the long-term the potential for impact from glint and glare is considered negligible.

Further archaeological investigation will be required and this can be controlled through condition. It is considered that there will remain some remnant of harm to the wider setting within which the surrounding heritage assets are experienced. It is considered that the impact resulting from this erosion of the landscape, however, will be limited and the key heritage significance of the assets deriving from their fabric and immediate relationships and setting will largely be preserved. It is considered that the level of harm should be more accurately assessed as less than substantial harm, at the lower end of the scale. In addition, the scheme is for a temporary change, albeit for 40 years, and it is intended that in the future the land would be restored through the decommissioning process.

Whilst the scheme will lead to a degree of negative cumulative impact, 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. The proposal involves the use of temporary structures and a condition can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and that the land is restored to its previous use.

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 to manage the detailed elements of the development and secure ongoing monitoring where appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation is 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 permission hereby granted shall be for a temporary period and shall expire 40 years from the date that electricity from the development is first exported to the electricity distribution network ('First Export Date') or no later than 44 years from the date of this decision, whichever is the soonest. Written confirmation of the First Export Date shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than 1 calendar month after that First Export Date. Within 6 months of the date of expiry of this planning permission, or, if sooner, the cessation of the use of the solar panels for electricity generation purposes for a continuous period of 6 months, the solar panels together with any supporting/associated infrastructure including the inverter stations, security equipment, poles and fencing shall be removed from the land and the land restored to its former agricultural condition in accordance with a scheme of work to be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The scheme of work, including a restoration plan and a decommissioning scheme that takes account of a recent ecological survey, shall be submitted to the local planning authority not less than six months before the removal of the installation.

REASON: In the interests of amenity and the circumstances of the use and to ensure the long-term management of landscape and ecological features retained and created by the development and in the interests of the significance of the heritage assets and their setting.

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

- Site location plan 264801/P002 6 October 2022
- Site location plan 264801/P004 6 October 2022
- PV Layout plan EDR1004-100 Rev H, 16 December 2022
- Forest Gate Planting Plan 264801-TOR-XX-XX-P-L-93-001 Rev W, December 2022
- Fixed tilt array details EDR1004-203 13 September 2022
- 40ft (12.2m) Central inverter substation details EDR1004-206 Rev D 6 April 2021
- 53ft (16.2m) Battery storage system details EDR1004-207 Rev E 12 April 2021
- Customer substation building details EDR1004-210 Rev C 6 April 2021
- Distribution network operator container details EDR1004-211 Rev C 6 April 2021
- Customer cabin details EDR1004-212 Rev C 6 April 2021
- Fence and gate details EDR1004-214 Rev C 13 April 2021
- Security camera plan EDR1004-215 Rev G 26 May 2021
- Maintenance road details EDR1004-216 Rev A 6 April 2021
- Fence and hedge details EDR1004-217 Rev B 13 April 2021
- Spare part container EDR1004-222 6 April 2021
- No-dig road details EDR1004-230 Rev A 29 April 2021
- Eastern site access General arrangement 800.0024.001 Rev C 3 September 2021
- Eastern site access Tracking 800.0024.002 Rev D 3 September 2021
- Eastern site access Visibility 800.0024.003 Rev C 3 September 2021
- Western site access General arrangement 800.0024.004 Rev B 3 September 2021
- Western site access Tracking (unchanged) 800.0024.005 Rev C 3 September 2021
- Western site access Visibility splay 800.0024.006 Rev A 3 September 2021
- Site access tracking Tractor and trailer 800.0024.007 Rev A 13 April 2022
- Biodiversity management plan – 10 October 2022
- Construction Traffic Management Plan 800.0024/CTMP/7 9 May 2022
- Biodiversity net gain calculation Metric 3.1 – 15 December 2022
- Tree Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree
- Protection Plan 8325, Revision C October 2022

- Environmental Statement, 4th addendum including technical appendices, December 2022
- ES Technical Appendix A1 Heritage Assessment, June 2021 (resubmitted October 2022)
- ES Technical Appendix A2 Geophysical Survey Report, December 2020 (resubmitted October 2022)
- ES Technical Appendix A3 Cable route Heritage appraisal, January 2022 (resubmitted October 2022)
- ES Technical Appendix A4 Trial trenching evaluation, December 2021 (resubmitted October 2022)
- ES Technical Appendix B1 Landscape and visual assessment, October 2022
- ES Technical Appendix C1 Full Ecological Assessment, 15 December 2022
- ES Technical Appendix C2 Phase 2 Bat and Great Crested Newt, 13 October 2022
- ES Technical Appendix C3 Breeding Bird Survey, June 2020 (resubmitted October 2022)
- ES Technical Appendix C4 Biodiversity Management Plan, December 2022
- ES Technical Appendix C5 Preliminary Ecological Assessment of cable route, January 2022 (resubmitted October 2022)

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

4. No development shall commence on site until a scheme for the discharge of surface water from the site, incorporating sustainable drainage details, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall not be first brought into use until surface water drainage has been constructed in accordance with the approved scheme. The scheme shall respond to the following conditions raised: -
- The applicant should provide calculations to establish the site greenfield runoff rate and the storage volumes required using a 1% (1 in 100 year) plus 10% climate change rainfall event. The scheme should ensure that run-off from the proposed development is reduced or will not exceed existing runoff rates unless evidence is submitted that demonstrates that site or environmental conditions make these measures unsuitable.
 - The applicant should demonstrate proposed flow/exceedance paths and any additional surface drainage features on the PV layout plan.
 - No development shall commence until details are provided of how these assets at high risk of pluvial flooding will be protected to ensure the safety of anyone attending the site. This should include a more detailed plan of the area at high risk of pluvial flooding. Alternatively, all proposed construction should be located outside of these potential flood areas.
 - No development shall commence on site until details of the connection to the watercourse are confirmed and how these might be impacted by the increase in runoff resulting from climate change.
 - No development can proceed until water quality has been addressed in line with the following assumptions:
 - As solar panels are not listed in the SuDS manual, the pollutant loads for commercial roofs (lower end values) should be used for the solar panels.
 - The pollutant loads for low traffic roads should be used when considering the access roads around the site.

REASON: The matter is required to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before development commences in order that the development is undertaken in an acceptable manner, to ensure that the development can be adequately drained.

5. No development shall commence within the area indicated by application PL/2021/06112 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: The matter is required to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before development commences in order to enable the protection of any matters of archaeological interest.

6. No development shall commence on site and no equipment, machinery or materials shall be brought on to site for the purpose of development until tree protective fencing has been erected in accordance with the details set out in the "Tree Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan (October 2022) by Hayden's Arboricultural Consultants.

The protective fencing shall remain in place for the entire development phase and until all equipment, machinery and surplus materials have been removed from the site. Such fencing shall not be removed or breached during construction operations.

No retained tree/s shall be cut down, uprooted or destroyed, nor shall any retained tree/s be topped or lopped other than in accordance with the approved plans and particulars. Any topping or lopping approval shall be carried out in accordance British Standard 3998: 2010 "Tree Work – Recommendations" or arboricultural techniques where it can be demonstrated to be in the interest of good arboricultural practice.

If any retained tree is removed, uprooted, destroyed or dies, another tree shall be planted at the same place, of a size and species and planted at such time, that must be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

No concrete, oil, cement, bitumen or other chemical shall be mixed or stored within 10 metres of the trunk of any tree or group of trees to be retained on the site or adjoining land.

[In this condition "retained tree" means an existing tree which is to be retained in accordance with the approved plans and particulars; and paragraphs above shall have effect until the expiration of five years from the first operation or the completion of the development, whichever is the later.

REASON: The tree protection fencing is required to be placed on site before any development, site clearance or machinery is brought on to site in order to enable the Local Planning Authority to ensure the retention of trees on the site in the interests of visual amenity and biodiversity.

7. Prior to the commencement of works, including demolition, ground works/excavation, site clearance, vegetation clearance and boundary treatment works, a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority. The Plan shall provide details of the avoidance, mitigation and protective measures to be implemented before and during the construction phase in accordance with the Requirements and Recommendations section of the submitted Full Ecological Assessment prepared by Wychwood Biodiversity (17/10/2022), and within the Avoidance section of the Biodiversity Management Plan prepared by Wychwood Biodiversity (17/10/2022). These will include but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- a) Identification of ecological protection areas/buffer zones and tree root protection areas and details of physical means of protection, e.g. exclusion fencing.
- b) Reasonable avoidance working method statements for protected/priority species, such as nesting birds, amphibians (great crested newts), reptiles, bats and dormice.
- c) Working method statements where minor works are required within the hedgerow buffer.
- d) Mitigation strategies already agreed with the local planning authority prior to determination, such as for great crested newts, dormice or bats; this should comprise the pre-construction/construction related elements of strategies only.
- e) Work schedules for activities with specific timing requirements in order to avoid/reduce potential harm to ecological receptors; including details of when a licensed ecologist and/or ecological clerk of works (ECoW) shall be present on site.
- f) Key personnel, responsibilities and contact details (including Site Manager and ecologist/ECoW).
- g) Timeframe for provision of compliance report to the local planning authority; to be completed by the ecologist/ECoW and to include photographic evidence.

Development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the approved CEMP.

REASON: The matter is required to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before development commences in order to ensure adequate protection and mitigation for ecological receptors prior to and during construction, and that works are undertaken in line with current best practice and industry standards and are supervised by a suitably licensed and competent professional ecological consultant where applicable.

8. Prior to the commencement of works, including demolition, ground works/excavation, site clearance, vegetation clearance and boundary treatment works, a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LEMP shall 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: The matter is required to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before development commences in order 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.

9. Prior to the commencement of works, including demolition, ground works/excavation, site clearance, vegetation clearance and boundary treatment works, a Monitoring Strategy for the Biodiversity Management Plan hereby approved shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority.

The Monitoring Strategy shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following information:

- a) A scheme of monitoring focused on the key aspects of the Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Plans;
- b) Details of a timetable to establish a monitoring baseline on completion of the development at the start of the operational phase

- c) A timetable for regular reporting for the lifetime of the development (in years 1, 3, 5, 10, 25, 40);
- d) Details of the body or organization responsible for implementation of the Monitoring Strategy, with any change to this body or organisation to be notified to the local planning authority within three months of such a change.

The Monitoring Strategy shall be implemented in full in accordance with the approved details for the entire operational lifetime of the installation.

REASON: The matter is required to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before development commences in order 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.

10. The development will be carried out in strict accordance with the following documents:

- a) Forest Gate Planting Plan. DWG TOR-XX-XX-P-L-93-001. Rev W. Terence O Rourke (12/2022).
- b) Forest Gate Biodiversity Management Plan FINAL_041022. Rev XF. Eden Renewables and Wychwood Biodiversity (17,10,2022).
- c) Diagram #001 Ecology Map Overview. Rev XF. Eden Renewables and Wychwood Biodiversity (17,10,2022).
- d) Diagram #002 Map of avoidance and reduction measures (Appendix B). Rev XF. Eden Renewables and Wychwood Biodiversity (17,10,2022).
- e) Diagram #003 Map of Mitigation Measures: Establishment (Appendix C). Rev XF. Eden Renewables and Wychwood Biodiversity (17,10,2022).
- f) Diagram #004 Map of Mitigation Measures. Rev XF. Eden Renewables and Wychwood Biodiversity (17,10,2022).
- g) Diagram #005 Ecology Map: 4.5m Buffer (only). Rev XF. Eden Renewables and Wychwood Biodiversity (17,10,2022).
- h) Diagram #006 Ecology Map: 10m Buffer (only). Rev XF. Eden Renewables and Wychwood Biodiversity (17,10,2022).
- i) Biodiversity Metric 3.1 (15/12/2022).

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

11. Prior to the commencement of works, including demolition, ground works/excavation, site clearance, vegetation clearance and boundary treatment works, a Construction Management Statement, together with a site plan, which shall include the following:

- a) Detailed Site logistics arrangements;
- b) A description of management responsibilities, to include communication procedures with the LPA and local community regarding key construction issues - newsletters, fliers etc. ;
- c) A description of the construction programme;
- d) the parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors;
- e) loading and unloading of plant and materials;
- f) storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development;
- g) the erection and maintenance of security hoarding including decorative displays and facilities for public viewing, where appropriate;
- h) wheel washing facilities;
- i) measures to control the emission of dust and dirt and noise mitigation during construction;

- j) a scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from demolition and construction works; and
- k) measures for the protection of the natural environment, which shall include monitoring of, and measures to retain, the existing vegetation across the site, together with details of drainage arrangements during the construction phase;
- l) Site working hours, including delivery schedules, and a named person for residents to contact;
- m) details of traffic routeing signs, both at the site accesses and along the construction route;
- n) pre-condition photo survey of the section of highway of the A4 London Road which would serve as access to the sites. Copies of the pre-condition survey and a post condition survey following completion of construction shall be supplied to the local planning authority.

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 construction method statement without the prior written permission of the Local Planning Authority. There shall be no burning undertaken on site at any time.

REASON: The matter is required to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before development commences in order 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.

12.No development shall commence on site until visibility splays for the eastern access (adjoining the bus stop) have been provided between the edge of the carriageway and a line extending from a point 2.4m metres back from the edge of the carriageway, measured along the centre line of the access, to the points on the edge of the carriageway 120 metres to the north and south from the centre of the access, in accordance with the approved plans. Such splays shall thereafter be permanently maintained free from obstruction to vision above a height of 900mm above the level of the adjacent carriageway.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety.

13.No development shall commence on site until visibility splays for the western access (field 4 on the layout plan) have been provided between the edge of the carriageway and a line extending from a point 2.4m metres back from the edge of the carriageway, measured along the centre line of the access, to the points on the edge of the carriageway 160 metres to the north and 120 metres to the south from the centre of the access, in accordance with the approved plans. Such splays shall thereafter be permanently maintained free from obstruction to vision above a height of 900mm above the level of the adjacent carriageway.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety.

14.The development hereby permitted shall not be first commenced until the access track between the public highway and the site compound has been consolidated and surfaced (not loose stone or gravel) in accordance with details which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety.

15.No development shall commence on site until details of the proposed width of the access tracks, including passing bays, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local

Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety.

- 16.No construction or operational artificial lighting shall be installed at the site unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

No external lighting shall be installed on-site until plans showing the type of light appliance, the height and position of fitting, illumination levels and light spillage in accordance with the appropriate Environmental Zone standards set out by the Institution of Lighting Professionals in their publication "The Reduction of Obtrusive Light" Guidance Note 01/21 (reference GN01/21), have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved lighting shall be installed and shall be maintained in accordance with the approved details and no additional external lighting shall be installed.

REASON: In the interests of the amenities of the area and to minimise unnecessary light spillage above and outside the development site and in the interests of conserving biodiversity.

- 17.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.

- 18.Landscape Planting shall be undertaken in accordance with the Forest Gate Planting Plan TOR-XX-XX-P-L-93-001 Revision W 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.

- 19.No construction or demolition work shall take place on Sundays or Public Holidays or outside the hours of 08:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays.

REASON: Core policy 57, Ensuring high design and place shaping such that appropriate levels of amenity are achievable.

Informatives:

21. Informative

Wilts and Berks Canal Trust (WBCT) has an agreement with the landowner to gain access into the section of canal through the land, the subject of this application and requests that, if the application is consented that access for restoration and maintenance purposes by WBCT shall be provided.

22. Informative:

There is a risk that protected species (great crested newts / reptiles/ dormice/ bats) could occur on the application site. These species are legally protected and planning permission does not provide a defence against prosecution. In order to minimise the risk of these species occurring on the site, the developer is advised to clear vegetation in line with the recommendations made in the Full Ecological Assessment prepared by Wychwood Biodiversity (2022) and as advised the contracted ecologist. If these species are unexpectedly found during the works, the applicant is advised to stop work and follow advice from the contracted ecologist.

23. Informative:

A photographic pre-condition highway survey to be carried out to the section of highway of the A4 London Road which would serve as access to the sites, and copies of pre and post condition survey to be supplied to Wiltshire Council. 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.

24. Informative:

The work is to be carried out following the standards and guidelines for archaeological field evaluation as set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) and the standards and guidelines for Strip, Map and Record excavations as set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). The applicant should note that the costs of carrying out an archaeological investigation will fall to the applicant or their successors in title. The Local Planning Authority cannot be held responsible for any costs incurred.

25. Informative:

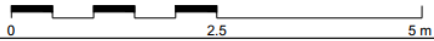
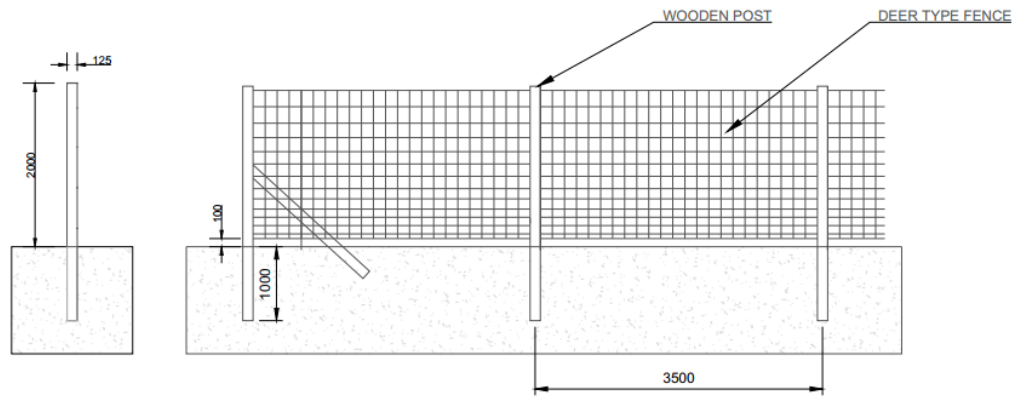
The applicant should note that under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and the Habitats Regulations (2010) it is an offence to disturb or harm any protected species, or to damage or disturb their habitat or resting place. Please note that this consent does not override the statutory protection afforded to any such species. In the event that your proposals could potentially affect a protected species you should seek the advice of a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist and consider the need for a licence from Natural England prior to commencing works. Please see Natural England's website for further information on protected species.

26. Informative:

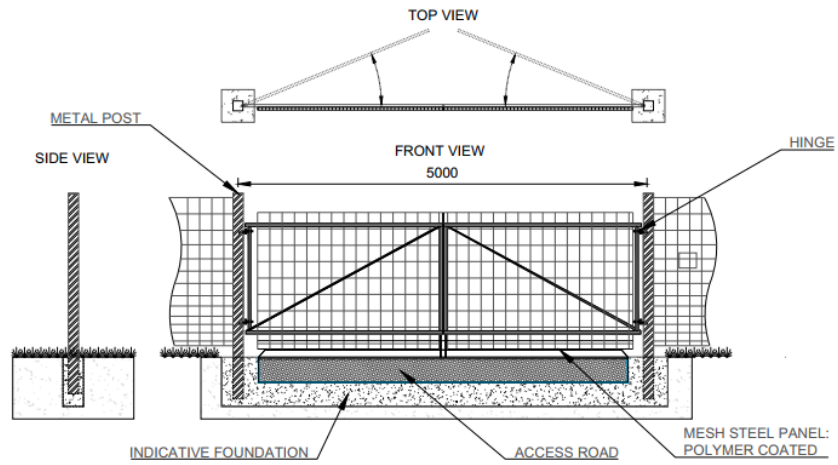
The consent hereby granted shall not be construed as authority to carry out works on the highway. The applicant is advised that a license may be required from Wiltshire's Highway Authority before any works are carried out on any footway, footpath, carriageway, verge or other land forming part of the highway.

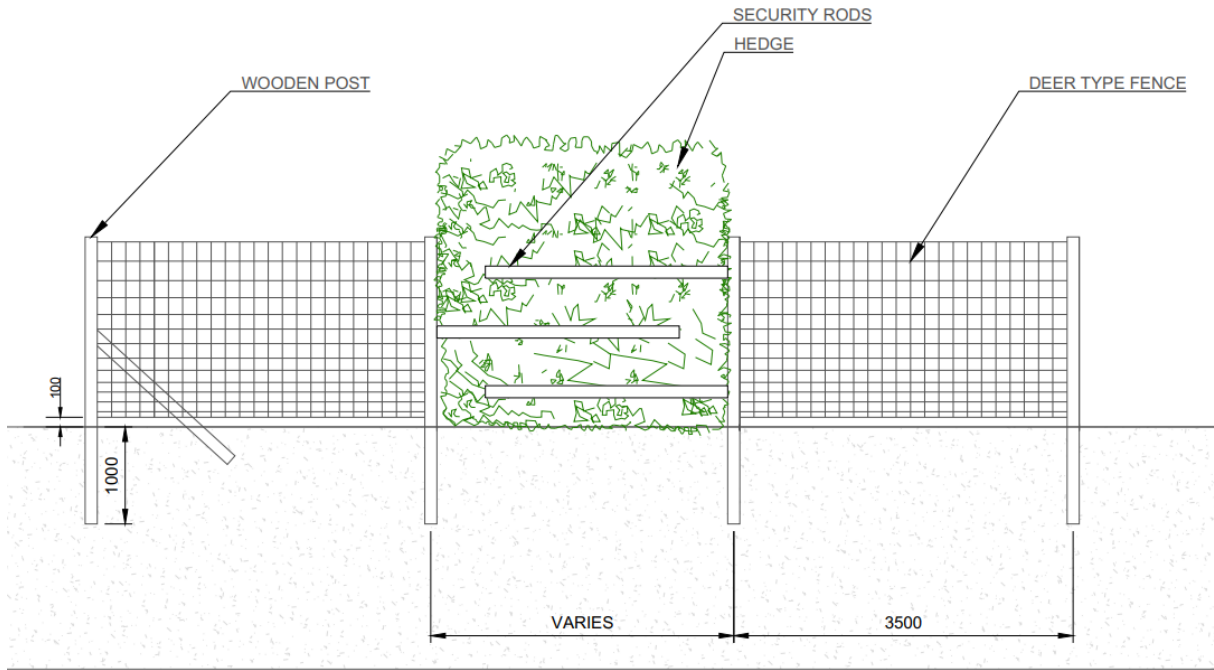
Appendix 1 – Typical operation details

DETAIL A | Fence
M 1:50@A3

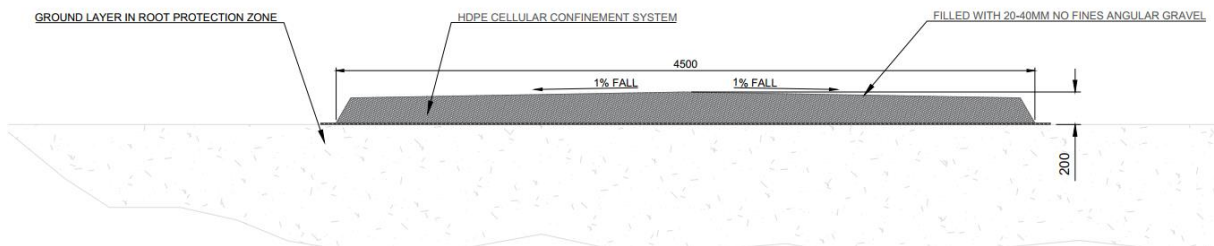


DETAIL B | Gate
M 1:50@A3

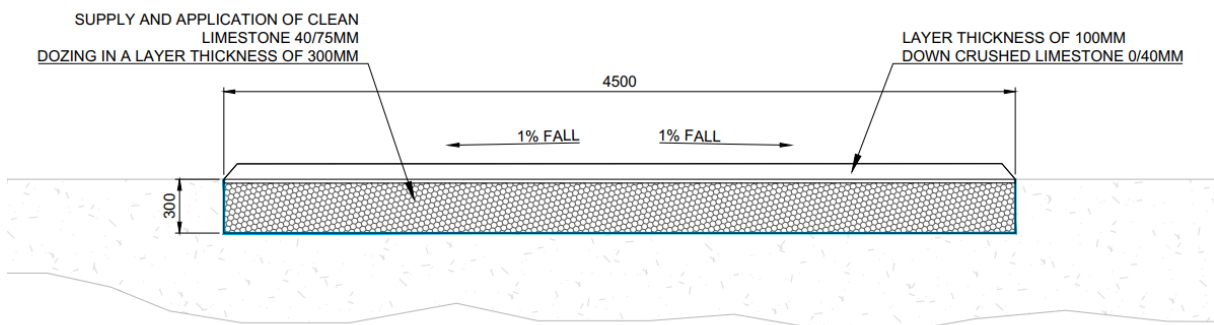




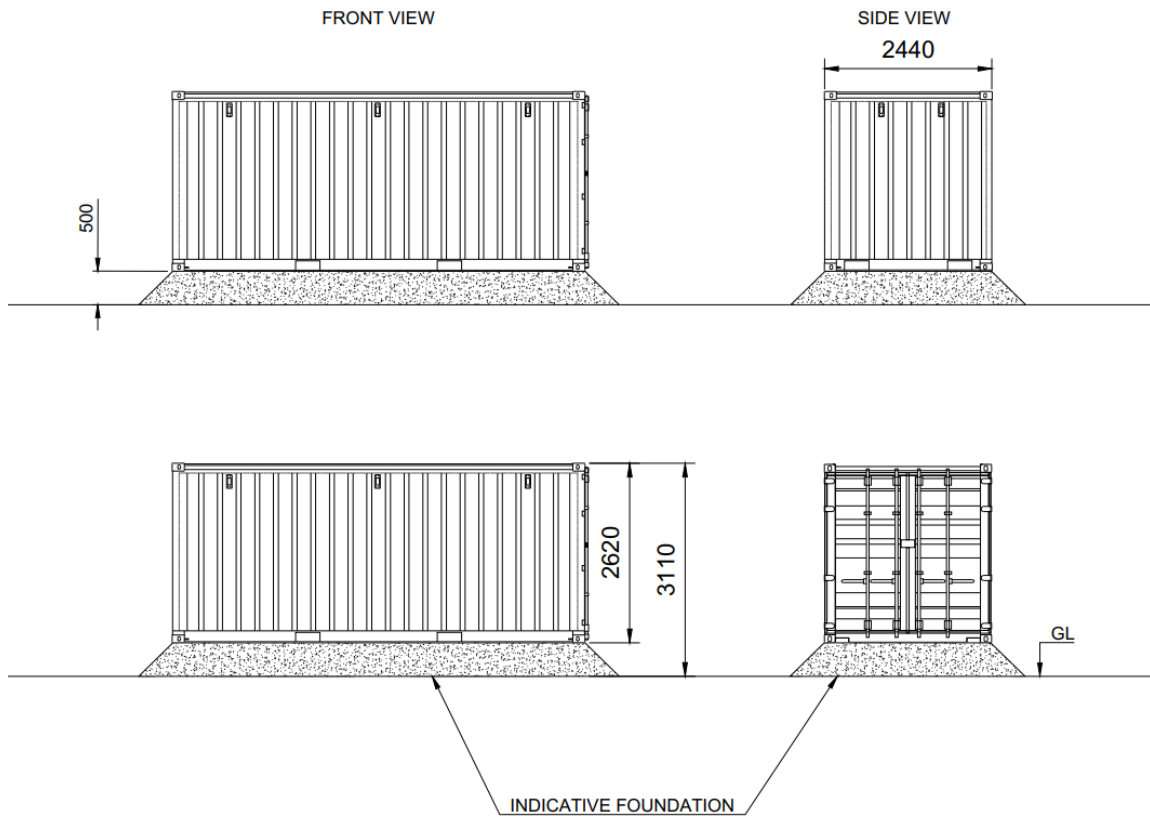
Hedge Crossing Detail



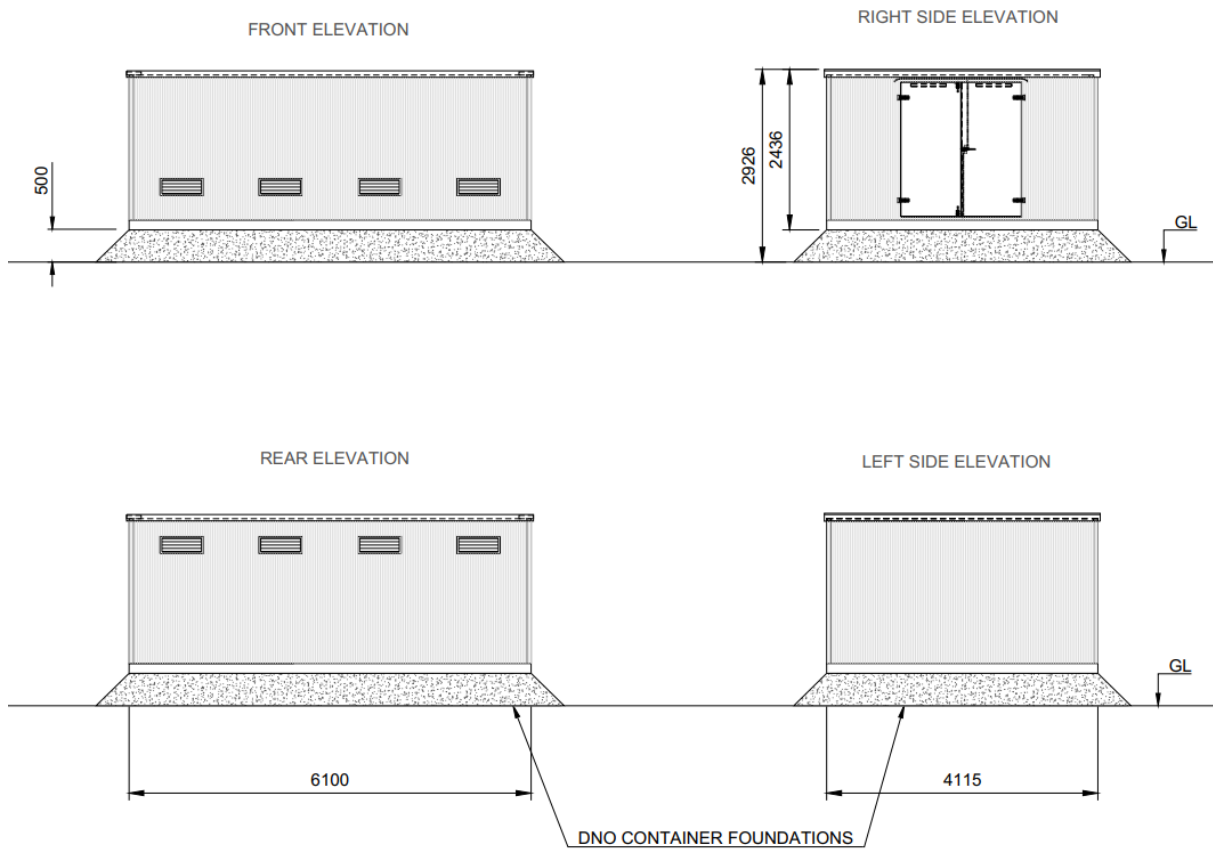
No-dig Road Details



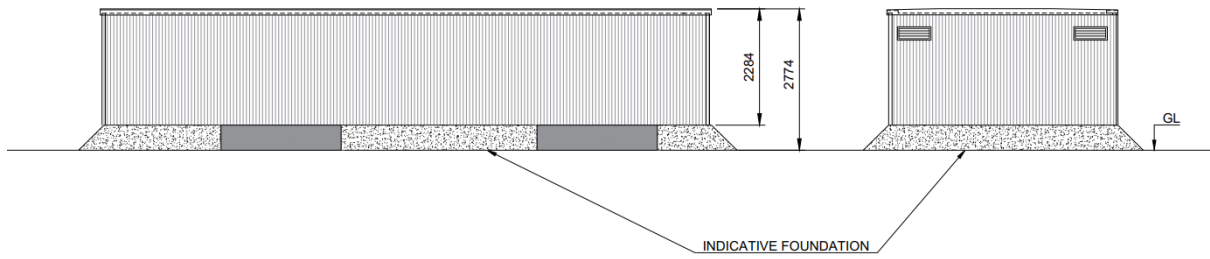
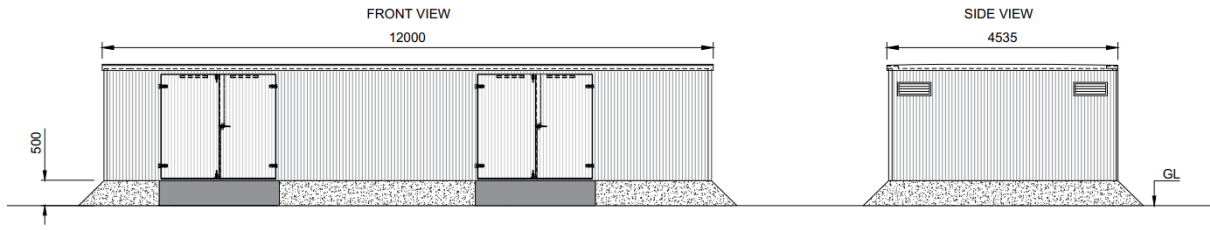
Maintenance Road Details



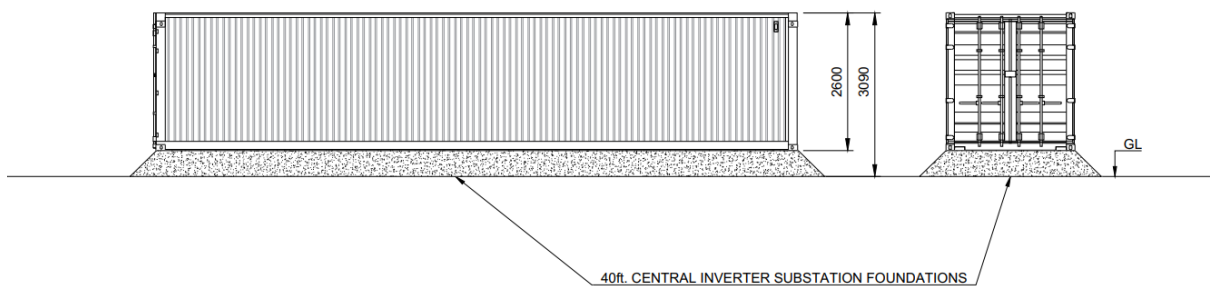
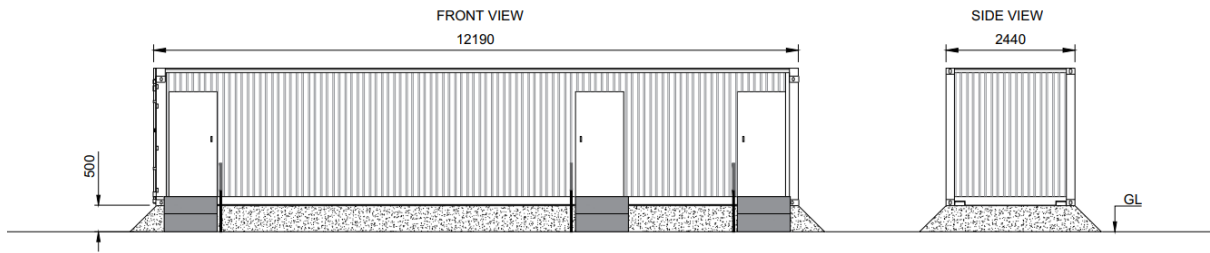
Spare Part Container



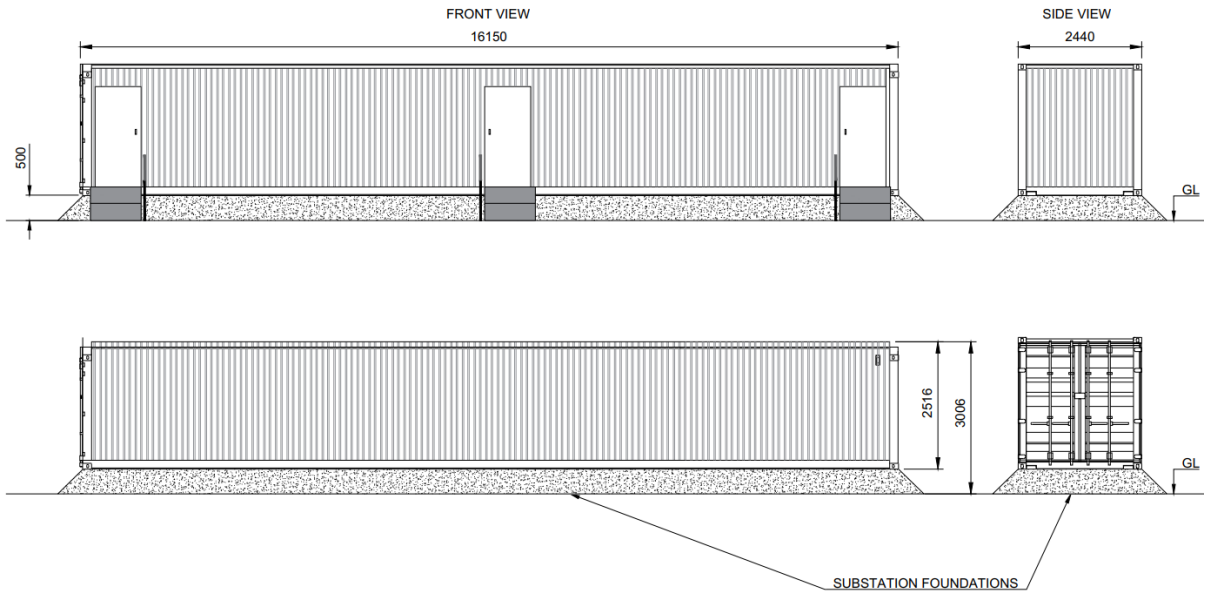
Distribution network operator container details



Customer cabin details



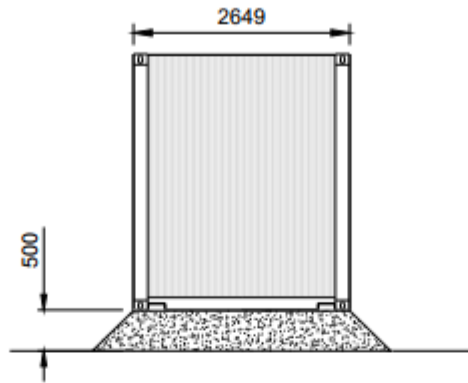
40ft central inverter substation details



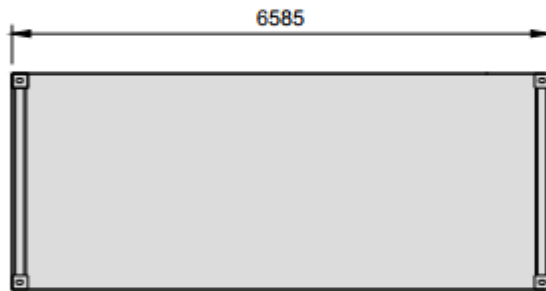
53ft battery storage system details

CUSTOMER SUBSTATION EXTERIOR VIEW

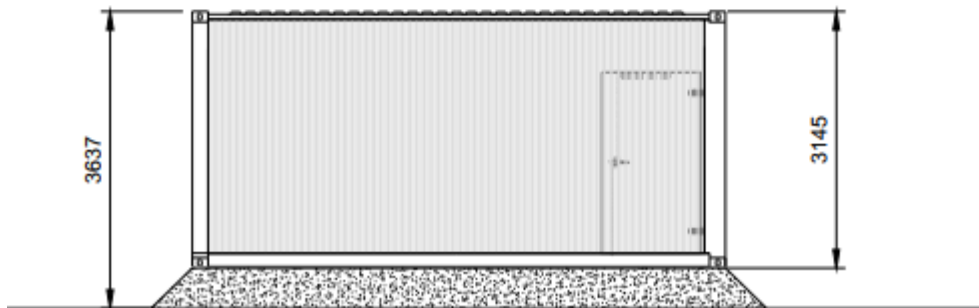
SIDE VIEW



TOP VIEW



FRONT VIEW



Appendix 2 – Representative responses received from Local Councillors

Cllr comments, object: -

“My objection is based on the following points:

- The planning application does not include the power export route to the Chippenham substation;*
- The fire hazard of the solar farm has not been adequately addressed;*
- The development plan is misleading in terms of actual power generation and energy storage;*
- The development plan is misleading over the green credentials of photovoltaic power generation;*
- The development directly conflicts with the Calne Without Local Neighbourhood Plan;*
- The development will result in detrimental damage to the defining characteristics of the adjoining rural villages (Studley & Derry Hill);*
- There will be a detrimental traffic impact on Studley and Derry Hill during construction/end of life decommissioning;*
- Detrimental impact on local fauna;*
- Wiltshire Council currently has no strategic plan for solar farm developments in the county;*
- There will be an increased crime risk”*

Cllr comments, support: -

“I fully and strongly support this application.

Although I'm aware and understand some of the objections from local households who will live very close to this solar farm and will have an impact on their 'views' across the landscape, this 'climate emergency' needs to be acted upon 'urgently' and without delay.

Obviously, I would have preferred if the solar farms were constructed along the M4 Motorway corridor, or at least 'away' from populated areas, as well as, covering every available rooftop, etc., with solar panels, but time is of the essence and we need to act immediately... we have NO MORE TIME TO WASTE!

With many communities around the UK declaring the climate emergency, we need to now focus on being sustainable and working out a road plan to start using other technologies such as 'solar-glass' and other materials that could help fight this dangerous situation we now ALL face.

The proposed solar farm seems to have been designed with sensitively and biodiversity, allowing the use of the land for ongoing agricultural grazing, wildflower and hedgerow planting and the creation of future footpaths.

I fully support this project and I hope that many others will see that it is a very small price to pay on losing views' (temporary), but 'gaining' a better, greener future which saves not only our environment, but our wonderful planet and everything that lives upon it.

We are facing a climate crisis of serious proportions and it is essential that growth in demand for electricity is met from renewable sources. Decarbonisation needs to take place rapidly and at scale if we are to have any chance of keeping global temperatures from rising to dangerous levels, with devastating consequences for the environment, society and our economy.

Wiltshire Council, Chippenham Town Council and surrounding parish councils have all declared a Climate Emergency and made commitments to working towards decarbonising by 2030.

Solar has a vital role to play and is now the cheapest new form of power generation, alongside onshore wind, so will help reduce energy costs as well. It can also be located close to the communities that use it, reducing the losses from electricity transmission over long distances, as experienced with nuclear power and offshore wind.

Whilst it's true that we should be putting solar panels on every rooftop and housing development, retrofitting is more technically challenging, and would in any case not be get us to where we need to be in terms of generation capacity. Hence we need large-scale solar farms in which can generate solar power on a much larger and more efficient scale, and which can also deliver multiple other benefits.

The Forest Gate solar farm would provide a significant quantity of renewable energy and make a significant contribution to decarbonising Wiltshire, avoiding around 20,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year.

The solar farm would support Wiltshire Council's Local Plan in achieving its obligations under the Climate Change Act, which require it to be aligned with national carbon budgets/ reduction trajectories. They also support Wiltshire Council's Climate Emergency declaration and commitment to decarbonise its local authority area and align with the Climate Emergency Task Group's Recommendations on Energy and Transport.

The proposals would also provide valuable co-benefits in terms of ecological enhancements such as wildflower meadows and hedgerow restoration. They will also provide more than £800,000 of local benefits during the life of the project, including contributing to a community fund that can be used for local social and environmental initiatives.

The solar farm is to be sited on grade 3b land that has relatively low agricultural value and will in any case be returned to agricultural use after 40 years, enhancing carbon sequestration in the meantime and preventing other types of much more intrusive development taking place over that period (which should be very reassuring for local residents).

From a planning perspective, the application complies with the NPPF and Wiltshire Council's Core Policy 42 and given its close proximity to Calne and Chippenham, should provide an opportunity for local people to participate in taking practical action in cutting carbon emissions by investing in the community energy side of the scheme".

"I fully and strongly support this application.

I understand some of the objections, but when the alternative is catastrophic climate change (which is what we're facing if we don't act in the next 2-3 years), I think an increase in solar farms is a very small, and totally necessary, price to pay.

The UK has become the first major economy to pass net zero emissions law requiring the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. Solar farms, along with wind and other forms of clean energy, will have to play a major part in this, otherwise the UK Government will fail to stay within the law.

Wiltshire Council, along with many Town and Parish Councils in the County, have declared climate emergencies. How would it look if we start voting against progressive and necessary developments like a solar farms?

The UK will need many more solar farms if we are to reach our targets and protect our children and grandchildren. This particular solar farm has been designed sensitively, with emphasis on increasing biodiversity, the use of land for ongoing agricultural grazing, wildflower and hedgerow planting and the creation of new footpaths. There will also be opportunities for the local community to benefit financially and through engagement and education.

Again, I fully support this project and I hope that those making this important decision vote wisely, support this solar farm, and be on the right side of history”.

“I fully support the creation of the Forest Gate solar farm, we desperately need to move away from fossil fuels and start investing in cheap, clean, renewable energy, otherwise, we run the risk of irreversible climatological breakdown”.