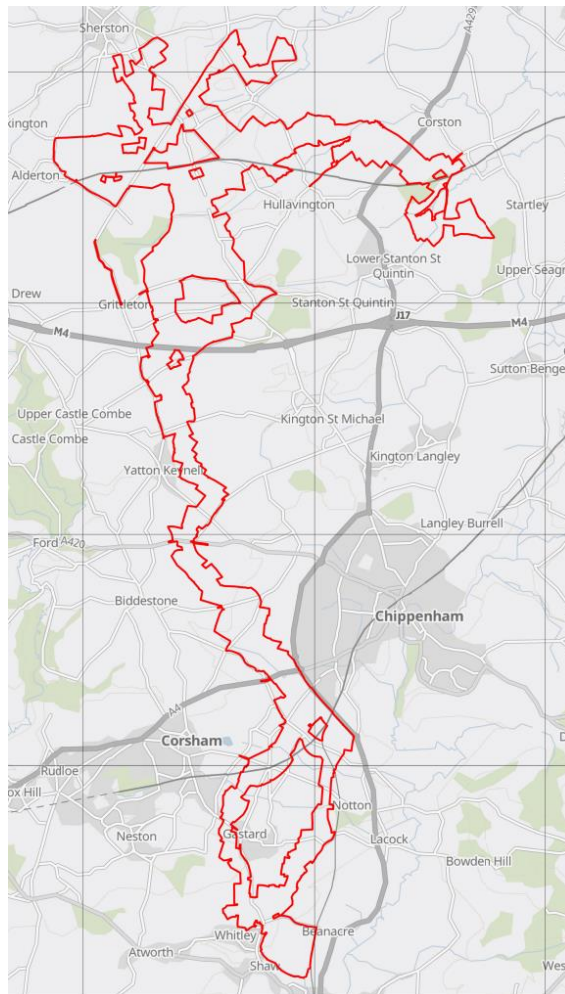


**Lime Down Solar Park  
(Planning Inspectorate Reference: EN010168)**



**Wiltshire Council Response to  
Statutory Consultation**

**March 2025**

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## 1. Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym / Abbreviation	Meaning / Description
AONB	Areas of Outstanding National Beauty
AVR	Accurate Visual Representation
BBOA Bats SAC	Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation
BCT	Bat Conservation Trust
BESS	Battery Energy Storage System
BGP	Biodiversity Gain Plan
BMV	Best and Most Versatile
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
BSMP	Battery Safety Management Plan
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
CNL	Cotswolds National Landscape
CNLB	Cotswolds National Landscape Board
CRC	Cable Route Corridor
CRSC	Cable Route Search Corridor
CTMP	Construction Traffic Management Plan
CWS	County Wildlife Sites
CWTP	Construction Work Travel Plan
DCO	Development Consent Order
DEMP	Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan
DLL	District Level Licensing
DS	Decommissioning Strategy
DTMP	Decommissioning Traffic Management Plan
EA	Environment Agency
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMEP	Ecology Mitigation and Enhancement Plan
EPS	European Protected Species
ES	Environmental Statement
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GLVIA3	Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (third edition)
GVA	Gross Value Added
ha	Hectares
HDD	Horizontal Directional Drilling
HER	Historic Environment Record
HMMP	Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan
HPI	Habitat of Principal Importance
HRA	Habitats Regulation Assessment
HVAC	Heating, Ventilation and Cooling
IAQM	Institute of Air Quality Management
IEMA	Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
IGP	Island Green Power (the applicant)
INNS	Invasive Non-Native Species

<b>Acronym / Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning / Description</b>
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LCT	Landscape Character Type
LEMP	Landscape and Ecological Management Plan
LSE	Likely Significant Effects
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
LWS	Local Wildlife Sites
MW	Megawatt
NETS	National Electricity Transmission System
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPS	National Policy Statement
NRSWA	New Roads and Streetworks Act
NSIP	Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project
OEMP	Operational Environmental Management Plan
OHID	Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
PEIR	Preliminary Environmental Information Report
PINS	Planning Inspectorate
POC	Points of Connection
PPG	Planning Practice Guidance
PRF	Potential Roosting Features
PROWMP	Public Rights of Way Management Plan
PV	Solar photovoltaic
SMP	Soil Management Plan
SMS	Strip, Map and Sample
SPI	Species of Importance
SSCEP	Skills, Supply Chain and Employment Plan
SSSI	Sites of Special Scientific Interest
SWMP	Site Waste Management Plan
WLC	Whole life carbon
WMS	Written Ministerial Statement
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation
Zol	Zone of Influence

## **2. Introduction and Context**

2.1. Island Green Power (IGP) are conducting the pre-application statutory consultation on the Lime Down Solar Park scheme between 29 January and 19 March 2025. Various documents have been published for consideration and comment from consultees, including:

- A Project Information Booklet
- The Preliminary Environmental Information Report Non-Technical Summary
- The Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), which contains 22 chapters, various figures and technical appendices
- Maps and plans of the proposed scheme.

- 2.2. Wiltshire Council has prepared this response to the statutory consultation in its role as Host Authority for the scheme, and as the Local Planning Authority, Local Highways Authority and Lead Local Flood Authority. The council has reviewed the above published information, and its observations, identified opportunities and concerns have been highlighted in this response.
- 2.3. The council's response should be considered by the applicant in its entirety, due to the inter-relationship between the various sections of the report and associated technical disciplines.

### **3. The Scheme**

- 3.1. As the Lime Down Solar Park scheme is anticipated to generate in excess of 50 Megawatt (MW) of electricity, it has been designated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. This NSIP is being promoted by Island Green Power (IGP), the applicant, under the requirements of the Planning Act to secure a Development Consent Order (DCO) to enable work to begin.
- 3.2. The applicant describes its proposals as *"Lime Down Solar Park is a new utility-scale solar park and battery energy storage project proposed to be built on land in North Wiltshire. The project would comprise the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and an on-site battery energy storage facility, plus associated development to connect the project into the national grid at Melksham Substation."*
- 3.3. At present, the scheme proposal covers approximately 2,834 hectares (ha) of land for solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generation, battery storage, associated infrastructure, and landscaping, heritage, surface water and biodiversity mitigation areas. The scheme would have up to a 500 MW export connection, 250 MW import connection and 500 MWh battery storage. The scheme is anticipated to be operational for a period of 60 years and be decommissioned from 2089.
- 3.4. The Project Information Booklet describes the core components of the scheme as follows:
  - Solar PV panels
  - Solar PV mounting structures
  - Supporting infrastructure – inverters, transformers and switchgear
  - Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)
  - Energy substations, including control buildings with welfare facilities
  - On-site cabling between the PV panels, BESS, inverters and transformers
  - Grid connection cabling between the on-site substation and Melksham Substation
  - Temporary construction compounds and temporary roadway accesses
  - Accesses to the site for construction and operation
  - Site security measures, including fencing and CCTV systems around site perimeter

- New planting, landscaping and biodiversity measures.
- 3.5. It is important to note that the scheme proposals are still developing, and that further environmental assessment and scheme development will occur in advance of the production of the Environmental Statement (ES), which will accompany the DCO application.
- 3.6. The applicant is proposing to prepare a suite of management documents to limit and control construction, operational and decommissioning activities associated with the scheme, which will seek to avoid or reduce impacts on the environment and local communities. These outline plans would accompany the DCO application and include, but are not limited to, the following:
- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)
  - Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP)
  - Construction Work Travel Plan (CWTP)
  - Public Right of Way Management Plan (PRoWMP)
  - Battery Safety Management Plan (BSMP)
  - Pollution Prevention Plan
  - Emergency Response Plan
  - Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)
  - Arboricultural Method Statement
  - Soil Management Plan (SMP)
  - Written Schemes of Investigation (WSI) for heritage matters
  - Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP)
  - Skills, Supply Chain and Employment Plan (SSCEP)
  - Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP)
  - Decommissioning Strategy (DS)
  - Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan (DEMP)
  - Decommissioning Traffic Management Plan (DTMP)
- 3.7. It is the applicant's stated intention that these documents would be further developed into detailed management plans prior to construction commencing and that the detailed management plans would be subject to continual monitoring and review throughout the construction phase. The development of these detailed management plans would be secured through a Requirement within the DCO.
- 3.8. It is currently expected that the applicant would submit the DCO application in early autumn 2025.

## **4. National and Local Policy Considerations**

- 4.1. Paragraph 165 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local plans to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low-carbon energy whilst ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed appropriately. The scheme is also aligned with the NPPFs requirement for the planning system to support the transition to a low carbon future, with recent revisions advising at NPPF paragraph 168(a):

*When determining planning applications for all forms of renewable and low carbon energy developments and their associated infrastructure, local planning authorities should: a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the proposal's contribution to a net zero future.*

- 4.2. National Policy Statements for Energy EN-1, EN-3 and EN-5, offer significant support for NSIP renewable energy development. Furthermore, both the last and the current government have issued Written Ministerial Statements (WMS) confirming the importance of renewable energy development.
- 4.3. In line with national legislation and guidance, Wiltshire Council has made a firm commitment to becoming a carbon neutral council by 2030. The Wiltshire Climate Strategy reiterates this commitment and expresses objectives that include renewable energy generation as part of the efficient and environmentally sensitive use of land, providing for the needs of an increasing population and nature.
- 4.4. Policies CP1 and CP2 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy relate to the spatial strategy for Wiltshire, setting the policy foundations for the promotion of sustainable development within the county. The scheme is for a standalone renewable energy installation and will not directly impact existing housing or employment sites. The scheme will result in some employment provision in the form of construction jobs but does not relate explicitly to employment development.
- 4.5. Policy CP42 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy expresses that proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported where it has been demonstrated that impacts (both individual and cumulative) specific to following factors (relevant to this scheme) have been satisfactorily considered:
  - (i) The landscape, particularly in and around Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONBs)
  - (iv) Biodiversity
  - (v) The historic environment [...]
  - (vi) Use of the local transport network
  - (vii) Residential amenity, including noise, odour, visual amenity and safety
  - (viii) Best and most versatile agricultural land
- 4.6. The cable connection search corridor passes through the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan area. Policy SCC3 of the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan reiterates the aims of CP42 expressing that proposals for standalone renewable energy development will be supported where all the following factors have been robustly demonstrated:
  - a) the costs and benefits compare favourably with potentially less intrusive options, such as large scale building mounted renewable energy

- b) a comprehensive landscape impact assessment has been undertaken which has informed the proposals for the location of new infrastructure and all mitigation measures identified in that are implemented
  - c) the wider benefits of providing energy from renewable sources, including contributions to national carbon reduction objectives and targets, outweigh any adverse impacts on the local environment or amenity, including any cumulative adverse impacts from existing or planned renewable energy developments; and
  - d) additional social, economic or environmental benefits which benefit the local community over the lifetime of the project are provided.
- 4.7. Policy SCC3 further expresses that any proposal for community energy project, where there is full or partial community ownership involvement, will be strongly supported.
- 4.8. In summary, the principle of proposals for renewable energy development receives broad support from local planning policies CP42 to the Wiltshire Core Strategy and policy SCC3 to the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan, as well as supporting Wiltshire's Green and Blue Infrastructure and climate strategies, provided that they are suitably located and sufficiently mitigate any adverse development specific and cumulative environmental effects. As set out in this response, further information is required from the applicant before the council can make an objective balanced planning judgement on the merits of the proposed scheme and therefore adequately assess its compliance with the aforementioned key policies.

## **5. Strategic Planning Considerations**

- 5.1. The applicant has supplied a Site Selection Assessment Report (Volume 3, Appendix 4-2) within the consultation documentation.
- 5.2. Whilst it is accepted that national planning policy / guidance does not prescribe a site selection methodology to address solar development, there are nonetheless a set of land use planning considerations that influence site selection.
- 5.3. It is noted that the applicant's site selection process runs to five stages and includes the consideration of typical planning constraints.
- 5.4. Nonetheless, in the case of the Lime Down Solar Park proposed scheme, the site selection methodology appears to be significantly influenced by available points of connection (POC) into the national electricity transmission system (NETS). It is considered that this makes sense as it potentially reduces costs and risks.
- 5.5. Annex A to the Site Selection Assessment Report presents a series of factors that have been considered through the assessment process. Under the title "Land Use", the assessment purports to have considered *inter alia* with extant planning permission for development and local plan / emerging local plan allocations. However, it is not clear whether the site selection process has assessed the electricity needs of these land uses and connection times.

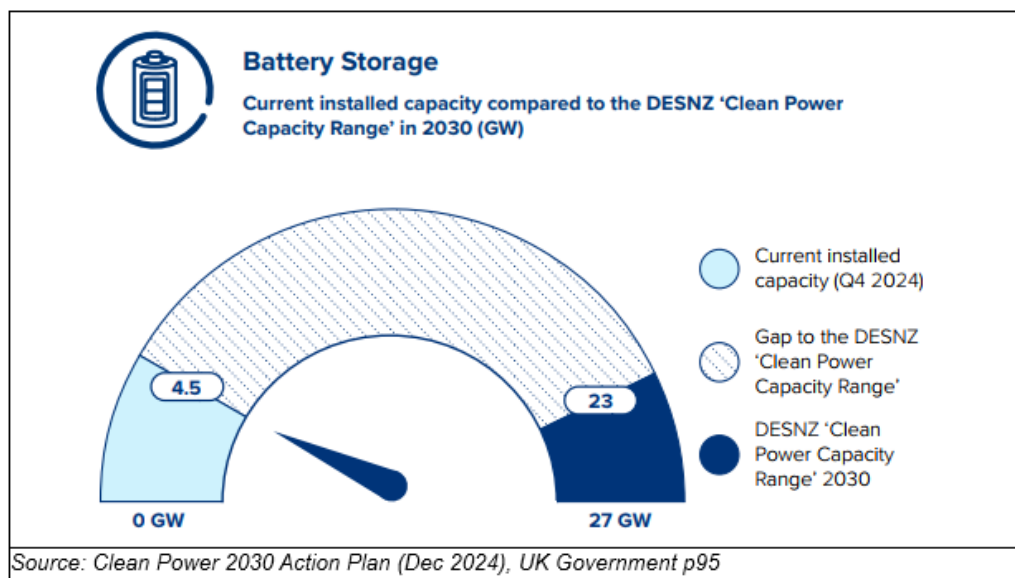
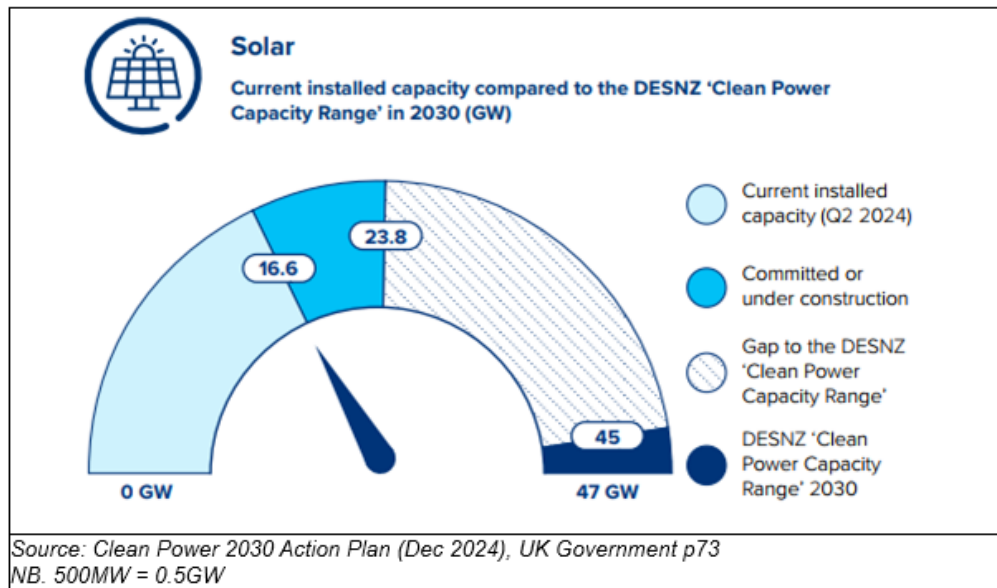


- 5.6. The emerging Local Plan review has been submitted for examination. It is accepted that the draft policies and proposals carry little weight in decision making, at the current time, but they nonetheless clearly set out the council's strategy for managing growth over the period to 2038 and potentially beyond.
- 5.7. The emerging Local Plan review identifies a significant level of housing and employment land commitments around Chippenham and Melksham. To provide direction and certainty in terms of where and when development will come forward to meet identified needs, the ability for such development to attain connections to the grid and electricity supply will be a fundamental requirement.
- 5.8. It is noted that whilst the proposed scheme will predominantly 'feed' the transmission part of the grid (i.e. 500MW exports), it will nonetheless require power (i.e. 250MW imports) from the grid too.
- 5.9. It is not clear in the submitted PEIR material whether the Melksham Substation has sufficient connection capacity to serve all 'committed' development and the proposed scheme, or whether it needs significant reinforcement.
- 5.10. These factors do not appear to have been assessed in detail and therefore if this proposed scheme obtains development consent, there would appear to be a risk that it may stymie the delivery of planned growth i.e. as set out in the emerging Local Plan review and / or sites benefitting from planning permission. It is the council's expectation that this is considered further in the ES.

## **6. Climate Change Considerations**

### Policy Context

- 6.1. It is considered that communicating the current action anticipated to meet net zero targets within the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 is important, and especially that information is relayed in a manner that is accessible to non-technical audiences. Unlike other areas of planning, there is no aggregation of need across local authority areas. Therefore, it is appropriate to place such development, especially nationally significant infrastructure, within a national context.
- 6.2. In tandem with the most recent NPPF, the UK Government published the [Clean Power 2030 Action Plan](#). It is considered that it is worth highlighting two key infographics within this publication because they detail the scale of challenge to decarbonise the UK's energy systems and sets out the energy mix it is anticipating, which includes a significant solar generation capacity growth and battery storage capacity growth. In common with all form of energy generation development, there is a degree of loss of energy through transmission.



6.3. Decarbonisation of the electricity grid is a key milestone towards net zero by 2050. Solar electricity generation and short-duration battery storage, as proposed here, are considered to be important parts of the future energy mix for UK energy security. In this context, this proposal could play an important role in meeting the required deployment at the necessary sharply accelerated scale and pace anticipated by the UK Government

Consultation Documents:

6.4. Based on the information contained in Chapter 7 (Climate Change) of the PEIR, the council acknowledges the applicant's comments, identified areas of further work and conclusions in general terms. It is noted that reference has been had to recognised industry sources and good practice, for example, the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). It is considered that the level of assumptions

and qualifications made within the PEIR seem reasonable given the current stage of the project, and the steps identified to refine this work when producing the ES.

- 6.5. It is noted that the PEIR has taken the approach of dealing with climate change adaptation as a theme to run through other sections of the report. This is considered to be a reasonable approach, as such matters when viewed purely through a climate adaptation perspective are unlikely to be significant in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) terms.
- 6.6. The applicant sets out that the proposal will have a total electricity generating capacity exceeding 50MW and up to 500MW with 500MWh battery storage (Chapter 7 of the PEIR is written with the assumption of 500MW (= 0.5GW) electricity generation capacity). The applicant states that there is no limit on the generating capacity because the environmental effects are determined by the design parameters rather than capacity. Furthermore, as technology develops (at pace) greater capacity may be achieved within the same design parameters. However, whilst this approach is not considered to be unreasonable and the need for flexibility is respected, the council considers that the capacity figures need to be refined within the future ES. This would allow interested parties to have the best information on the likely benefits of this scheme in climate change terms available.
- 6.7. Additionally, the council considers that the following minor points should be incorporated into the further assessment on this topic:
- Paragraph 7.3.16 should be updated to reflect the December 2024 NPPF publication.
  - The National Policy section should include reference to the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which was published in December 2024.
  - Paragraph 7.3.22 refers to the adopted Wiltshire Council Climate Strategy. Please note that this is a non-statutory document and is not part of the local development plan.
  - The Local Planning Policy needs to refer to the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy and emerging Local Plan review, including CP42 and Policy 86 respectively. Based on existing timetables, the emerging Local Plan review is likely to be the development plan at the point of DCO determination.
- 6.8. It is noted that the Chapter 7 of the PEIR analysis of whole life carbon (WLC) shows that the adverse impacts (in climate change terms) from the construction and decommissioning phases is clearly outweighed by the operational phase where renewable energy will be generated and stored. To clarify in this regard, the WLC includes embodied carbon, for example in the form of the carbon emitted to produce the panels, concrete blocks and supports, cabling, battery storage, transportation etc., as well as how this will be managed in the decommissioning.
- 6.9. The WLC of the proposal is also compared to a baseline scenario that doesn't consider construction and decommissioning phases. As with most types of development, it is the construction phase, and to a lesser degree the decommissioning phase, that result

in the greatest carbon emissions. As such, it is considered that the approach by the applicant in this work could underestimate the benefits of the scheme compared to the baseline. Furthermore, other assumptions in their baseline, such as, that the existing land-use (agricultural) will result in no carbon emissions are agreed – they will be conservative. In short, the council considers that for a variety of reasons the baseline carbon impacts are most likely understated in the PEIR.

- 6.10. Whilst the steps suggested by the applicant should ensure additional accuracy in their ES, it is the council's view, based on the information provided from the applicant, that the impact of the development is likely to be beneficial in EIA terms relating to climate matters.
- 6.11. From a climate perspective, Wiltshire Council is satisfied that the PEIR has been compiled by the applicant, provides coverage consistent with the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 Regulation 14(2) and allows officers to develop an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the development (and any associated development).

## **7. Landscape and Visual Considerations**

### Response Context:

- 7.1. This response primarily considers the information included within Chapter 8 (Landscape and Visual) of the PEIR. Comments are also provided on other chapters and information where landscape and visual matters are relevant.
- 7.2. It is noted that this statutory consultation phase remains within the pre-application stage of the DCO process. The following comments and observations are provided primarily to check whether the methodology and approach to the assessment of Landscape and Visual effects upon appropriately identified receptors is sufficient or sufficiently on course to enable informed planning judgement on the likely resulting significant landscape and visual effects arising from the project, including any significant cumulative landscape and visual effects that are considered likely to arise from the development proposals in combination with other existing and planned developments.
- 7.3. It is acknowledged that the survey, assessment and preliminary design of solar panel areas A to E are further advanced at this stage of the NSIP project in comparison to the cable route linking the separate panel areas to onsite substations and for the main cable connection to the point of grid connection. There is limited information provided for the actual cable routes within the PEIR information at this stage, so comments for this element of the project will be limited. However, it is agreed that the cable route connection element of the scheme is unlikely to generate much potential for likely significant landscape or visual effects if the mitigation hierarchy is followed, as no new overhead electricity transmission infrastructure is proposed as a design parameter, and the trenching work would be short duration and temporary in nature largely limited to construction phase effects.

- 7.4. An Indicative Masterplan (Volume 2, Figures 8.15.1 to 8.15.5) has been developed for the purpose of the PEIR, which sets out the proposed Solar PV Panel, BESS and sub-station areas together with the proposed environmental mitigation that has been developed including native tree and ground cover planting areas, hedgerow planting and reinforcement areas, habitat connections, field margin enhancement areas, green corridors, watercourse and woodland offset areas, and panel exclusion areas.

#### Consultation Documents:

##### Chapter 1 (Introduction):

- 7.5. Paragraph 1.6.13 of Chapter 1 (Introduction) identifies documents that collectively form the Development Plan. The currently listed documents in Chapter 1 do not identify the '*North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011*', which remains relevant in part, as it contains some saved policies which still contribute to and comprise the Development Plan i.e. Core Policies NE12 and NE14 to the Wiltshire Core Strategy. It is therefore recommended that this reference is added, and relevant saved policies evaluated under relevant chapters. It is noted that reference and details of these relevant saved policies are included in Chapter 8.

##### Chapter 2 (The Development Area):

- 7.6. The description of the development area included within Chapter 2 (The Development Area) outlines the maximum extents of the land required for the construction, operation maintenance and decommissioning phases of the scheme further illustrated by maps included in Volume 2, Figure 1-2 (Development Area) and Volume 2, Figure 2-1 (Elements of the Site). The council considers that the information is sufficient to inform the landscape and visual assessment of the scheme, noting that further refinement of Development Areas will follow as the detailed design is further refined and EIA progresses.
- 7.7. Volume 2, Figures 2-2-1 to 2-2-5 inclusive are maps that illustrate the existing individual field parcels comprising the separate development areas for Lime Down sites A to E. It is noted that there is a drawing reference number error on Figure 2-2-5, which erroneously states Figure 2-2-6.
- 7.8. Volume 2, Figures 2-3-1 to 2-3-5 inclusive are maps that illustrate the environmental and planning constraints within and surrounding Lime Down sites A to E. While Figures 2-3-6 to 2-3-9 inclusive illustrate the environmental and planning constraints for the cable route search corridor.
- 7.9. Volume 2, Figures 2-4-1 to 2-4-5 inclusive are maps that illustrate the public rights of way and highway network for Lime Down sites A to E. While Figures 2-4-6 to 2-4-9 inclusive illustrate the environmental and planning constraints for the cable route search corridor.

- 7.10. The council's Landscape Officer does not identify any obvious landscape or visual receptor omissions pertinent to the consideration of landscape and visual assessment, or issues with how this information is presented on the supporting maps.
- 7.11. It is anticipated that additional maps will be incorporated into the Landscape and Visual chapter of the finally submitted ES, following the refinement of the detailed cable connection route in accordance with the identified design parameters for this project element.

Chapter 6 (EIA Methodology):

- 7.12. In paragraph 6.8.5 of Chapter 6 (EIA Methodology) it states that: "**Volume 2, Figure 21-2 illustrates the location of other developments (cumulative developments) in the local area that have the potential to increase the impacts associated with the Scheme. An initial long list and the short list (Volume 3, Appendix 21-1) of cumulative developments has been prepared and shared with Wiltshire Council for consultation/agreement in preparing this PEIR. Chapter 21: Cumulative and In-Combination Effects presents the list of relevant cumulative developments considered in the assessment.**"
- 7.13. Following the publication of the adopted scoping opinion by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), Wiltshire Council was subsequently consulted on the initial Long and Short Lists to be taken forward within the cumulative assessment of effects. One of the issues raised at the time was the absence of any justification informing the basis of specific 'Zone of Influence' (Zol) extents for individual topic areas included for assessment. At paragraph 6.8.12 it states that: "*A review of other developments has been undertaken, initially encompassing a Zone of Influence (Zol) defined by the technical topic specialists in order to prepare a long list of 'other development' or 'cumulative developments'. The justification for each Zol identified is presented in Volume 2, Figure 21-2 and summarised in Chapter 21: Cumulative and In-Combination Effects.*"
- 7.14. The council notes that the justification for establishing the Landscape and Visual 'Zol' (noting these could be different for landscape and visual receptors) is not presented in Volume 2, Figure 21-2 as stated. Clarification was sought from the applicant on this specific point. The clarification received to date was that Volume 1 - Chapter 6 reference to Vol 2, Fig 21-2 was an error, and technical justification informing Zol for specific topic areas is provided in Vol 2, Fig 21-1 and further detail included at Vol 1, Chapter 21, para 21.5.7 (incorporating table 21-1).
- 7.15. The council's Landscape Officer has been unable to find any justification within the submitted PEIR information to explain the justification for the Zol for cumulative Landscape and Visual topic area, including within Volume 3 – Appendix 8-1 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Methodology, where it simply states at para, 2.5.1 that *'The Cumulative landscape and visual effects relating to the Cumulative Developments are considered as part of this LVIA cumulative assessment. Cumulative Effects relating to other similar developments (Cumulative Developments) are*

*considered within the Cumulative Developments assessment.”* Further detail or explanation should be provided in relation to the Landscape and Visual assessment methodology used in the assessment of ‘cumulative schemes’ and ‘cumulative developments’ alongside justification for establishing the Landscape and Visual cumulative development Zol (this is discussed in further detail under comments for Chapter 21 (Cumulative and In-Combination Effects)). It is considered that the applicant should provide this additional information, if it exists, signpost it more clearly.

- 7.16. In the council’s Landscape Officer’s opinion, the methodology and basis of the current cumulative landscape and visual assessment is not clear. At this preliminary stage, the submitted information doesn’t appear to consider within its scope the most relevant type of cumulative effect associated with the introduction of large-scale solar development and associated infrastructure over existing farmland, providing a rural separating function and setting to Wiltshire’s characteristic limestone villages, and which provides countryside recreation and amenity functions for their associated communities.
- 7.17. Paragraph 7.17 of the third edition of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) explains there are many different types of cumulative landscape and visual effects that may need to be considered and lists seven different types of cumulative effect that could be relevant to include. In the council’s Landscape Officer’s opinion, the two most relevant of these seven bullet points to include from the guidelines are (underline added for emphasis):
- The filling of an area with either the same or different types of development over time, such that it may be judged to have substantially altered the landscape resource and views or visual amenity.
  - Incremental change as a result of successive individual developments such that the combined landscape and / or visual effect is significant even though the individual effects may not be;
- 7.18. Paragraph 7.18 of the GLVIA3 states that: “Agreement should also be reached about whether the cumulative effects assessment is to focus primarily on the **additional** effects of the main project under consideration, or on the **combined** effects of all the past, present and future proposals together with the new project.”
- 7.19. It is considered that due to the large expanses of land that these types of development occupy, and the obvious magnitude of change to landcover and land use, there is a proportionate justification in this regard to follow the ‘combined’ effects approach, as it is felt that stakeholders, including the public will likely be more interested to understand the combined effects of all the past, current and future proposals, including the proposed scheme.

## Chapter 8 (Landscape and Visual):

- 7.20. Chapter 8 (Landscape and Visual) presents the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken to date considering the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed scheme during the construction, operation (including maintenance) and decommissioning phases. The following aspects are identified to have been considered within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) process to inform the findings of this chapter to date (Jan 2025):
- The existing landscape and visual baseline scenario within a defined Study Area, and the nature of change.
  - The effects upon landscape and visual receptors arising as a result of the Scheme and the significance associated with identified effects based on the sensitivity of these receptors to change and the magnitude of any change that will likely occur. It also defines whether an effect is beneficial, adverse, or neutral.
  - Embedded mitigation proposals established in response to design proposals to date and identified landscape and visual receptors.
- 7.21. The methodology states that it follows the advice contained within the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Third Edition' (GLVIA3) and supporting LITGN-2024-01-GLVIA3 'Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Third Edition (GLVIA3). The council agrees that this referenced guidance alongside the other guidance listed under paragraph 1.11 of Volume 3, Appendix 8 is the appropriate guidance to establish the methodology relating to the assessment of likely significant landscape and visual effects including cumulative landscape and visual effects.
- 7.22. The following observations are provided in relation to the LVIA methodology as currently included at Appendix 8-1 (Volume 3) of the PEIR.
- 7.23. Under the section heading 'Visual Baseline', paragraph 1.4.11 states: "*Landscape character types (LCTs) are reviewed during fieldwork and the descriptions contained in the published landscape character assessment are augmented where necessary.*" The council considers that the extracted text relates to the landscape baseline methodology and not the visual baseline methodology.
- 7.24. There is no information included within the LVIA methodology which justifies or explains how the Zol for the cumulative landscape and visual assessment has been established. Further comments in relation to the LVIA's specific approach and methodology employed for the assessment of cumulative Landscape effects and cumulative Visual effects is included under comments for Chapter 6 (EIA Methodology) and Chapter 21 (Cumulative and In-Combination Assessment of Effects).



## Landscape Effects:

7.25. Following a preliminary review of the summary tables for likely landscape effects, as included within Appendix 8-3-1 (Volume 3) Landscape Assessment, it is noted that Table 1.1 provides a summary of the landscape receptors assessed as part of the PEIR (extracted below) for potential significant effects to arise from the project.

### 1.1 Landscape Assessment Summary – PEIR Assessment of Cumulative Site Effects

Table 1 PEIR Assessment of Cumulative Site Effects

Lime Down Solar Park: PEIR Assessment of Cumulative Site Effects				
Receptor	Significance of Effect			
	Construction	Operation – Year 1	Operation – Year 15	Decommissioning
Landscape Fabric	Moderate / Minor Neutral	Moderate / Minor Neutral	<b>Moderate Beneficial (Significant)</b>	<b>Moderate Beneficial (Significant)</b>
Local Study Area	<b>Moderate (Significant)</b>	<b>Moderate (Significant)</b>	Moderate / Minor	Minor
Wider Study Area	Moderate / Minor	Moderate / Minor	Minor	Minor
Outer Study Area	Moderate / Minor	Moderate / Minor	Minor	Minor

7.26. The above table brings together the assessed cumulative site effects (Lime Down A to E) into a summary overview of the significance of landscape effects which are assessed at this stage for each of the receptors assessed for individual solar panel areas, which are included as separate tables for each area within Appendix 8-3-1.

7.27. The applicant has assessed that the only likely significant effects considered to arise from the introduction of the totality of the scheme at this location are for the **Landscape Fabric** receptor, i.e. relating to cumulative consideration of landscape elements / components, for example trees, hedgerows, woodland, ponds etc. The assessment concludes that at Operation (year 15) there would be a **moderate significant beneficial** effect, following the establishment of mitigation and enhancement planting, and a **moderate significant adverse** effect upon the character of the **Local Study Area** (1km) at Construction phase and for Year 1 Operation phase, which progressively reduces to **moderate minor adverse** and not significant by Operation (year 15). No other significant adverse effects are otherwise anticipated for landscape receptors by the applicant. The council is not yet in a position to agree with this conclusion.

7.28. At this stage, and without the benefit of the detailed LVIA on the final scheme, the council's Landscape Officer is not yet in a position to agree that if appropriate new planting successfully establishes, and as it begins to mature, then the project (Lime Down areas A to E) could result in a **moderate beneficial** effect at year 15 Operation and Decommissioning phases of the project for the **landscape fabric**. This would very much depend on the final design of the scheme and its successful establishment and appropriate future management.

- 7.29. The only other significant effect identified by the applicant in Chapter 8 is for the landscape character of the **Local Study Area**. The council has considered the supporting landscape assessment sheets of the PEIR, which in the council's Landscape Officer's opinion seem to rely upon the embedded mitigation design parameters in all cases, including buffers and standoffs to sensitive visual receptors alongside new mitigating planting to screen development areas and improve visual integration of the solar panel areas in order to reduce this **moderate significant adverse** effect assessed at year 1 Operation, to a **moderate / minor adverse** (not significant) effect at Year 15 Operation for the baseline character of the Local Study Area including all site areas (Lime Down A to E).
- 7.30. It is the council's Landscape Officer's opinion that the applicant's preliminary consideration of likely resulting significant effects arising from the development proposal has only superficially evidenced the consideration of the resulting change effects upon the existing landscape character baseline. The significance of resulting effect upon the Local Study Area (landscape character) is a measure of resulting change arising from the introduction of the development proposal into the existing landscape baseline situation, in this case, the Local Study Area equates to the character of the site areas (Lime Down A to E) and their immediate adjoining landscape context.
- 7.31. The provisional assessment of likely significant effects upon landscape character doesn't appear to consider or reference the scale (land area cover) of the development proposal or corresponding land use change, or how the introduction of new urbanising solar scheme elements including 100's of hectares of solar panel strings, 2 substations and up to 2 Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facilities into the receiving local landscape (character) baseline alter this. The provisional assessment of landscape character seems to focus on retention and enhancement of physical perimeter site landscaping components (landscape fabric which is assessed separately), while in other areas of the PEIR, it states that additional enhancement measures are not relevant to the assessment of overall significance.
- 7.32. The magnitude of change to character seems to acknowledge the qualitative elements of the landscape, but not the quantitative change from new introductions, or how these fit with the existing character to maintain the baseline condition. The character of the existing landscape baseline will be substantially changed from that of existing farmed fields and seasonal farming activities functioning to providing greenfield separating countryside between distinctive rural limestone villages and farmsteads to extremely large, albeit disaggregated areas of new urbanising solar energy infrastructure. These effects are in theory fully reversible, but will be of long-term duration. They will endure for the proposed life of development and visual mitigation measures, combined with landscape enhancement planting would not in the council's Landscape Officer's opinion substantially alter this state of significance from Operational Year 1 to Operational Year 15 in terms of character.

## Visual Effects:

- 7.33. It is noted that the initial assessment of visual receptors is evidenced by numerous visual assessment sheets included within Appendix 8, including assessments of Private receptors at Appendix 3-2-1; Transport receptors at Appendix 3-2-2 and public receptors at Appendix 3-2-3. Those visual receptors assessed likely to experience significant visual effects are scoped in to be taken forward for final visual assessment and inclusion within the ES to be submitted with the DCO application. The council's Landscape Officer does not identify any additional public visual receptors or raise any issues in this regard.
- 7.34. The proposed public viewpoint locations to be taken forward for visual assessment are included within Chapter 8 and listed at Table 8-7 (Proposed Viewpoint Locations), which is supported by Figures 8-10 (viewpoint location maps) and Figures 8-10-1 to 8-10-5 (viewpoint location maps of individual site areas A to E) and Figures 8-14-1 to 8-14-57 (Viewpoint Baseline Photography and Accurate Visual Representation (AVR) Level 1 photomontages) in Volume 3 of the PEIR.
- 7.35. The viewpoint locations have been subject to consultation and agreement with the council's Landscape Officer and the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL). Additional viewpoints have been requested by Wiltshire Council and CNL representatives during consultation on this matter, and the PEIR confirms these have been or will be additionally included. Therefore, the council's Landscape Officer does not identify any additional visual receptors or viewpoints (including longer distance) which would be necessary to additionally include to provide a proportionate assessment of likely significant visual effects arising from the proposed development.
- 7.36. A series of AVR Level 1 photomontages have been produced to show the effects of the scheme at locations where significant visual effects are considered likely to occur. The locations of the photomontages have been agreed with the Cotswolds National Landscape Board (CNLB) and Wiltshire Council's Landscape Officer. It is understood that the summer Viewpoint photography for the additionally requested photomontage viewpoint locations requested by the CNLB and Wiltshire Council could not be undertaken in time for inclusion in this report. However, it is understood that both winter and summer photography will be included in the final ES.
- 7.37. The council welcomes that the final ES submission will include AVR Level 3 photomontages (which include details such as materials, textures and colour) in both winter and summer months from a number of these Viewpoints, which will be finally agreed with CNLB and Wiltshire Council alongside cumulative photography where the effects of the Scheme would be seen in combination with other Development schemes.
- 7.38. Therefore, the council's Landscape Officer does not raise any specific issues in relation to the visual assessment methodology as currently outlined within Chapter 8 of the PEIR at this stage. It should enable the preparation of a proportionate and transparent visual assessment as part of the LVIA to be carried out for the final DCO scheme.

### **Embedded Mitigation Measures:**

- 7.39. The PEIR identifies embedded mitigation measures as a design response to date, seeking to avoid, reduce, and compensate for significant adverse landscape and visual effects resulting from the proposed development.
- 7.40. It is acknowledged that some field areas initially proposed as solar panel infrastructure areas have been removed or reduced in extent from the scheme where these were assessed to result in potential for likely significant adverse visual effects for sensitive visual receptors. The removal of these areas following iterative landscape and visual assessment is welcomed in landscape and visual terms, noting that some other field areas are similarly removed to safeguard identified settings to heritage assets (such as opposite Fosse Lodge in Lime Down C) or to provide ecology mitigation / net gain areas or to avoid sensitive buried archaeology. These removed field areas, as based on current indicative layouts, are understood to remain within the project site area and will provide onsite mitigation or additional enhancement opportunities for ecology / Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).
- 7.41. It is the council's Landscape Officer's view that some additional field areas, currently illustrated as panel areas within site layout drawings, should be removed to provide further embedded mitigation for the final scheme. Obvious examples are considered to be the land located in the northwest corner of Lime Down C due to the rising sloping and open nature of the topography viewed by receptors located within the CNL, and which could be considered as complimentary landscape to the CNL designation, and rising field(s) to the north of Lime Down E, which are visible from the edges of Corston and which shares some potential for a cumulative visual effect with the existing operational Rodbourne Rail Solar farm from elevated vantage points.

### **Additional Enhancement Measures:**

- 7.42. It is understood that the applicant has requested feedback in relation to the nature and type of landscape enhancement measures suitable for the project to seek to deliver. The council has identified the following measures as a starting point for further project team / stakeholder engagement:
- In areas that are considered to comprise the setting to the CNL, or adjacent areas that can be considered as 'complimentary' landscapes to the CNL, mitigation measures and enhancements should support the delivery of policies contained within the 'Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) Management Plan' which can be further detailed and informed on a landscape character area basis by following advice contained within the 'Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) Landscape Strategy and Guidelines' and other relevant guidance.
  - Enhancement planting and future management objectives in all areas should be generally aligned to support the delivery of the 'Wiltshire and Swindon Nature Recovery Strategy' (this is currently of draft status, but likely to be

adopted prior to DCO submission), Wiltshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, and supportive of landscape management recommendations for specific landscape character types and areas identified within the hierarchy of published Landscape Character Assessments as identified within the scoping opinion, including environmental opportunities identified within the National Character Area Profiles.

- The reinstatement of missing and lost hedgerow trees is considered an important enhancement opportunity to help conserve and enhance landscape character and leave a positive landscape legacy from the project. (The reintroduction of disease resistant varieties of hedgerow Elm trees into this landscape could be supported).
- Restore missing and enhance the existing species and age diversity of hedgerow trees and field trees present in the landscape. It is acknowledged that many hedgerow trees have been lost from the landscape / field pattern over the last 50 years, primarily resulting from Dutch Elm Disease (1970's) and more recently and ongoing from Ash Die Back. English Oak comprises the highest percentage of the remaining hedgerow and field trees in this area of Wiltshire, and it can be observed that many of these trees are of a similar mature age. Oak trees are high water demand trees and could be at increased risk of drought stress with longer drier summers arising from climate change. Taking this into account, a successive approach to selection of trees to grow on as hedgerow trees or planting new trees could be adopted over the life of the project might be adopted. i.e. not all provided up front, with potentially a second phase after 30 years and another phase prior to decommissioning.
- The construction of new, maintenance and repair of existing dry-stone walls. (Note: avoid new hedgerow planting adjacent to existing drystone walls).
- Reinstatement of historic hedge lines / former field patterns.
- Landscape and ecological enhancement of riparian corridors and improved management of watercourses.
- Improve and enhance existing hedgerow structure. Lay overgrown hedgerows and improve species diversity of woody hedgerow species, with supplementary planting to increase ecological value and nature recovery.
- Plant new areas of mixed native broadleaf woodland or identify areas for natural regeneration of woodland in areas which would help deliver improved habitat connections. Consideration could also be given to introducing new field corner copses and trees as stepping stones to link with and extend existing areas of woodland and tree cover, where this would not lead to the loss of existing important scenic or heritage views or harm other existing valued habitat types or impact the buried archaeological resource.

- Replacement of existing stiles with access for all gates along the rural public rights of way network.
- Introduction of permissive or dedicated paths through or linking site areas to offer alternative attractive recreational routes, or create new circular recreational routes or linking connections, where this is compatible with ecology / biodiversity objectives.

#### Chapter 21 (Cumulative and In-Combination Effects):

- 7.43. Chapter 21 (Cumulative and In-Combination Effects) considers the potential for effect and interactions and cumulative effects as a result of the Scheme. This chapter includes Table 21-1 Zol Extents for Assessment of potential Cumulative Effects, which identifies that the Zol extents for the cumulative assessment of landscape and visual effects extends up to 5km from solar PV sites (Lime Down A to E), and 0.5km from the cable connection route search corridor.
- 7.44. Despite a reference from Chapter 21, there is no justification included within Chapter 8 (Landscape and Visual) or its supporting Volume 3 appendices as far as has been observed to justify Zol extents for the purpose of Landscape or Visual cumulative assessment.
- 7.45. Previous council feedback on the long and short lists of projects to be included within the Cumulative Assessment highlighted some concerns in relation to the current 5km cumulative Zol extent for the cumulative assessment of certain landscape receptors, scoped in for assessment i.e. the specific Landscape Character Types / Areas, the setting to the Cotswold National Landscape Designation, and in relation to visual assessment for certain linear routes such as the Fosse Way where there is potential for sequential visual effects, all potentially extending beyond the existing 5km study area / Zol limits.
- 7.46. A number of existing operational solar PV / BESS developments (as built) and proposed (in planning or with planning permission) schemes were additionally highlighted in feedback to the applicant. The applicant has subsequently confirmed that existing operational solar schemes identified by the council will not be included on short lists but will form part of the existing landscape and visual baseline. It is the council's Landscape Officer's view that all large-scale solar development within the cumulative Zol should be scoped into the cumulative landscape assessment.
- 7.47. It is noted that the approach to the cumulative assessment within the PEIR includes.
- The assessment of **Cumulative Sites** based on the Lime Down Solar PV Sites A to E.
  - The assessment of **Cumulative Developments** being the Scheme in combination with other similar developments, these being solar projects in the local area.

- 7.48. For the purpose of the cumulative assessment a long list of developments is provided in Appendix 21-1 (Volume 3) which lists all potential developments within the identified Zol.
- 7.49. The PEIR states the identified long list of developments has been screened by the applicant to determine their potential to interact with the Scheme in a manner that has the ability to generate cumulative effects. This initial screening is stated to consider the scale of the development and its potential to generate significant environmental effects, the location of the development, and how the development's programme relates to that of the Scheme.
- 7.50. A short list of developments is then formed (provided in Table 21-2) which details why the development has been selected for further assessment (i.e. those developments progressing to further Stages 3 and 4 of the cumulative assessment). The location of these developments is shown in Figure 21-1. It is noted that while the location of these developments is indicated with a pin marker on this Figure, the spatial extents are not currently illustrated. Due to the substantial areas of land required for these schemes, the council considers that the development areas should be included on the Figure to understand the spatial relationship with the Lime Down areas A to E.
- 7.51. It is noted and welcomed that the applicant's approach will be to continue to liaise with the host authority (Wiltshire Council) in relation to potential further planning applications that come forward within the Cumulative Zone(s) of Influence for consideration as to whether these should be included on long and short lists and screened for their potential combined cumulative effects. Further discussions would be welcomed to agree final schemes with potential for likely significant cumulative landscape or visual effects. Further to the council's initial feedback on long and short lists, planning consent has subsequently been granted for the large solar farm located at 'Land at Red Barn, East of Kington St Michael, Chippenham' (Planning Application Reference: PL/2023/08481) and a new application for a solar farm is additionally identified at Land East of Battens Farm, Allington, Chippenham, SN14 6LT (Planning Application Reference: PL/2024/09410) both of these schemes are included within the extent of the cumulative landscape and visual Zol.
- 7.52. A summary of cumulative effects is included within Table 21-3. In relation to Chapter 8 (Landscape and Visual) topic area, the summary states: *"Overall, cumulative landscape and visual effects are not anticipated to be significant due to the distance between the Solar PV Sites and other developments, limited intervisibility between the Scheme and other developments, and the short-term and minor nature of impacts from the Scheme along the Cable Route Search Corridor."* The council agrees that it is unlikely that there is much potential for either significant landscape or visual effects to arise from the cable connection route element of the scheme (even though the final route remains to be confirmed at this stage) due to the low magnitude and short-term nature of change connected with this project element in landscape or visual terms.

- 7.53. Having visited the locations of the Lime Down Areas A-E scheme to ground truth a number of representative visual receptors and representative viewpoints used within the visual assessment, both independently and accompanied with the applicant's appointed landscape consultant, it is the council's Landscape Officer's opinion that there is likely limited potential for substantial levels of shared intervisibility between the separate Lime Down (A to E) site areas from representative viewpoints. However, this requires further work.
- 7.54. There is also likely to be limited potential for shared intervisibility between the Lime Down (A to E) site areas and existing operational large scale solar PV developments already present in the landscape, however the council's Landscape Officer considers that there is potential for some shared intervisibility between the existing operational solar development at Rodbourne Rail Farm, north of Corston and the northern field parcels located within Lime Down Area E. There is also limited potential for shared intervisibility between the existing operational solar development at Hill Hayes Lane, Hullavington and Lime Down C. While this potential is limited and unlikely to result in an assessed significant cumulative visual effect, the potential for some shared intervisibility exists. This could influence overall judgements in relation to cumulative effects upon landscape character in terms of perceptual aspects of character.
- 7.55. The approach to assessment of cumulative landscape effects in relation to landscape character (in particular the 'Limestone Lowland Type' and its associated 'Landscape Character Areas') are not in the council's Landscape Officer's opinion being appropriately considered but need to be.
- 7.56. There is an evident spatial clustering of existing, proposed and planned large-scale solar PV development and BESS feeding into Minety, Chippenham and Melksham substations in this area of Wiltshire, and in particular within this character type. This is incrementally and progressively significant changing the landscape character baseline due to the magnitude of change effects associated with this type of development which should be factored into susceptibility judgements for this additional NSIP project in the same character type and area.
- 7.57. The cumulative landscape assessment should illustrate graphically the application boundary extents of all existing large scale operational solar farms and BESS, those in receipt of planning consent pending construction, and those currently in planning awaiting determination within a clearly reasoned and justified Zol for this purpose to help understand the extent of their coverage on the baseline Landscape Character Type and Area(s).

#### DCO Conditions / Requirements:

- 7.58. At this initial stage, the council requests that the following heads of terms of DCO requirements are included for council approval:
1. Provision of detailed landscaping proposals



2. Implementation of landscaping proposals (including replacement of planting failures during early years establishment)
3. Maintenance of landscaping (for duration of project)
4. Tree protection plans and arboricultural method statements for both construction and decommissioning phases
5. Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)
6. Decommissioning and Land Restoration Plan

## **8. Ecology and Biodiversity Considerations**

### Response Context:

- 8.1. This response considers the information provided within the submitted PEIR (January 2025) with a primary focus on Volume 1, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity), the suite of Volume 2 supporting figures and Volume 3, Appendix 9.1 to Appendix 9.9. Comments are also provided on other chapters and figures where relevant to the consideration of ecology and biodiversity matters.
- 8.2. It is noted that this statutory consultation phase is within the pre-application stage of the DCO process. Therefore, the objective of the comments, observations and recommendations detailed herein is primarily to provide feedback and steer regarding whether the methodology and approach to the assessment of potential impacts on ecology and biodiversity likely to result from the Lime Down Solar Park scheme as set out in the PEIR, is on the right trajectory and whether it is sufficient to facilitate an informed planning judgement on the likely significant effects arising from the proposed Scheme.
- 8.3. In light of the vast amount of information that required review within a short period of time, please note that this response focuses on issues, concerns, queries or outstanding information that warrant dedicated discussion and those matters where provision of specific feedback or steer has been considered necessary to ensure appropriate and best outcomes for biodiversity and ecology through the EIA process. The objective of this response is therefore, not to summarise or provide details of all matters discussed within the PEIR or to discuss every single ecological receptor. Instead, only those receptors where a particular issue, concern, query or so forth needs to be raised is detailed herein. As such, this response should not be relied upon as a summary of all matters detailed in the PEIR in relation to ecology and biodiversity but instead, as an evaluation of the submitted PEIR.

### Consultation Documents:

### General Observations and Overarching Comments:

- 8.4. It is evident from a review of the PEIR, that additional areas have been added to the Scheme Boundary as paragraph 9.6.15 of Volume 1, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) states: *“All land at the Solar PV Sites will be subject to the same survey scope. At the time of writing, a lesser degree of survey work has been completed on*

*the areas of land within Lime Down C and D that were added in February 2024, and still less at the further areas of land within Lime Down C that were added in June 2024, owing to their later addition into the Scheme and the reduced time available for survey work to this point. However, survey across all Sites will be equalised at the point of submission of the DCO application.”*

- 8.5. Volume 3, Appendix 9-3 specifies that the first parcels of additional land included within the Scheme Boundary were added in March 2024 rather than February 2024, so there is some discrepancy between the various submitted chapters and appendices in this regard. Nonetheless, paragraph 1.2.19 of Appendix 9-3 explains: *“In March 2024, approximately 67.1ha of land was added to the Scheme Boundary, 14.4ha of which was added to Lime Down C with 52.7ha added to Lime Down D. Additionally, approximately 44ha of land was added to Lime Down C in June 2024.”*
- 8.6. The council’s ecology and biodiversity officer notes that a rationale for the addition of these areas at a later stage along with a clear map / plan showing the extent of the respective areas does not appear to be provided within the PEIR, clarity from the applicant would be welcomed. Whilst these additional areas may seem relatively small in comparison to the total area covered by the Solar PV Sites, it is worth highlighting that the areas added in February and June 2024 are of a considerable size in their own right. It is therefore considered that sufficient ecological baseline information for these additional areas should have been included within the PEIR at the statutory consultation stage to ensure that adequate information was provided to facilitate a suitably informed response to this proposed scheme from the council.
- 8.7. Volume 1, Chapter 6 (EIA Methodology) states: *“The final routing of the cables which connect the Solar PV Sites and the Solar PV Sites to the existing National Grid substation is yet to be defined for the PEIR...The final Cable Route Corridor will fall within the Cable Route Search Corridor presented at PEIR, with the final route refined as more information is gathered from fieldwork and through consultation. As such, the assessment of effects in relation to the Cable Search Route Corridor for the majority of topics is necessarily preliminary in this PEIR. Further detailed assessment will be undertaken based on a Cable Route Corridor that will be defined following statutory consultation. Detailed assessment will be contained within the ES submitted with the DCO Application.”*
- 8.8. Contrary to the stipulation in the previously submitted Scoping Report that the PEIR would provide details of a refined cable route, the Cable Route Corridor (CRC) has not been refined. Furthermore, there have been so surveys conducted in the Cable Route Search Corridor (CRSC) to date with the exception of some survey at the former proposed location for the BESS at Land near Melksham Substation and as such, the ecological baseline of the CRSC hasn’t been established. Therefore, insufficient information has been provided at this stage in the PEIR to enable provision of suitably informed comments regarding this element of the Scheme.
- 8.9. Given that all surveys are either ongoing or yet to be undertaken in 2025 for the additional areas at Lime Down C and D, and all surveys in the CRSC are currently

pending and due to be conducted in 2025, it is not feasible at this stage to provide suitably informed, wholly robust commentary on the likely efficacy and adequacy of mitigation and compensation proposed in relation to a number of ecological receptors. Furthermore, mitigation packages are not confirmed and are still being explored for several species / species groups.

- 8.10. Moreover, Volume 1, Chapter 3 (The Scheme) states: *“Once the full suite of species surveys has been carried out any new habitat land and / or mitigation that is appropriate will be identified and included in the DCO application.”* This extract from Chapter 3 serves to augment the above point in so far as the council cannot form a robust stance at this stage regarding the appropriateness and adequacy of mitigation and compensation detailed in the PEIR as the pending survey will potentially necessitate the provision of more mitigation and compensation than has been put forward to date.
- 8.11. In light of the above, it is suggested that a supplementary public consultation is carried out whereby all interested parties, including the council, are formally re-consulted once pending surveys have been conducted and any mitigation and compensation measures have been determined, where required. This is particularly pertinent in light of the need for a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and the necessity to ascertain the potential for effects on the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation (BBOA Bats SAC) and its qualifying species as a result of the proposed CRC. (This is discussed later in this response; however, the applicant’s ecological consultant was provided with a Technical Briefing Note regarding this matter by Wiltshire Council’s ecology team in autumn 2024 and there are details in the Scoping Opinion). Determination of survey scope within the CRSC needs to take account of the information detailed in the aforementioned Technical Briefing Note and the results of survey should inform the final CRC.
- 8.12. For similar reasons, the provision of suitably informed commentary on the assessment of cumulative and in-combination effects has not been possible. Thus, comments relating to the potential for such effects can be provided subsequent to completion of the scheduled surveys on the additional land at Lime Down C and D and within the CRSC.
- 8.13. It is evident that at present the PEIR and supporting plans don’t include any details regarding the potential number and / or location of temporary construction compounds that it is understood will be constructed within the Solar PV Sites and the CRSC. Assessment of the siting of compounds within the CRSC is particularly important due to areas of the CRSC falling within consultation zones associated with the BBOA Bats SAC and core areas around Bechstein’s bat core roosts that are considered to be functionally linked with the BBOA Bats SAC. In addition, information regarding the size and proposed locations of on-site car parking areas for site personnel, as well as confirmation of any new highway improvement works haven’t been provided. As such, it is considered that Volume 3, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) effectively omits robust assessment of these elements of the construction phase.

- 8.14. The biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirement for NSIPs to achieve at least 10% measurable net gain on all terrestrial and intertidal development, which is to be secured for at least 30 years, will be mandatory from November 2025. As such, it is recognised that delivery of BNG is not mandatory for this NSIP at the present time. However, Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted January 2015) requires no net loss of biodiversity and for major development to achieve a net gain; albeit the latter requirement is not quantified as a percentage in the policy as it was adopted prior to mandatory BNG.
- 8.15. Nevertheless, it is noted that the PEIR indicates that the proposed scheme will achieve at least 10% BNG. Please note that it has not been possible for the council to verify the percentage of BNG that could be delivered because neither Chapter 9 or Appendix 9-1 or any of the other supporting appendices include habitat condition assessment sheets, species lists or a completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric. This information will be required as part of the DCO submission. Please be advised however, that for the purposes of ensuring no net loss of biodiversity and delivery of BNG, the council has adopted a precautionary stance and assumes that only modified grassland can be achieved under the solar panels. This is discussed further herein.
- 8.16. An Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) (Volume 3, Appendix 9-8) has been submitted alongside the PEIR. Whilst the preparation of the Outline LEMP is welcomed, the Council reserves the right to comment on this document in future given that ecological surveys and details of mitigation and compensation are still outstanding.
- 8.17. The ecological assessment presented in Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) and the BNG projections on submitted plans appear to assume that there will be provision of enhancement measures for ecology and biodiversity, and this is welcomed. However, paragraph 1.4.3 of Volume 1, Chapter 1 (Introduction) indicates that the applicant may opt not to deliver these enhancement measures as it specifies: *“Over and above the secured mitigation measures, the Applicant is also considering providing various enhancement measures to provide additional biodiversity and community benefits. These enhancement measures are not required to mitigate significant adverse effects of the Scheme. The Applicant may or may not provide those enhancement measures and one of the purposes of this consultation is to obtain opinions on the types of enhancement measures to be considered.”* It is recommended that enhancement measures are provided and that ongoing liaison with the council and other stakeholders is undertaken on this matter.

#### Appraisal of Ecological Baseline Conditions and Associated Survey Methodology:

- 8.18. The Council has a couple of general observations collated during the review of the PEIR, particularly Appendix 9-1, and these are as follows:
- Appendix 9-1 doesn't provide comprehensive botanical species lists at the back of the report. Therefore, although some species are listed under each habitat type in the main body of the report, the whole list of species identified

within each habitat has not been provided. This is required so that the botanical assemblage and number of different species at the identified habitats can be reviewed.

- Target Notes have not been included on the Baseline Habitat Maps (Figures 9.1.8 to 9.1.12) and have not been tabulated at the back of Appendix 9-1 as would have been expected in accordance with the adopted survey methodology. If the decision was taken not to use Target Notes, perhaps on account of the size of the Scheme, it would be helpful for a rationale to be provided within Appendix 9-1.

- 8.19. General observations regarding the evaluation of the ecological baseline and associated survey methodology as detailed in Volume 1, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) of the PEIR are set out below.
- 8.20. Paragraph 9.3.12 of Chapter 9 specifies that the NPPF had most recently been revised in December 2023. This wasn't the case at the time that Chapter 9 was published (January 2025) and so if the intention was for the applicant's assessment to continue to cite the NPPF from 2023, it is recommended that this is stipulated in any future assessment work and the ES.
- 8.21. In respect of the Solar PV Sites, Chapter 9 states that a suite of baseline ecological surveys have been undertaken since June 2023 and will continue into 2025. It then explains that the EIA is iterative, and whilst this is agreed, it is deemed that in itself doesn't comprise a sound rationale for the total omission of any baseline ecological surveys in respect of the CRSC.
- 8.22. In terms of the CRSC, paragraph 9.6.16 of Chapter 9 specifies that the CRC will be assessed in the ES. It then states that disturbance will be limited, that the cable installation works will be temporary and will occur progressively in one direction, and that works will be carried out via a combination of open cut trenching and Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD), with the latter likely to be employed where ecological features of an increased importance or sensitivity (e.g. main rivers, important hedgerows or Priority Habitats) are to be crossed by the route, and where less impactful routes could not be followed.
- 8.23. Whilst these points regarding employment of appropriate technologies during construction are duly noted, this in itself is not deemed to comprise a sound justification for the PEIR to have been submitted with complete omission of any field survey data pertaining to the CRSC. Although the council is not the determining authority for this NSIP project, and although the PEIR is intended to comprise a 'preliminary' report, it is nevertheless considered that the documentation submitted at this statutory consultation stage should have been sufficiently advanced in terms of the ecological baseline information and details of mitigation and compensation presented therein to facilitate a suitably informed and robust review of the Scheme proposals and response from the council and other consultee. Although it is recognised and accepted that the PEIR can present preliminary information, that is

not to say that total omission of any ecological baseline information in the form of actual field survey results is acceptable. Provision of desk-based information and field survey information pertaining to the Land near Melksham Substation, which was formerly proposed as the BESS site, is not deemed to be adequate to inform robust assessment of impacts in the PEIR. It is therefore considered that there has been an over-reliance on the PEIR being a 'preliminary' document and also a potential over-reliance on the Rochdale Envelope approach.

- 8.24. In respect of the CRSC, paragraph 9.6.17 stipulates that the survey scope has not yet been finalised but that it will be determined once the CRC has been further refined. Therefore, although this paragraph of Chapter 9 goes on to set out what the applicant considers to be a proportionate survey scope, the Council does not wish to comment on this prematurely and instead can provide its stance / feedback once the CRC has been further refined.
- 8.25. It is noted that Chapter 9, paragraph 9.6.20 specifies that design considerations are ongoing with regards to the potential need for and extent of Highways Improvement Areas and associated works. It states that further surveys will be undertaken if required, which will be detailed in the ES. Provision of the scope of any necessary survey to the council would also be welcomed at that point in time.

#### **Designated Sites:**

- 8.26. Volume 3, 9-1: Ecological Baseline Report stipulates: "3.1.3 *There are no internationally designated sites for nature conservation within the CRSC. However, two consultation zones, also known as 'Core Areas', lie within the CRSC.*" The Council considers that this is not wholly accurate as there are more than two consultation zones. Whilst some of the consultation zones and core areas overlap, there are a greater number of zones than indicated in the appendix. In addition, the paragraph doesn't mention that the consultation zones are associated with BBOA Bat SAC component sites and core roosts that are considered to be functionally linked to the BBOA Bats SAC as the precautionary principle has been applied in the absence of evidence to the contrary. It is recommended that the applicant refers to the Technical Briefing Note provided to the applicant's ecological consultant in autumn 2024 for further information together with the council's Scoping Response.
- 8.27. It is not apparent why the BBOA Bat SAC consultation zones and core areas around core roosts that are functionally linked to the SAC have been illustrated on Figure 9.1.4 – Non-Statutorily Designated Sites within the Cable Route Search Corridor. Although the consultation zones around the BBOA Bats SAC and core areas around core roosts that are functionally linked to the SAC don't formally constitute part of the statutorily designated Bats SAC, they do comprise areas that may be used by the qualifying species and which is considered to be functionally linked land. As such, it may be more appropriate to map these zones on a separate dedicated map rather than on a map pertaining to non-statutory designated sites.

- 8.28. Paragraph 9.3.3 of the PEIR Volume 1, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) states that Likely Significant Effects (LSE) in relation to international sites, will be considered within a HRA report that will be included along with the ES as part of the DCO application.” The recognition of the need for HRA in Chapter 9 is welcomed, and the potential for effects on the BBOA Bats SAC and its qualifying species and functionally linked core roosts and associated core areas needs to be considered.

#### **Habitats:**

- 8.29. In Section of Appendix 9-1, there seems to be a lack of consistency in terms of when details pertaining to the Land near Melksham Substation site are provided and it appears that only those habitats of lower intrinsic value are discussed such as arable and modified grassland. It's not apparent why this is the case, but it is recommended that this is addressed.

#### Modified Grassland:

- 8.30. Appendix 9-1 stipulates that several fields across the Solar PV Sites comprise modified grassland that are either grazed by cattle or sheep or were in grass silage production. Paragraph 3.2.22 states that the modified grassland is of relatively low intrinsic value for biodiversity, is ubiquitous in the wider landscape, and is considered to be of no more than Site Importance. Whilst it is appreciated that the intrinsic botanical value of cattle grazed permanent pasture is likely to be low, this habitat is an important foraging resource for horseshoe bats, especially greater horseshoe bats.

#### Other Neutral Grassland:

- 8.31. Appendix 9-1 states: *“A relatively small extent of habitat across the Solar PV Sites were classified as falling under the UKHab habitat type ‘Other neutral grassland’. This habitat covered an area of 12.73ha or 1.45% of the total extent of the Solar PV Sites...Other neutral grassland was generally restricted to a small number of fields or portions of fields within Lime Down E which showed less evidence of intensive agricultural management and input than other grassland parcels at the Solar PV Sites. This habitat was also noted occasionally within some field margins at Lime Down C.”*
- 8.32. Section 3.2.29 states that when considered as a whole, the areas of other neutral grassland are of moderate botanical interest and considered to be of Local importance. The Appendix lists 17 species of flora within Field E12, and it is specified that Field E18 has areas of more diverse grassland with some herbaceous species which are indicative of degraded calcareous meadow. Species lists have not been included at the back of Appendix 9-1 and as such, the number of species of flora identified is not actually known and the baseline report does not discuss whether any of the areas of other neutral grassland comprise lowland meadow and if so, whether any areas could qualify as priority habitat / Habitat of Principal Importance (HPI). It is therefore suggested that clarity on this matter is provided and that any

areas of lowland meadow are illustrated on the Baseline Habitats Maps (Figures 9.1.8 to 9.1.12) especially given that other technical appendices specify that lowland meadow exists on site even though this seems to have been omitted from the Baseline Report. For example, Appendix 9-4: Breeding Birds Survey Report refers to fields at Lime Down E as comprising cattle-grazed pasture and lowland meadow habitat.

- 8.33. Table 9-7 in Chapter 9 sets out that other neutral grassland covers 1.45% of the Solar PV Sites area and that 15.80% of this area is in good condition, but that it's not an HPI, although no rationale is provided for this conclusion. A condition assessment sheet and comprehensive species list hasn't been included so the Condition Assessment Score cannot be verified. Considering that the other neutral grassland has been categorised as being of Local ecological importance however and given the presence of lowland meadow HPI and County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) designated for the presence of lowland meadow immediately adjacent and close to the Solar PV Sites, it is deemed possible that there are areas of lowland meadow priority habitat / HPI within the Solar PV Sites site as well. If none of the other neutral grassland within the Solar PV Sites is considered to qualify as priority habitat / HPI, then a clear rationale should be provided as that is currently omitted from Chapter 9 and Volume 3, Appendix 9-1: Ecological Baseline Report.
- 8.34. It is important to understand if any lowland meadow priority habitat / HPI exists on the Solar PV Sites, and if so where this habitat is located within the other neutral grassland areas. In accordance with the principles set out in Core Policy 50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted January 2015), solar arrays/ panels should not be installed on areas of priority habitat / HPI including any areas of lowland meadow present. Instead, any such areas of grassland should be retained and protected.
- 8.35. Similarly, it is not entirely apparent from the information provided, whether areas of Field E18 may constitute calcareous grassland given the presence of species which are indicative of degraded calcareous meadow. Therefore, it is suggested that further information and clarity in this regard is provided. If calcareous grassland is present in Field E18 or any other fields on site, it is important to establish if any of these areas qualify as priority habitat / HPI. Furthermore, it is advised that solar panels should not be installed on any areas of calcareous grassland that qualify as priority habitat / HPI and instead such grassland areas should be retained, protected and enhanced if degraded.

#### Hedgerows:

- 8.36. Appendix recognises that all the hedgerows present constitute HPI, and the council would concur with that assessment. Paragraph 3.2.59 stipulates that the majority (over 66km) of hedgerows across the Solar PV Sites were categorised as being species-rich and paragraph 3.2.63 classifies the hedgerows as being of District Importance.



- 8.37. Appendix 9-1 does not discuss whether any of the hedgerows qualify as ‘important hedgerow’ under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. Nonetheless, it is expected that there will be substantial extents of hedgerow across the Solar PV Sites that meet the criteria of ‘important hedgerow’ as set out in the regulations. A rationale has not been included within Appendix 9-1 (or Chapter 9) detailing why there has been no assessment as to whether hedgerow on site comprise ‘important hedgerow’. If the reason for omission of this evaluation and because it would have been too labour, time and cost intensive to conduct dedicated survey of all the hedgerow present across the Solar PV Sites given that the proposal is for most hedgerow to be retained and protected by a 15m buffer zone, then this should be stipulated in the appendix for completeness and transparency.

#### Watercourses:

- 8.38. Under the Watercourse heading in Table 9-7 in Chapter 9, the priority habitat river and other rivers and streams categories have been assigned an Ecological Importance of District, however, in the Rationale column it specifies that these habitats are of Local Importance. This discrepancy should be rectified.

#### **Protected and Notable Species:**

- 8.39. There are a few general observations and comments regarding matters detailed in the Baseline Conditions section of Chapter 9 that have been set out below before the discussions under the respective sub-headings for various species / species groups.
- 8.40. In the council’s Ecology and Biodiversity Officer’s view, the title of Table 9-8 should only refer to the Solar PV Sites and not the ‘Scheme’ as, at present, no species-specific surveys have yet been undertaken in the CRSC and only a desk study has been undertaken in respect of the CRSC. The current title of Table 9-8 infers that a suitably informed assessment has been possible for the entire Scheme which is not yet the case. This should be updated for the ES once the surveys have been undertaken.
- 8.41. It is suggested that the use of the term ‘legislative protection’ is inaccurate against invasive non-native species (INNS) in Table 9-9. It is suggested that instead it should just read ‘legislation’ or ‘legislative context’ given that no legal protection is afforded to INNS.

#### Bats:

- 8.42. Appendix 9-3 explains that buildings on site were subject to inspection for roosting bats and potential roosting features (PRFs) but that as all buildings are expected to be retained and unaffected by the proposed development, no further detailed surveys to establish the presence or likely absence of roosts within the buildings has been undertaken.

- 8.43. Even though buildings are likely to be retained within the Scheme layout, depending on where site compounds, sub-stations and so forth are to be sited (some of which is not yet confirmed), there could be indirect disturbance to any bats using the buildings as roost sites during the construction phase. As such, further survey of buildings with identified PRFs would have served to inform the layout of the Scheme in terms of ascertaining where infrastructure, BESS sites, compounds and so forth should be sited to minimise the potential for impacts on bats.
- 8.44. Table 9-8 in Chapter 9 assesses the importance of protected and notable species present or potentially present within the Scheme. In terms of roosting bats, Table 9-8 specifies there are a large number of trees and a small number of buildings that afford potential to support roosting bats and stipulates that specific survey to ascertain the presence or likely absence of bat roosts has not taken place. Table 9-8 assigns an ecological importance of Local (Assemblage) to roosting bats. It is unclear how this conclusion has been reached given that the preliminary roost assessment undertaken identified a large number of trees with PRFs and the presence of several buildings with potential to support roosting bats and in light of absence of further targeted survey. It is deemed that the assessment has potentially undervalued roosting bats in terms of the Solar PV Sites and as further survey of the trees with PRFs and buildings with bat roosting suitability was not undertaken, the precautionary principle should be applied.
- 8.45. In addition, the title of Table 9-8 refers to the 'Scheme' and so if this is intended to encompass the CRSC, the possibility that roosts (including unidentified roosts of Annex II species) could be located within this area should be considered in the assessment, particularly given the proximity of roosts associated with the BBOA Bats SAC. This has not been discussed in Table 9-8. If the intention were that Table 9-8 does not attempt to assess the importance of roosting bats within the CRSC, which is advocated given the lack of survey conducted in the CRSC to date, then it is considered that this should have been clearer that the assessment presented therein pertains solely to the Solar PV Sites at this stage rather than the whole Scheme.
- 8.46. In respect of discussion in Appendix 9-3 about the most suitable foraging and commuting habitat for bats, paragraph 1.2.12 recognises that permanent grassland utilised for cattle grazing or hay / silage cutting, provides suitable foraging habitat for bats, particularly greater horseshoe and lesser horseshoe bats. The appendix goes on to specify, however, that grassland habitats will be retained within the development proposals and enhanced where practicable, and that management practices i.e. grazing or cutting will be finalised within the Outline LEMP for the Scheme. This assumption is incorrect because whilst grassland habitats will be retained, grassland that comprises permanent pasture will not continue to be grazed during the construction phase and may not be grazed during the operational phase either and should have been assessed on this basis. This is due to the stipulation in Volume 1, Chapter 3 (The Scheme), under the heading of 'Grazing' that: *"For the purposes of assessment and reporting of effects, it is assumed that vegetation will be managed with machinery and there will be no grazing at the Solar PV Sites during the operation and maintenance phase...However, should consent be granted, grazing by*

*sheep will be explored, noting that there are no known landowner restrictive covenants or other reasons that would prevent such use.”*

- 8.47. Therefore, the ecological assessment in Chapter 9 of the PEIR and the subsequent ES should be undertaken on the assumption that there will not be grazing at the Solar PV Sites during the operation and maintenance phase and that there will be loss of permanent grassland / grazed pasture as a foraging resource for bats particularly as grazing by cattle, rather than sheep, provides the greatest value due to the associated invertebrate assemblage it encourages. Retention of grassland that is not grazed would not be of equal foraging value for horseshoe bats. In addition, there is emerging evidence (notwithstanding limitations of associated studies) to suggest that bats avoid foraging over solar panels. As such, regardless of the retention of grassland beneath the panels, the precautionary principle should be applied and it should be assumed for the purposes of the ES, that bats would not forage over grassland in the Solar PV Sites.
- 8.48. Paragraph 1.2.12 states: *“Consequently, the combined Sites as a whole were considered to represent habitat of ‘Low to Moderate’ suitability for foraging and commuting bats in accordance with the BCT guidance.”* Presumably this was assessed in accordance with Table 4.1 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) Bat Survey Guidelines (2015) given that the survey methodology has followed that edition rather than the 4<sup>th</sup> edition published in September 2023. Assuming so, it is the council’s Ecology and Biodiversity Officer’s view, that the conclusion of low to moderate suitability potentially comprises an underestimation of the suitability of the habitats across sites. Whilst there are not significant areas of woodland across and adjacent to the Solar PV Sites which would increase the suitability, favourable commuting and foraging habitat for bats is present across the sites including Gauze Brook and other watercourses and associated riparian corridors, areas of permanent pasture and extensive well-established / mature species-rich hedgerows with trees that have functional connectivity with suitable habitats in the wider landscape. As such, it is suggested that the Solar PV Sites as a whole afford at least moderate suitability for foraging and commuting bats rather than low to moderate.
- 8.49. Bat activity surveys were conducted at the Solar PV Sites. Appendix 9-3 sets out a rationale for why manual transect surveys were not undertaken in conjunction with static detector surveys in accordance with BCT guidelines. It sets out that this approach to survey was considered appropriate given the relative homogeneity of the habitats within the Survey Area and wider landscape and on account of the likely retention of the best foraging and commuting habitat. The last justification put forward is the cost of undertaking manual activity surveys, and Appendix 9-3 specifies that to be precautionary, the level of static detector survey carried out was for that of ‘high’ suitability habitats (according to BCT guidelines) in lieu of walked transects.
- 8.50. The rationale explaining why manual activity transect surveys were not conducted is understood and there is validity to these arguments. Nonetheless, the council would highlight the presence of mature species-rich hedgerows, especially those adjoining

woodlands, and watercourses / riparian corridors and areas of permanent pasture across the Solar PV Sites and reiterate that there will effectively be loss of permanent pasture as a foraging resource for horseshoe bats and so this optimal foraging habitat will not be retained. Given the scale of the proposed Scheme and the potential for impacts on bat activity and behaviour across the sites, it is the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer's view that it would have been preferable for some walked transect surveys to have at least been conducted in the most suitable habitats. This would collate data and visual observations regarding bat behaviour and activity at the site and to augment the static detector surveys.

- 8.51. Appendix 9-3 details that two extra detectors were deployed in the additional substantial area of 44 ha added in June 2024. It's apparent that 28 static detectors were deployed in total across the Solar PV Sites. Given the substantial land area covered by the Solar PV Sites, it should be noted that even deployment of that number of detectors could have left areas of suitable bat habitat unsampled.
- 8.52. It's noted that survey of the additional land at Lime Down added in June 2024 has not yet been conducted in the months of April to June and that survey of this area is provisionally scheduled for April to June 2025. Ideally, the council and other interested parties would be re-consulted subsequent to completion of these survey visits.
- 8.53. The discussion under the headings of Cable Route Search Corridor and Designated Sites mentions two bat consultation zones and it's also mentioned in paragraph 1.4.14. However, there are some omissions which were touched on earlier in this response. Firstly, there are more than two bat consultation zones that coincide with the CRSC. Secondly, the discussion presented in Appendix 9-3 does not fully identify the importance of these zones which includes zones around component areas of the BBOA Bats SAC itself, whilst three others are around Bechstein's bats 'core roosts' that are considered to be demographically and functionally linked to the BBOA Bats SAC in the absence of evidence to the contrary. Paragraph 1.4.14 does make reference to qualifying bat species but doesn't explicitly specify that these comprise qualifying species of the BBOA Bats SAC. It is suggested that the applicant and their consultant ecologist refer to the Scoping Opinion and Technical Briefing Note provided by the council for more information on this matter and HRA implications.
- 8.54. In the absence of survey data for the CRSC, the precautionary principle should be applied when considering the habitat suitability for foraging / commuting bats especially as consultation zones associated with the BBOA Bats SAC coincide with the CRSC.

#### Breeding Birds:

- 8.55. Volume 3, Appendix 9-4: Breeding Bird Survey Report states that: "*Six breeding bird surveys have been carried out at Lime Down A-E and Land near Melksham Substation between June 2023 and June 2024. Surveys followed good practice guidelines (Ref 9-4-1). Surveys of additional land at Lime Down C added to the Solar PV Sites in June*

*2024 are scheduled for April to June 2025.” The report goes on to state: “Surveys were carried out over two survey seasons, with two visits at Survey Zones 1-12 and Land near Melksham Substation occurring between June and July 2023, and a further four visits between April and May 2024. All six visits of Survey Zone 13 were undertaken during a single season between April and June 2024 (Table 9-4-1 refers).”*

- 8.56. The council makes a couple of observations regarding the survey methodology. Firstly, it's not evident why surveys in 2024 didn't start until 10-12<sup>th</sup> April. This is a relatively late start to the survey, especially given that breeding bird surveys can commence in late March and generally commence by early April. If this was due to poor weather or some other factor it would be prudent for this to be explained in the report.
- 8.57. Furthermore, apart from Survey Zone 13, it appears all other areas were subject to survey visits that were split over two survey seasons i.e. two consecutive years. Whilst it is appreciated that there may have been limited control over when surveys were instructed in 2023, it is not apparent why the decision was taken not to conduct a full season's worth of survey at those sites surveyed in 2024 and to instead only conduct survey visits in April and May of 2024 at those survey zones where survey visits had been conducted in June and July in 2023. As a result of employing this approach to survey, most survey zones haven't been subject to a complete season's worth of survey visits. It would have been preferable for a full suite of survey visits to have been conducted in 2024 even though June and July visits were undertaken in 2023, in order to have provided a complete dataset for 2024. Splitting the survey across two years doesn't provide such robust data regarding number of breeding birds and territories.
- 8.58. In addition, no rationale is provided in Appendix 9-4 as to why a full season's worth of visits was not conducted in 2024 to ensure collation of a complete and robust dataset. This is important given the considerable loss of habitat important to a number of bird species and displacement of species, especially those that nest in open habitats and arable field margins, that the proposed Scheme is likely to cause. The Limitations section of Appendix 9-4 does explain that survey visits were completed over two years. However, it stops short of fully acknowledging the issues associated with quantifying / estimating numbers and extents of territories when the survey is split across two years and there isn't a complete dataset for any given survey year. It also omits full discussion regarding how this approach to survey draws into question the robustness of any estimations made.
- 8.59. Survey visits were also split across consecutive days with a single transect being surveyed across more than one day, and this is explained in paragraph 1.2.10. Although this doesn't represent optimal survey methodology, and employing this approach does comprise a limitation to degree, it is understood that this approach likely proved necessary due to the scale of the Solar PV Sites and the large areas that each surveyor would have covered on foot before the survey cut-off time each morning.

- 8.60. Appendix 9-4 states in paragraphs 1.3.53 – 1.3.54: *“The estimated minimum total number of skylark territories within the Sites was 167...The greatest number of skylark territories were recorded at Lime Down C, the largest of the five Sites, although the density per hectare was among the lowest (0.16/ha). The large open fields at Lime Down C represent ideal nesting habitat for the species; Field C10 in particular appeared to be of particular importance for the species, supporting 20% of the total skylark territories at the Site.”* It is recommended that those fields which have the greatest number of skylark territories, such as Field C10, are not subject to installation of solar panels but are instead retained and protected in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy.

#### Great Crested Newts:

- 8.61. In respect of survey undertaken to date, Volume 3, Appendix 9-5: Great Crested Newt Survey Report specifies: *“eDNA surveys have been carried out on accessible waterbodies within the Solar PV Sites and Land near Melksham Substation, and within the 250m buffer surrounding the Sites between April 2023 and June 2024.”*
- 8.62. The report states: *“259 ponds identified during the desk-based assessment have not yet been accessed for survey, between April 2023 and June 2024, including a large number associated with the Cable Route Search Corridor. District Level Licensing (DLL) for GCN is currently being explored as a potential compensation option for the Scheme, which does not require survey data to be collected. The proposal for GCN eDNA mitigation, compensation and scope of further eDNA surveys is therefore still to be confirmed...Where access has not been possible to date on further ponds on third-party land within 250m of the Scheme Boundary and within the Cable Route Search Corridor, attempts will be made to secure access for survey in the 2025 season.”*
- 8.63. The report doesn't clearly stipulate how many ponds are yet to be surveyed around the Solar PV Sites. As such, it is recommended that clarity is provided in the report and to the council to make it clear exactly what survey is outstanding and where. Also, it is queried whether it has now been determined whether the DLL route will be used or will surveys be conducted in 2025; or whether there will be a combination of the two approaches, such as surveys of the remaining ponds around the Solar PV Sites and use of DLL for the CRSC.
- 8.64. Given the amount of outstanding survey and gaps in the ecological baseline information in respect of great crested newts, and that a suitably informed and comprehensive mitigation strategy has not yet been formulated for the species, comment cannot be provided at this stage regarding whether proposed mitigation and compensation at the site is adequate and likely to be effective.

#### Otter and Water Vole:

- 8.65. Volume 3, Appendix 9-6: Otter and Water Vole Survey Report explains that no field surveys for these riparian mammals have been conducted in the CRSC to date.

Chapter 9 stipulates that in terms of water vole and otter surveys at the additional land at Lime Down C included within the Scheme boundary in June 2024, a spring survey is scheduled for April / May 2025. It is therefore, recommended that a further supplementary consultation is undertaken subsequent to completion of this survey.

- 8.66. Evidence of otter and water vole presence has been found within Lime Down D and otter field signs have also been identified in Lime Down E and both species have been assigned an ecological importance of Local in Chapter 9. However, dormouse, for which presence has been assumed due to no dedicated survey being undertaken, has been assumed to be of higher District level importance. The approach and application of the precautionary principle in respect of dormice in the absence of survey data is welcomed, however, both otter and dormouse are European Protected Species (EPS), and all three species are Species of Importance (SPI), and survey has confirmed presence of otter and water vole. The associated rationales for how the ecological importance valuations for otter and water vole have been derived don't robustly justify the disparity in the approach to these species compared to how dormouse has been assessed. It is suggested that this is re-evaluated, and consideration be given to otter and water vole likewise being assessed as District level importance. Moreover, the survey identified presence of American mink at Lime Down E which serves to indicate how under threat water vole are in this locality and therefore, the importance of the population at Lime Down D. It is worth highlighting that water vole is the country's fastest declining mammal.

#### Wintering Birds:

- 8.67. Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) sets out that wintering bird surveys are still ongoing at additional land at Lime Down C and D added in February 2024 and additional land at Lime Down C added in June 2024. Surveys are due to finish in February 2025. It is therefore recommended that a supplementary consultation is undertaken once the outstanding surveys are complete and an appropriate mitigation strategy has been devised, if appropriate.

#### White-Clawed Crayfish:

- 8.68. In respect of the assessment of white-clawed crayfish in Chapter 9, although no specific survey has been undertaken, in light of the data search yielding records within watercourses in the surrounding landscape and the existence of suitable habitat for the species at Gauze Brook, Gabriel's Well and connecting ditches, it has been assumed that the species is present within these features. This approach and application of the precautionary principle is welcomed. However, as it is being assumed that white-clawed crayfish is present, assigning an ecological importance of greater than 'Local (assumed)' may need to be considered given that the species is in decline and under threat.

## Embedded Mitigation Measures:

- 8.69. Section 9.9 titled 'Embedded Mitigation Measures' states under the sub-heading of 'Construction': *"The Scheme has been designed to retain the most valuable habitats and protect these with undeveloped buffer zones at the Solar PV Sites during construction and decommissioning and through the operation of the Scheme. These are shown on the Indicative Masterplan in **Volume 2, Figures 8.15.1 to 8.15.5.** Similarly, habitats with particular importance for protected / notable species, even if the habitats are of low importance in themselves, will be retained outside the Development Area, where appropriate, to avoid impacts."*
- 8.70. The use of these embedded mitigation measures is supported, however, as detailed earlier, it's not entirely apparent whether any grassland habitat of intrinsic value (lowland meadow and calcareous grassland) could be present within the Solar PV Sites and if so, whether these areas will be retained and protected or whether solar panels will be installed on any such areas, if present with the areas currently mapped as other neutral grassland. The applicant should provide further information and clarity in this regard. Also, any areas of permanent pasture which may be a foraging resource for horseshoe bats will be lost.
- 8.71. Since the Scoping stage, Chalkenhams Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Brickyard Scrub LWS, which were formerly included within Lime Down E, have been removed from the Scheme Boundary due to these sites comprising species-rich lowland meadow habitat and this is advocated. It is advised that if any areas of intrinsic botanical value, which could qualify as grassland priority habitat, do exist within the Solar PV Sites, these areas should also be retained and remain undeveloped.
- 8.72. In terms of Operation, paragraph 9.9.20 of Chapter 9 specifies: *"Grassland habitats under operational arrays will be either managed through grazing or cutting. The proportion of grazing and cutting will be balanced to maximise the ecological benefits which can arise from a sensitively-timed cutting regime."* Nonetheless, as aforementioned, Chapter 3 (The Scheme) of the PEIR indicates that for the purposes of the assessment it should be assumed the site won't be grazed. As such, paragraph 9.9.20 and the remainder of the ecological assessment presented in Chapter 9 should be amended accordingly and the assessment adjusted as necessary given that impacts, and the efficacy of mitigation and compensation measures detailed therein have been assessed on the basis that the Solar PV Sites may be grazed.
- 8.73. Chapter 9 details proposed buffer widths to be implemented from different habitats and features, and states that these buffers will not contain any array structures, hard standing or electrical hardware, with the exception of where new access and cables need to cross existing field boundary habitats. It should be specified that access tracks cannot run the length of buffers. Also, there must be no encroachment of compounds or welfare units into the buffers, or storage of materials, equipment or machinery within the buffers; they should remain free of development and associated activities.



- 8.74. In addition, it should be stipulated that where the habitat to be buffered is a boundary habitat, the buffer zone should extend from the edge of the habitat to the perimeter fence rather than to the solar panels / arrays or any other structure / infrastructure. Likewise, the 15m buffer to woodland must be between the edge of the woodland and the perimeter fencing rather than between the woodland edge and solar panels.
- 8.75. In respect of the final cable route, which hasn't yet been refined or determined, paragraphs 9.9.12 – 9.9.14 specify that it will be sited to avoid impacts on ecological features and buffers from sensitive boundary features will be observed where practicable. It then specifies that general principles are provided in Volume 3, Appendix 3.2 and that a Precautionary Method of Working will be employed which will include deployment of an Ecological Clerk of Works and use of horizontal directional drilling. It states: "The ecological avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures determined to be necessary for cable route installation will be detailed within a CEMP."
- 8.76. This approach to mitigating potential impacts associated with the cable route and the production of a suitably comprehensive CEMP is supported. Nonetheless, use of this approach and formulation of a CEMP will need to be informed and supported by an appropriate level of survey. It is also possible that further avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures will need to be devised especially given that the location and number of temporary site compounds to be constructed is not known at present and could give rise to a mechanism for effect on ecological receptors. There are likely to be other potential pathways for effect associated with the construction of the cable route that may necessitate dedicated mitigation strategies over and above that which would be covered in the Outline CEMP due to be submitted with the DCO application. This will need to be assessed further within the ES as the cable route construction comprises a considerable element of the Scheme and should be subject to adequate assessment. As previously mentioned, the council recommends that the applicant undertake a secondary, supplementary public consultation subsequent to surveys being carried out in the CRSC.

#### **Assessment of Likely Impacts and Effects:**

- 8.77. General points regarding the assessment of likely impacts and effects in Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) are set out below.
- 8.78. Chapter 3 (The Scheme) specifies that there would be either one or two locations where the BESS would be situated, namely in Field D1 and Field D18 within Lime Down D. It explains that each of the individual BESS Battery Containers would have an integrated heating, ventilation, and cooling (HVAC) system which may entail a HVAC system that is external to the container, located either on the top of the unit or attached to the side of the unit. If this uses air to heat and cool the BESS Battery Containers it would have a fan built into it that is powered by auxiliary power.

- 8.79. It is therefore assumed that the BESS Battery Containers and integrated HVAC systems could generate some noise and / or vibration particularly on account of the in-built fan. The potential for operational disturbance as a result of low-level noise associated with electrical equipment is cited in paragraph 9.8.3 of Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity). Nevertheless, the potential for impacts on ecological receptors as a result of noise and / or vibration that may be generated by the BESS Battery Containers, as well as other solar park infrastructure such as the sub-stations, has not been fully assessed in Chapter 9. It is possible that bats and birds in particular, could be subject to disturbance during the operational phase as a result of an increase in noise and vibration associated with the solar park infrastructure, especially as one of the BESS locations is immediately adjacent to an area of woodland in Lime Down D. Potential for effects on bats and birds as well as other species, has not been assessed in the respective sections of Chapter 9. Therefore, further consideration should be given to the potential for effects arising from noise and vibration generated during operation and that it may need to be assessed in more detail in the ES.
- 8.80. Chapter 3 (The Scheme) states that it is considered likely that east-west single axis tracker Solar PV Mounting Structures (Option A) will be used within all Solar PV Sites, unless there are practical or environmental constraints at an individual field level that make it necessary to use fixed south facing Solar PV Mounting Structures (Option B). It is apparent that a tracker system involves attaching the Solar PV Panels to a motorised table that can move in relation to the sun. As such, it is assumed that the tracking / tilting of the panels and the motor may generate a degree of noise. The potential for operational disturbance as a result of low-level noise associated with electrical equipment is cited in paragraph 9.8.3 of Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity). Most notably, birds could be subject to disturbance during the operational phase as a result of an increase in noise and vibration associated with movement of the solar panels during daylight hours. However, the potential for effects on ecological receptors hasn't been fully discussed in Chapter 9 and there is no discussion in the section of the assessment pertaining to birds. If this potential effect has been screened out due to it having been assessed that any noise / vibration / movement generated by the operation of the solar panels would not lead to significant effects and so hasn't been included in Chapter 9 to be taken forward to the ES, then it would be prudent to provide this rationale.
- 8.81. As discussed, Chapter 3 of the PEIR stipulates that for the purposes of assessment and reporting of effects, it is to be assumed that vegetation will be managed with machinery and there will be no grazing at the Solar PV Sites during the operation and maintenance phase. Chapter 3 does go on to specify that should consent be granted, grazing by sheep will be explored and that there are no known landowner restrictive covenants or other reasons that would prevent such use. Nevertheless, the assessment of likely impacts and effects in Chapter 9 appears to be based on an assumption that the Solar PV Sites will probably be subject to grazing and so assumes attainment of the benefits to ecology that a grazing regime can confer. Although Chapter 9 stipulates that management options will be set out within the LEMP, it is the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer's view that it doesn't sufficiently caveat

the assessment to explain that the potential for grazing has yet to be confirmed. In fact, paragraph 9.9.20 indicates that the assessment of impacts on grassland habitats during operation is predicated on grazing taking place. It discusses balancing the proportion of grazing and cutting to maximise the ecological benefits and specifies that grazing methods such as pulse-grazing, aftermath grazing, and conservation grazing can be employed and that conventional grazing regimes are typically less beneficial to habitat diversification.

- 8.82. It is therefore recommended that the approach taken in Chapter 9 is reviewed accordingly and any necessary amendments are undertaken and carried forward to the ES to ensure that the assessment (and the discussion regarding mitigation, compensation and enhancement) hasn't relied on grazing taking place during operation contrary to the stipulation in Chapter 3 of the PEIR.
- 8.83. Section 9.8 in Chapter 9, titled 'Potential Impacts', doesn't include discussion of artificial lighting / light pollution / light spill under the 'Construction' sub-heading. Lighting at construction compounds, welfare units and from the considerable number of vehicles and machinery which will present on site, particularly during the construction phase, may give rise to impacts on wildlife. It is recommended that this is taken forward in the ES.
- 8.84. In Section 9.8 titled 'Potential Impacts' in Chapter 9, under the sub-heading of 'Operation' there is no discussion of the cleaning of the solar panels during the operational phase and the potential associated impacts. It is suggested that this maintenance activity should be included in the list and potentially under the sub-headings of 'Habitat Loss and Habitat Change', 'Killing and Injury' and 'Disturbance'. It should not be assumed that cleaning of the solar panels will have no impact on ecological receptors. This is because the use of machinery to periodically clean the solar panels may cause damage and disturbance to habitats, flora and soils around with the solar array areas, and damage could be exacerbated if the ground is water-logged or very dry. This could have a detrimental effect on the establishment of grassland habitats within the Solar PV Sites. Cleaning of the solar panels, which the PEIR stipulates will take place at night using artificial lighting, could also cause low-level disturbance to wildlife, such as nesting and roosting birds. Chapter 9 does not sufficiently assess the cleaning of the solar panels and the potential mechanisms for effect on ecological receptors. As such, is suggested this omission is addressed in the ES.

#### Designated Sites:

- 8.85. The assessment of the potential construction and operational phase impacts on the BBOA Bats SAC provided under the sub-heading of 'Designated Sites' in Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) recognises that permanent pasture at the Solar PV Sites comprises important foraging habitat for horseshoe bats. Nonetheless, the assessment goes on to state: "Permanent pasture coverage at the Solar PV Sites is comparably small, accounting for approximately 60.56ha or 6.9% of the total area of covered by the Solar PV Sites."

- 8.86. Whilst the area of permanent pasture is relatively small when considered as a proportion of the whole Solar PV Sites area, 60.56ha is not an insubstantial area and could comprise an locally important foraging resource for bats. Therefore, the potential for adverse effects as a result of change of use of this habitat and the effective loss of this foraging resource for horseshoe bats should be appropriately assessed. Aside from reference to embedded mitigation in the form of 15m undeveloped buffer zones, there doesn't appear to be any other avoidance or mitigation measures proposed to address or offset the potential impacts that could arise as a result of the loss of permanent pasture, and in turn on the loss of foraging habitat for horseshoe bats. Moreover, emerging research and evidence is increasingly suggesting that bats are avoiding foraging over solar farm sites and so retention of grassland within the Solar PV Sites will not provide like-for-like or better compensatory habitat for horseshoe bats than the permanent pasture that will be lost. Bat activity across and in the vicinity of the solar park decrease further if artificial light were to spill onto / illuminate retained field boundary habitats of value to bats.
- 8.87. It is therefore suggested that the areas of permanent pasture on the Solar PV Sites should be retained as far as reasonably practicable, especially given that contrary to the supposition in Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity), Chapter 3 (The Scheme) indicates that there may not be grazing on the site during the operational phase and that if this is implemented, it would likely comprise sheep grazing rather than cattle grazing.
- 8.88. The assessment in respect of BBOA Bats SAC acknowledges that bat surveys are ongoing and that insufficient information is currently available to fully evaluate the scope and significance of any potential impacts on the SAC. It assumes a reasonable worst-case scenario and concludes there could be a significant adverse impact on the integrity of the SAC. This precautionary approach to the assessment is welcomed and advocated given the current absence of any survey information for the additional land at Lime Down C and the CRSC. However, the assessment seems to focus on loss of foraging habitat and doesn't consider that there could be unidentified Bechstein's roosts within the CRSC especially given the proximity of the recently identified Bechstein's bat maternity roosts south of Chippenham which we provided a Technical Briefing Note regarding in the autumn.
- 8.89. The assessment presented in Chapter 9 of impacts on the BBOA Bats SAC during construction and operation concludes that the assessment will be updated once full survey information has been collected and analysed and that a full assessment of effects will be detailed within the ES, including the proposed mitigation package to manage the full extent of impacts identified, and assessment on whether the Scheme will have a likely significant effect upon the SAC which will be provided in the HRA report that will accompany the DCO application.
- 8.90. Therefore, it is recommended that a secondary, supplementary consultation is undertaken by the applicant once comprehensive survey data has been collated. It is also advised that the HRA should give full consideration to not just the SAC component

sites and qualifying species but also to core roosts which are known and / or considered to be functionally and demographically linked to the SAC.

#### Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs):

- 8.91. In terms of the assessment of impacts on Harries Ground, Rodbourne Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which lies immediately adjacent to Lime Down D, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) outlines 'Enhancement Measures' and states that prescriptions for the creation and management of all grassland within the Scheme (under panels and in buffer / ecological mitigation zones) would be set out within the final LEMP and that the general objective would be to generate a simple mosaic of grassland habitats through the adoption of a number of different habitat management types. It states that grassland management objectives may range from conservation-grazed pasture, to tussocky grassland, flowering meadow and ruderal-mix grassland. In addition, paragraph 9.10.62 refers to the creation of areas of species-rich grassland within the Solar PV Sites.
- 8.92. Although these aspirations are welcomed, as already discussed, the assessment should assume there will be no grazing during operation (as dictated in Chapter 3) and as such, the assessment and proposed measures in Chapter 9 are not entirely correct or reflective of the Scheme proposals put forward by the applicant. Also, whilst it may be possible to provide some areas of species-rich grassland, this cannot be guaranteed. Thus, in terms of projections of the type, quality and diversity of grasslands that will be achievable under the solar panels, Wiltshire Council are applying the precautionary principle and taking a risk-based view in line with the approach also being taken by other Local Planning Authorities and are assuming that only modified grassland would be delivered under the solar panels. Without knowing the exact details of how the grassland will be managed the council does not have assurance that anything better than modified grassland would be achieved under and around the solar panels. Furthermore, as NSIPs are not currently subject to statutory biodiversity net gain (BNG), details of appropriate habitat creation, enhancement and management measures cannot be secured by means of the BNG route and a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) and biodiversity gain plan (BGP). Instead, the detailed LEMP will be an important document.

#### Non-Statutory Designated Sites:

- 8.93. Fagot Heath, The Privet, fox Covert and Corsham Wood LWS lie within the CRSC. In terms of potential construction phase impacts, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) specifies that installation of the cables could result in direct impacts on the LWS through damage to, or removal of habitat and the council concurs with that assessment. Chapter 9 then explains the refined CRC is expected to avoid this LWS but that if it cannot be avoided, HDD would be employed and concludes that no significant effects are anticipated. However, if the LWS could not be avoided and HDD were to be employed, it is the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer's view that the potential for residual significant effects may remain. This is because even with use of HDD technology and implementation of other measures, the potential for noise and

vibrations generated by the use of HDD and an increase in noise, lighting, dust etc. associated with an increase in activity / personnel and use of vehicles, plant and machinery in the vicinity of the woodland to have an impact on the woodland and the species it supports may persist. Furthermore, at present it isn't clear where site compounds would be sited within the CRC and these could also have an impact. As such, it is considered that at this stage and in the absence of field survey data for the CRSC, a conclusive assessment regarding the potential for residual impacts on the LWS should be withheld until more information is available as it may transpire that further bespoke mitigation measures are required if the LWS were to be affected as a result of the cable route refinement.

### **Assessment of Impacts on Habitats:**

#### Arable Field Margins:

8.94. In terms of assessment of operational phase impacts on arable field margins, Chapter 9 (Ecology and Biodiversity) specifies that the value of these marginal areas will be maximised for biodiversity through favourable cutting / grazing regimes. The applicant is advised to cross-refer to earlier comments regarding grazing during operation and take this into account in the ES accordingly.

#### Other Neutral Grassland:

8.95. In respect of construction phase impacts on other neutral grassland, Chapter 9 states that although some areas of this grassland may be lost during the construction phase, the Scheme will be designed to ensure that the most valuable habitats are retained and protected. It then specifies that a BNG Assessment (taking account of habitat trading rules and ensuring that a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity is achieved) will ensure that any losses of other neutral grassland are fully compensated for through the creation of new areas of this habitat type and enhancement of retained areas over lifetime of Scheme. It states that it will be designed to ensure no net loss of other neutral grassland across the entirety of the Scheme. It concludes that any losses are considered likely to be minor and that there will be no significant adverse effects on extent or quality of this grassland habitat during construction.

8.96. Although Chapter 9 stipulates that the most valuable habitats will be retained and protected and this is advocated, as discussed earlier, it hasn't been clearly specified within the main body of the report whether there are any areas of other neutral grassland that may comprise lowland meadow or calcareous grassland. It is acknowledged that Table 9-7 in Chapter 9 states that the grassland on site is not priority habitat / HPI. However, a robust rationale is not provided and given the number and assemblage of species listed in the reporting against some areas and in the absence of a comprehensive botanical list (which ordinarily would be included within the Ecological Baseline Report), the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer cannot corroborate the conclusion presented in Table 9-7 regarding the importance and priority habitat status of the more botanically diverse areas of other neutral

grassland within the Solar PV Sites. As previously indicated, solar panels should not be installed in any areas of grassland that qualify as priority habitat / HPI.

- 8.97. In terms of operational phase impacts, Chapter 9 concludes no significant adverse effects on other neutral grassland and that the Scheme will support habitats of higher biodiversity value during the operation and maintenance phase than at baseline. Whilst it is agreed that this is likely to be the case when considering the Solar PV Sites in their entirety, any areas of other neutral grassland that are already of moderate botanical interest could decline in diversity and condition if solar panels were to be installed there. Moreover, as aforementioned, application of the precautionary principle means the council has to assume that beneath the solar panels, grassland of no greater value than modified grassland will be attained. As such, the council must appraise the proposed solar park on this basis. Also, as already detailed, grazing should not have been assumed as a possibility in the assessment.

### **Assessment of Impacts on Species:**

#### Roosting Bats – Construction Phase Impacts:

- 8.98. Chapter 9 states that insufficient information is currently available to fully assess potential impacts on roosting bats associated with the loss of trees or buildings, as well as through the potential isolation of roosts through the fragmentation of key connecting habitats within the CRSC. The precautionary approach taken in the assessment of impacts on roosting bats is advocated and the council concurs with that conclusion. It is suggested however, that reference to the BBOA Bats SAC and functionally linked core roosts and habitat and the potential for unidentified roosts of SAC qualifying species to be present in the Scheme, particularly the CRSC, should be mentioned in the assessment.
- 8.99. Chapter 9 discusses the potential for artificial lighting at night to impact bat activity and roosting bats and this is corroborated. The assessment does not, however, consider that site compounds, welfare units etc. in place during the construction phase will utilise security lighting at night during the summer months as well as the winter months, and that this could have an adverse impact on roosting bats. As a result, Chapter 9 also omits discussion regarding additional mitigation measures during construction phase to address the potential for the aforementioned impact and it is recommended this is addressed in the ES.

#### Foraging / Commuting Bats – Construction Phase Impacts:

- 8.100. In terms of the potential for effects in the CRSC, Chapter 9 specifies this will be fully assessed within the ES chapter once a refined CRC is available and an assessment of habitats and features within the CRS for bats has been completed. This is deemed to be the correct approach but the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer would suggest that reference to the potential for impacts on habitat used by qualifying species of the BBOA Bats SAC and of the need for HRA is included in this section of the assessment going forward. This is on account of the potential for effects on bat

habitat within consultation zones around BBOA Bats SAC component areas and within core areas around core roosts functionally linked to the SAC given that the CRSC coincides with these zones.

- 8.101. Chapter 9 specifies that the removal of grassland fields within the Solar PV Sites during construction will result in temporary reduction in available foraging habitat of low suitability which is likely to reduce the availability of invertebrate prey for foraging bats in the short-term. It assesses that the loss of sub-optimal habitat is non-significant. It is deemed that this assessment neglects to wholly consider the impacts associated with loss of permanent pasture which is a foraging resource for horseshoe bats, which are Annex II qualifying species of the BBOA Bats SAC, especially given that grazing is not to be considered as a possibility on this solar park during the operational phase. In addition, the assessment again fails to identify that artificial lighting in the form of security lighting will probably be used at site compounds, welfare units etc. in the summer during the hours of darkness as well as in the winter months.

Foraging / Commuting Bats – Operation Phase Impacts:

- 8.102. Paragraph 9.10.160 of Chapter 9 states: *“The present uncertainty over how bats use solar arrays is another reason why 15m wide buffers from field boundaries are proposed. A precautionary approach has been taken which assumes that bat foraging activity could be reduced directly over solar panels.”*
- 8.103. This assessment is concurred with and whilst the limitations to the studies undertaken to date as set out in the assessment are noted, it does appear that emerging evidence indicates there is a reduction in bat foraging activity over fields containing solar panels. Moreover, the council has to apply the precautionary principle in the absence of ecological survey data / information to the contrary and so must assume there will be a reduction in bat activity (foraging / commuting) over the fields with solar panels.
- 8.104. The assessment in Chapter 9 concludes no significant adverse effects on foraging / commuting bats at the Solar PV Sites given embedded mitigation measures, and that with implementation of habitat creation and enhancement measures set out on the LEMP, that residual effects on foraging / commuting bats during the operation and maintenance phase would be neutral and not significant. It goes on to suggest there is potential for a significant beneficial effect on the bat population at a Local level. It is considered that this neglects to fully take account of the likely impacts on foraging / commuting bats associated with the loss of permanent pasture and the fact that a precautionary approach must be taken when considering impacts on bat activity over fields containing solar panels. The assessment also assumes that the enhancement measures will be realised, whereas paragraph 1.4.3 of Volume 1, Chapter 1 (Introduction) indicates that the applicant may opt not to deliver enhancement measures.
- 8.105. Therefore, it is considered that insufficient information and evidence has been submitted to augment the conclusion put forward in Chapter 9 of no significant adverse effect on foraging / commuting bats during the operational phase.



Furthermore, in light of the discussed emerging evidence regarding how bat activity over fields with solar panels seems to be adversely affected, in the absence of evidence to suggest otherwise, and given the vast scale of the proposed solar park, the council must consider the worst-case scenario and apply a risk-based approach. As such, the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer does not agree with the conclusion of no significant adverse effect and consider this likely constitutes an underestimation of the potential adverse effects.

#### Brown Hare:

- 8.106. The assessment of operation phase impacts suggests a benefit to hares as a result of the expected reversion of land to sheep grazed or cut grassland, but as already discussed, Chapter 3 indicates that the assessment should have assumed there will be no grazing during operation of the solar park.

#### Breeding Birds: Ground Nesting Birds of Open Farmland – Construction Phase Impacts:

- 8.107. Chapter 9 states that installation of Solar PV panels and BESS compounds will displace ground-nesting bird species which preferentially nest in open habitats and that the species of conservation concern most likely to be impacted are skylark and yellow wagtail. The assessment includes a preliminary territory analysis that indicates that 167 skylark territories and 3 yellow wagtail territories are present within the Solar PV Sites; although it acknowledges that surveys at an additional area of Lime Down C added in June 2024 have not yet been undertaken. As highlighted earlier, an entire breeding season's worth of survey visits have not been undertaken in any one year, with survey visits instead split across two years – this approach is not advocated and places doubt on the robustness of the territory analysis. Therefore, it is recommended that the numbers of territories quoted are treated very much as estimates.
- 8.108. The assessment specifies that skylark and yellow wagtail will likely be displaced to a significant degree due to installation of tall structures and other hardware in arable fields, which may lead to population fragmentation and increased intra-specific pressures on surrounding arable and grassland habitat, which may be at, or approaching, carrying capacity. The council concurs with this appraisal.
- 8.109. Paragraph 9.10.230 indicates that as scheme design is evolving it is likely some fields will be removed from the developable area of the Scheme and that a proportion of these may be utilised to deliver nesting bird mitigation within the Scheme but highlights that design proposals are yet to be finalised. It concludes that in the absence of mitigation, skylark and yellow wagtail would be displaced for the lifetime of the Scheme which would likely constitute a significant adverse effect at a District level. In addition, corn bunting, grey partridge and quail comprise additional ground-nesting species recorded within the Sites and quail is listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The assessment specifies that the proposed mitigation package will be detailed in the ES once the full extent of impacts has been identified.

- 8.110. As such, the council cannot provide comments on the adequacy and efficacy of proposed mitigation for ground nesting birds, and it is strongly suggested that a supplementary consultation is conducted by the applicant once surveys are completed. Nonetheless, it is recommended that considerable areas outside of the solar arrays are set aside and subject to appropriate management for these species as compensation for the loss of nesting habitat. These areas must comprise suitable areas of grassland or arable farmland as indicated in paragraph 9.10.234 and must be appropriately situated and managed such that the habitat requirements of these species are met. It is critical that adequately sized areas are provided as compensatory habitat for the substantial loss of territories. Paragraph 9.10.234 states that the approach to mitigation will be discussed with relevant stakeholders and it is strongly advised that this should include Wiltshire Council.
- 8.111. Paragraph 9.10.235 states that residual effects on skylark and yellow wagtail haven't been predicted as there is insufficient information at this stage. The council concurs with this judgement.
- 8.112. In terms of the operational phase impacts on ground nesting birds of open farmland, paragraph 9.10.239 discusses enhanced foraging opportunities over time and suggests a significant beneficial effect at the District level could be possible. However, the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer would heed some caution in respect of this projection in light of the substantial displacement likely to have occurred and which may not be adequately offset if adequate areas of compensatory habitat are not provided in the vicinity.

#### Overwintering Birds – Construction Phase Impacts:

- 8.113. Wintering bird surveys are still ongoing at areas of additional land at Lime Down C and Lime Down D. The assessment assumes a significant adverse effect is possible due to potential displacement of a wintering bird assemblage but states that the assessment will be revisited upon completion of the wintering bird surveys and that a package of mitigation measures, if deemed to be required, will be presented in the ES chapter. Thus, it is strongly advised that the applicant undertakes a supplementary consultation once surveys are complete and any mitigation measures have been determined.

#### **DCO Conditions / Requirements:**

- 8.114. At this initial stage, the council requests that the following heads of terms of DCO requirements are included for council approval:
1. Ecology Mitigation and Enhancement Plan (EMEP) – a scaled drawing showing all existing ecological features, together with mitigation and enhancement measures in relation to solar panel layout. Specify buffer distances, locations of new planting, sowing and other permanent features, whether retained or created.

2. Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy – detailing surveys of habitats and species / species groups.
3. Detailed Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP).
4. Final Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
5. Mechanisms to secure compliance with approved documents and plans, including for any remedial action required.
6. Lighting Strategy, which covers construction and operational / maintenance phases.
7. Requirement to secure use of horizontal directional drilling (HDD) under watercourses, woodland, hedgerows and any other habitats of importance lying along the cable route.
8. Monitoring contribution from applicant to be payable to the Local Planning Authority (amount to be agreed).
9. Phasing programme for the delivery of mitigation, compensation and enhancement alongside the development of the solar farm.
10. Decommissioning plan.

## 9. Arboriculture Considerations

- 9.1. It is acknowledged that the Tree Constraints Plans and Arboricultural Report submitted as part of Chapter 10 (Arboriculture) of the PEIR identifies the information that the applicant had suggested would be provided. However, due to the limited details within the report and plans, it is not currently possible for the council's Arboricultural Officers to assess the full impact of the proposal on arboricultural assets within the confines of the entire scheme.
- 9.2. It is noted that the Inspectorate's comments in the EIA Scoping Opinion stated:
 

*“the Cable Route Search Area is still to be defined and the potential for arboricultural impacts from construction activities, it is not proposed to scope out the impacts to trees within the Cable Route Area (once refined) at this point. It is further stated that this will be kept under review and due to proposed mitigation and refinement of the route, the potential for impacts may be unlikely and there is potential for the Cable Route to be scoped out of the ES.”*
- 9.3. Therefore, since the cable connection route has not been defined and the impacts on the trees has not been determined at the time of the PEIR for assessment within the consultation, all arboricultural features within this area should be fully considered within the ES.
- 9.4. The council recommends that the applicant undertakes a supplementary consultation in advance of DCO submission, to enable these matters to be properly considered.
- 9.5. It is the council's expectation that at the time of the DCO submission, detailed documents including the Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Tree Constraints Plans, Tree Protection Plans and Arboricultural Method Statement, prepared in accordance with BS5837:2012, should be provided. This will ensure that the impact of the

proposal in its full detail is determined, and to ensure that sufficient consideration has been given to all trees and hedgerows within the scheme proposals.

## **10. Hydrology, Flood Risk and Drainage Considerations**

- 10.1. Chapter 11 (Hydrology, Flood Risk and Drainage) of the PEIR suggests that the majority of the cable route connection corridor and the areas for the solar array are within Flood Zone 1 and at low risk of flooding. It is also confirmed that the preliminary assessment so far undertaken by the applicant is based on baseline and design information available at the time of writing and that a full assessment will be developed and refined following statutory consultation, and as additional information becomes available. The full assessment will be presented within the ES.
- 10.2. It is noted that the Water Framework Directive screening and scoping assessment referred to in paragraph 11.6.4, will require consideration from the council's ecology team, the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England. This similarly applies to the potential impacts identified in section 11.8 and with respect to the suitability of mitigations in source protection zones 1.
- 10.3. In respect of the Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy, contained within Volume 3, Appendix 11-1 to the PEIR, the council's Drainage Engineer has the following comments.
- 10.4. It is noted that in paragraph 1.1.1, it states that in some places the sites are at risk of flooding, primarily from pluvial sources. The determining authority (as well as the council in its capacity as a consultee) will need to consider whether the site has passed the sequential test in so far as there are no other reasonably available sites at lower risk of flooding (noting that this is a planning judgement and not a technical drainage matter).
- 10.5. In paragraph 3.2.2, the proposal from the applicant to include 8m buffer zones around ordinary watercourses and main rivers is welcomed. It is considered that this will help to simplify and reduce the number of Land Drainage Consents / Environmental Permits required.
- 10.6. It states in paragraph 3.2.2, that solar panels etc. will be located outside of areas at risk of the 1 in 100 year plus climate change flood extents (i.e. the design flood), or where not practicable, to areas where there is less than 1m predicted flood depth. Whilst this is potentially a matter for detailed design, the council would like to understand these locations further and understand the detail of the flood modelling used in these locations. The applicant should be undertaking additional flood modelling in these locations so as to confirm predicted flood extents and depths to a higher degree of accuracy. This will likely need additional topographical survey to be completed.

- 10.7. In section 4.0 (soil management), it is noted that as per the council's previous consultation comments, the applicant will be managing soil compaction in order to prevent an increase in runoff on the solar PV sites.
- 10.8. It is noted that in paragraph 4.1.5, it states that where disturbance to the soil occurs, post construction remediation (deep ploughing) may be required. It is the council's working assumption that all sites will need to be remediated. The applicant should provide details of proposed test regimes in order to confirm which sites would / would not need remediation post construction.
- 10.9. Similarly, in paragraph 4.1.7, the applicant should also provide details of intermediate remediation to be carried out during construction such that there isn't an increase in flood risk during the temporary condition as a result of soil compaction.
- 10.10. In paragraph 5.3.6, the council agrees that the access tracks should be designed to be permeable. It is the council's expectation that the applicant will provide cross-sections / construction details to demonstrate that the access tracks will be permeable. Furthermore, access tracks should be installed to match existing ground level so that these do not alter overland flow paths.
- 10.11. In respect of paragraph 5.3.7, the council's Drainage Engineer agrees in principle with managing surface water runoff through filter drains etc. However, calculations will need to be provided to demonstrate that these perform in accordance with the council's soakaway guidance (given that they are infiltration-based drainage systems).
- 10.12. In paragraph 5.3.8, the council's Drainage Engineer observes that whilst restriction of discharge to the greenfield 1 in 2 year rates will provide betterment against the more extreme return period events, the applicant should note the council's betterment policy and ensure that for the 1 in 1 / 1 in 2-year events, runoff is restricted to 70% of existing greenfield rates for the same storm event.
- 10.13. With regard to paragraph 5.3.10, the council's Drainage Engineer would expect the temporary drainage strategy for the sites to be provided in order for the council to confirm that these would not result in a temporary increase in local flood risk.
- 10.14. In paragraph 5.5.1, it is suggested that the EA should be consulted on the foul strategy and provision of a septic tank. The applicant has currently described that the effluent will be stored and tankered off site; this could suggest that a cesspit may be proposed to be installed. It is considered that further clarification and consultation with the EA is required.
- 10.15. The council's Drainage Engineer makes the general comment that the applicant will need to ensure that there is no change to existing overland flow routes as a result of the proposals to ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. The applicant must ensure there is no filling / alteration to / culverting of watercourses (either temporarily or in the permanent case) without prior Land Drainage Consent from the Lead Local Flood Authority.

- 10.16. In respect of the Lime Down D site, paragraph 3.2.5 indicates that BRE 365 soakaway testing is required. The council considers that this should be completed at this early stage to inform feasibility and not left to detailed design stage.
- 10.17. Again, with respect to the Lime Down D site, paragraph 3.8.5 suggests that calculations are to be provided that demonstrate that the full fire suppression flows can be accommodated within the proposed drainage without causing flooding of the site / elsewhere. It is the council's expectation that these are provided.
- 10.18. Furthermore, with regard to the Causeway Flow Calculations for Lime Down D, it is considered that the applicant should set the Additional Storage Volume to 0 (not the 20m<sup>3</sup>/ha default) so as there is not an overprediction in attenuation on site.

## 11. Built Heritage Considerations

### Policy Context

- 11.1. The applicant has set out the relevant policy and legislation within Chapter 12 (Cultural Heritage) of the PEIR. These include:
- The requirements of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
  - Section 66 of the aforementioned act referring to planning permissions, which requires that **special regard** be given to the desirability of preserving or enhancing listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.
  - Paragraph 58B of the Planning Act 1990 which requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving or enhancing registered parks and gardens.
  - Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also requires the council to pay special **attention** to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of designated Conservation Areas.
- 11.2. The NPPF outlines government policy, including its policy in respect of the historic environment. Section 16 of the NPPF '*Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development.
- 11.3. Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy Policy CP58 '*Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment*' requires that "designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced, in a manner appropriate to their significance." It is also required that distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved, and where possible enhanced.

## Consultation Documents

- 11.4. In preparing these comments, the council has considered Chapter 12 (Cultural Heritage) of the PEIR and its associated figures and technical appendices. Chapters 1 to 6 of the PEIR have also been reviewed, which set out introductory information to the proposals and the scheme, its development area, design evolution and alternatives considered, the legislative context and the EIA methodology. Consideration has also been had to Chapter 21 (Cumulative and In-Combination Effects).
- 11.5. It is noted that there are no designated heritage assets located within any of the solar sites and that the key issues to be taken into account will therefore be the setting issues, i.e. the likely impact on any contribution made by the site to the significance of assets in the vicinity. However, the applicant has acknowledged that the cable connection route is less well defined, and the assessment is consequently not so advanced. The applicant has indicated that full assessment will follow in the ES.
- 11.6. The council confirms that the methodology guiding the identification of assets which are likely to be impacted, including the proposed study areas and the commitment to allowing some flexibility/ discretion in considering highly graded assets has previously been agreed. Additionally, the council welcomes the inclusion of the additional assets within the scoping tables as previously requested. Therefore, the council can confirm that the scoping tables (Volume 3, Appendix 12-1) indicating which assets are to be scoped into the assessment are agreed. Volume 3, Appendix 12-4 sets out the Historic Environment Record (HER) Records and Designated Heritage Assets within the Cabe Route Study Area and the council confirms that this has also previously been agreed.
- 11.7. With regard to the Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment Tables, as set out in Volume 3, Appendix 12-5, it is understood that detailed assessment of the significance of scoped in assets and the extent and nature of the contribution made by their settings has not yet been undertaken. This will lead on to more detailed assessment of the impacts of the scheme. As a consequence, the impact tables are based on the high level, in principle, assessment which has been undertaken to date and a range of possible values have been identified for the magnitude of impact and significance of effect and for the residual impacts following mitigation. These are wide ranges (covering the whole range of possibilities from neutral to major adverse) and it is agreed that they cover the potential outcomes.
- 11.8. It is noted that some mitigation has been suggested at this stage based on the potential for impact and the applicant's current (desktop) understanding of the significance of scoped in heritage assets, industry best practice and professional judgement. This mitigation is shown on the indicative site layouts and masterplans included in the consultation documents. The indicative site layouts at this stage appear to indicate initial mitigation via the exclusion of areas from development as buffers. This is welcomed by the council as this is likely to address some specific and immediately obvious areas of concern.

- 11.9. However, the council is concerned that the detailed methodology for identifying the long and short list of projects for consideration in the cumulative impact assessment continues to lack clarity. Additional justification and explanation on how the zone of influence (Zol) for cultural heritage of 2km from the development area has been derived would also be helpful. As identified in the Landscape and Visual section above, it is noted that paragraph 6.8.12 states that *“The justification for each Zol is presented in Volume 2, Figure 21-2”*, however this figure has not been published. The council sought clarification from the applicant who indicated that this should instead refer to Figure 21-1. Furthermore, and as previously advised, the applicant is asked to provide GIS mapping of the development areas, which would aid interrogation of the data. At present, this is only identified in written format and via point data on maps.
- 11.10. At this stage, and based on the information available to date, the council agrees that impacts on built heritage assets are likely to be temporary in nature and are therefore of lesser concern. However, alternative routes are noted in some areas and, where possible, routes would ideally be chosen to avoid highly graded assets, and particularly landscapes to avoid even the temporary harm from the proximity of construction. For example, close to the Grade I Listed Corsham Court and Grade II\* Corsham Court registered landscape.
- 11.11. However, in order for the council to reach a definitive position on the likely heritage impacts, further work is required to be undertaken by the applicant. It is the council’s expectation that the following works will be undertaken for inclusion in the ES, which will be submitted with the DCO application.
- 11.12. The applicant is required to prepare significance and setting assessments for the individual assets and these should be used to determine the contribution made by the site to this significance. Once available, this should be followed by an impact assessment, which takes the findings of the significance and setting assessments into account.
- 11.13. Verification on site will be required. It is acknowledged that the applicant’s heritage team have committed to undertaking joint site visits to achieve this.
- 11.14. The applicant is required to undertake full assessment of the cable routes and cable connection corridor. The council also requires further detail on the likely impacts associated with the Highway Improvement Areas in order to allow assessment of heritage impacts.
- 11.15. Furthermore, and as indicated above, clarity is required on the methodology for the cumulative impact assessment. In addition, the developable areas for the short-listed projects should be presented on mapping to aid assessment. Further assessment will then be required once the individual significance assessments for assets have been undertaken.
- 11.16. It is understood that additional mitigation may be found to be necessary in order to limit the impact on heritage assets as required by current legislation and policy, and



that this will be formulated as part of the continuing development of the scheme following the completion of significance and impact assessments. It is the council's expectation that all mitigation is identified within the ES and detailed scheme design.

## **12. Archaeology Considerations**

- 12.1. Please note that the comments in this section only address aspects of the PEIR which relate to archaeological sites, features and findspots. Aspects related to setting and built heritage have been considered in the above section and Historic England will be considering scheduled monuments.
- 12.2. Chapter 12 (Cultural Heritage) of the PEIR has collated all currently known archaeological data from within the proposed development area, including a sweep of all data from the Wiltshire Historic Environment Record, LiDAR plots and the results of a recently completed geophysical survey of all the fields that make up the site.
- 12.3. As the applicant acknowledges, the true archaeological potential of the scheme area is still to be determined as the trial trench evaluation, which is exploring the archaeological features identified by the geophysics, is currently underway and will not be completed for some time.
- 12.4. As a result of this developing situation, the council is unable to provide a definitive response to the likely impact of the proposed development upon cultural heritage issues. However, the council is able to provide an opinion on the mitigation strategies and the assessment of effects that have been set out in Chapter 12. The council will also provide an outline of what the council's Archaeology Service will be expecting from the applicant during the preparation of the ES.
- 12.5. The applicant has set out the assessment assumptions and limitations in section 12.4. With regard to the assumptions contained within paragraph 12.4.3 (and specifically bullet points 6 to 9), the council would endorse most of the consultation and assessment process set out here, although the assumption that concrete feet for the solar panels can be accepted as embedded mitigation is not agreed. If solar panels are to be placed over areas of archaeological sensitivity, then these areas will have to be made the subject of either archaeological area excavations or Strip, Map and Sample (SMS), depending on the value of said archaeology. This is the strategy that the council's Archaeology Service employed for the solar farm at Wick Farm Lacock (20/06840/FUL), a strategy that has then been followed for all subsequent solar farm application in the county.
- 12.6. Paragraphs 12.9.6 and 12.9.7 set out the embedded mitigation measures specific to archaeology. The council welcomes this strategy but again questions whether concrete feet are an acceptable mitigation measure.
- 12.7. The applicant has set out its proposed approach to the decommissioning phase in paragraph 12.9.13. The council considers that it is refreshing to see the decommissioning phase addressed at this early stage and welcomes the commitments

contained within this paragraph. However, these proposals do of course assume that they will suffice in 60 years' time when national and local political priorities and legislation (as well as available technologies) are likely to be different to today.

- 12.8. With regard to the applicant's initial assessment of the likely impacts of the scheme upon buried archaeology, as contained within paragraph 12.10.4, the council wishes to make the following comments:

- 12.8.1. The council concurs with the following statement contained in the first bullet point:

*Where possible settlement activity is suspected (but currently unproven), for example, from the presence of a cluster Roman coin findspots, the sensitivity score is given as a range from Very Low (i.e., if these were just chance losses with no associated buried archaeological evidence) to Medium (i.e., if they represent the location of a buried Roman settlement);*

- 12.8.2. With respect to bullet point two, which states:

*Where Medium value archaeological remains such as Iron Age/Romano-British settlement and field systems have been identified in areas where solar panels are proposed it has been considered that, with standard mitigation in place in the form of placing the panels on concrete feet or evaluation trenching, the impact would be avoided, and it is therefore considered that the effects upon these remains would be Neutral during the construction phase. This is notwithstanding the fact there could be some impacts due to construction traffic movement, though such impacts could also occur anyway in the 'future baseline without the Scheme scenario' scenario, due to impacts from agricultural machinery;*

As previously indicated, the council disputes that concrete feet are an adequate mitigation measure per se. It is considered that this issue will need to be resolved following the completion of the trial trench evaluation.

- 12.8.3. The applicant states in bullet point three that:

*Whilst the magnitude of the impacts from the installation of panels (in the absence of mitigation) have been generally scored as a worst case Low adverse upon buried archaeological remains. Where there are also impacts from other infrastructure (i.e. proposed substations, BESS Area, fences, access tracks etc) within the Sites, these impacts have been scored as Low-High;*

The council considers the impacts of all aspects of the proposed development will not be fully assessed until the completion of the trial trench evaluation and therefore the range of impacts must remain open-ended.

12.8.4. The council concurs with the following statement contained within bullet point four:

*Impacts to findspots are recorded as 'No impact likely', due to the possibility that they might be redeposited or represent chance losses, and the context of the find may have been lost; and*

12.8.5. Whilst the council concurs with the following statement within bullet point five, the issue of the impact of the solar panels themselves is to be addressed within the ES:

*Where archaeological excavation and recording are proposed as mitigation, (for example along the cable routes, access and haul roads, conversion units, battery storage compound, and substations), the adverse impacts upon the archaeological resource would still occur, with or without this mitigation in place, although the recording will serve to offset the adverse effects.*

12.9. The council welcomes the applicant's approach to the assessment of the significance of effect as set out in paragraphs 12.10.13 and 12.10.14. It is the council's expectation that these issues will be discussed with the applicant's archaeological consultants once the evaluation has been completed and the ES prepared.

12.10. Overall, the council is broadly content with the approach set out in Chapter 12 of the PEIR in relation to archaeological matters.

12.11. The geophysical survey has provided the county with a valuable resource of new data on ancient settlement in the north-west of the county.

12.12. Additionally, the council welcomes the potential (as laid out in the PEIR) to scope sites of high archaeological potential out of the development altogether and for the funding of archaeological excavations and SMS investigations to mitigate impacts on areas that cannot be scoped out. Further to this, it is the council's expectation that a detailed mitigation strategy will be included in the ES following discussions between the archaeological consultants and the council's Archaeology Service once the full results of the trial trench evaluation are known.

12.13. The council are pleased to note that the PEIR has given thought to the impacts, not just of the construction phase, but also the operational phase (which is often dismissed) and the decommissioning phase. However, it is considered that looking ahead to the environmental and political conditions in 60 years' time may prove problematic.

12.14. At present, the main area of contention with the PEIR is the potential impact of the solar panels themselves. The council is sceptical as to the effectiveness of the 'concrete feet' mitigation and in the past, the council's Archaeology Service has insisted that areas of archaeological high potential in solar panel areas are to be made the subject of archaeological excavations in order to preserve such sites 'by record'.

This policy has been consistently followed for all solar park schemes within Wiltshire and it is considered that this scheme, which is so full of potentially important archaeology, shouldn't be approached differently.

### **13. Highways and Transport Considerations**

- 13.1. In preparing these comments, the council has considered Chapter 13 (Transport and Access) of the PEIR and its associated figures. Regard has also been had to EIA Scoping Opinion issued on 2 August 2024. Whilst it is acknowledged that the design of the scheme continues to evolve, the council considers that the EIA scoping advice has been included within the developing proposals.
- 13.2. The council is supportive of the approach for the work undertaken to date by the applicant, in terms of presenting the scheme proposals and the impacts that would arise in terms of direct highways impact. Whilst it is acknowledged that further work is required, the council is content that these have been identified and does not consider that further input is required by the council at this time in terms of the approach and background data. It is considered that the highways and transport section is clearly presented and can be understood by statutory consultees and any other person who may wish to comment on these matters during the statutory public consultation.
- 13.3. However, the council wishes to raise the following matters for the applicant to take forward in the further assessment and design development to ensure that any further works respond appropriately.
- 13.4. The 'Highway Improvement Areas' should be considered in the context of the need to carry out such improvements solely to support this proposal and the expectation that these improvements are no longer necessary. There should be a clear distinction for any 'Highway Improvement Area's' which are intended to remain in place even after the commissioning works are completed.
- 13.5. The council notes that applicant's position that some increases in traffic are larger in percentage terms due to existing low levels of movement. However, in terms of movement, the council's expectation will be for route widths and passing to be acceptable, to which the number and frequency of occurrences is less of an issue than ensuring that even if it only occurs once, that it does so safely and suitably.
- 13.6. In some cases, the council considers that management of traffic may be a more reasonable or suitable approach than improvement, but this would come forward as matters progress.
- 13.7. The council considers that if the applicant's goals for staff numbers and arrivals by shuttle bus or travel planned solutions are to be meaningful, there needs to be clear monitoring and performance measures to ensure that the stated approach is adopted during delivery. Furthermore, the assumptions in terms of staff numbers and arrivals by mode must move towards practical and managed outcomes with realistic

strategies. Other site assumptions would need to be presented as having been achieved and met in implementation to satisfy the reliance on them any further.

- 13.8. As indicated by the applicant, it is the council's expectation that the construction management plan and abnormal loads elements form part of any DCO. The council wish to retain final positions on these and authority.
- 13.9. Whilst it is acknowledged that the exact proposals in terms of roads, accesses, and highway impacts are still developing (and survey work is still in the process of being completed), for any works within or affecting the local highway network, the council will need to consider the verge, footways and pathways and the carriageway. It is noted that open cutting of the highway will require a greater reinstatement when compared to directional drilling. The council, therefore, reserves the right to comment further on this matter once the scheme designs are more advanced. Any new apparatus within the highway will need to be licenced under Section 50 of the New Roads and Streetworks Act (NRSWA).
- 13.10. The council will also need to consider any vehicle access onto private land which requires changes to the highway fabric, and these works will need to be licenced in some way. Depending on whether the access is temporary or permanent, the construction detail will vary and will require approval at the licencing stage. A dilapidation survey of the highway condition may be required on high traffic count areas so that the highway can be returned to its original state at the end of construction. The council awaits further details from the applicant to assess whether this will be applicable.
- 13.11. Furthermore, a permit will be required for any works on the highway and depending on the traffic management method proposed, a Portable Traffic Signals licence or Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) may be required. Approval from the council's Streetworks team will be required in either instance. The council considers it prudent to remind the applicant that for large scale works, a 12 week notice period is required and the same notice period also applies if a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) is necessary. The council cannot guarantee that the network will be available for the dates and duration required by the applicant and encourages the applicant to provide as much information as possible in advance to aid efficient working practices.
- 13.12. Whilst access and approvals may be a matter that can sit wholly within the DCO, subject to demonstration of the work and being satisfied that they can be carried out without the need for provision of powers and approvals under the Highways Act. At present, the council will reserve the right to retain final positions and authority on these matters also.
- 13.13. It is the council's Highways Officer's view that the assumptions and approach to specifying the vehicle numbers which underpins the assessment of in-combination cumulative effects is considered to be sound. It is acknowledged that these vehicle movements may result in in-combination cumulative effects for other environmental

disciplines, for example air quality, noise etc. This would be over and above the highway oversight of ensuring matters can be safely and suitably accommodated.

## **14. Public Rights of Ways (PROW) Considerations**

- 14.1 The council notes that some of the biggest impacts of this development will be those placed upon the users of Public Rights of Way (PROW). Whilst it is acknowledged that the development is proposed to be temporary in nature with an expected lifespan of 60 years, the impact on and enjoyment by these users could be considerable.
- 14.2 Therefore, it is considered that this scheme provides significant opportunities to tackle one of the biggest problems on the PROW network, which is fragmentation of Footpaths and Bridleways, which terminate on roads forcing users onto the road or verges until they can rejoin another PROW. The creation of additional PROW could be of considerable benefit to PROW users, especially if MALW50 and GSOM15 were able to be linked into the PROW network. These two footpaths currently terminate at a point where no onward highway rights exist.
- 14.3 It is noted that the applicant refers to permissive paths. However, given that permissive routes could be removed in 60 years' time once the scheme is decommissioned, it is considered that routes should be dedicated so that they become permanent additions to the PROW network, where possible.
- 14.4 The council notes that further clarity is required on the impacts to PROW resulting from the cable connection route and the applicant's stated intention to provide this information within the ES.
- 14.5 The council welcomes the applicant's intention to submit an outline Public Rights of Way Management Plan (PRoWMP) with its DCO application. The council reserves the right to comment on the proposed management arrangements once this more detailed information is available.
- 14.6 The council's proposals in relation to the solar sites are outlined in the following sections. Further opportunities may be identified as the scheme designs are further developed.

### Lime Down Site A:

- 14.7 There are two PROW within the Lime Down A site being: Public Footpath SHER15 and Public Bridleway SHER16. Three PROW connect with or are in the immediate vicinity of the site. These include: Public Footpath SHER14, Public Footpath SHER17 and Public Footpath SHER13. Additionally, there are PROW which are near the Lime Down A site being: Public Footpath SHER11 and Public Footpath SHER12.
- 14.8 Figure 1 displays the Site Extent of Lime Down A below:

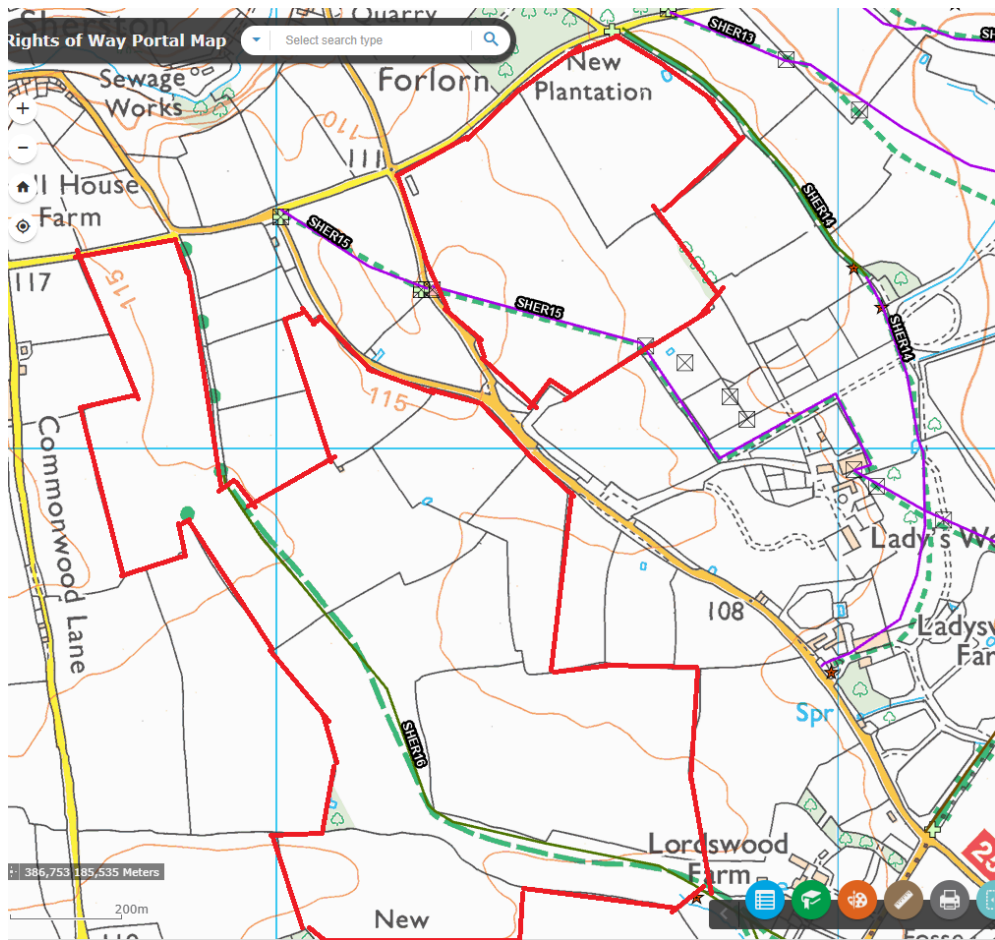


Figure 1

- 14.9 The Lime Down A component of the scheme provides an opportunity to link Bridleway SHER14 with Bridleway SHER16 if a Public Bridleway was created by following a route of A-B-C-D. It might also be possible to divert a section of SHER15 onto the field edge to improve the management of the land. A new Public Footpath from point G-F could link SHER14 to SHER16, which is considered would create a nice circular route option. These are shown on Figure 2 below:

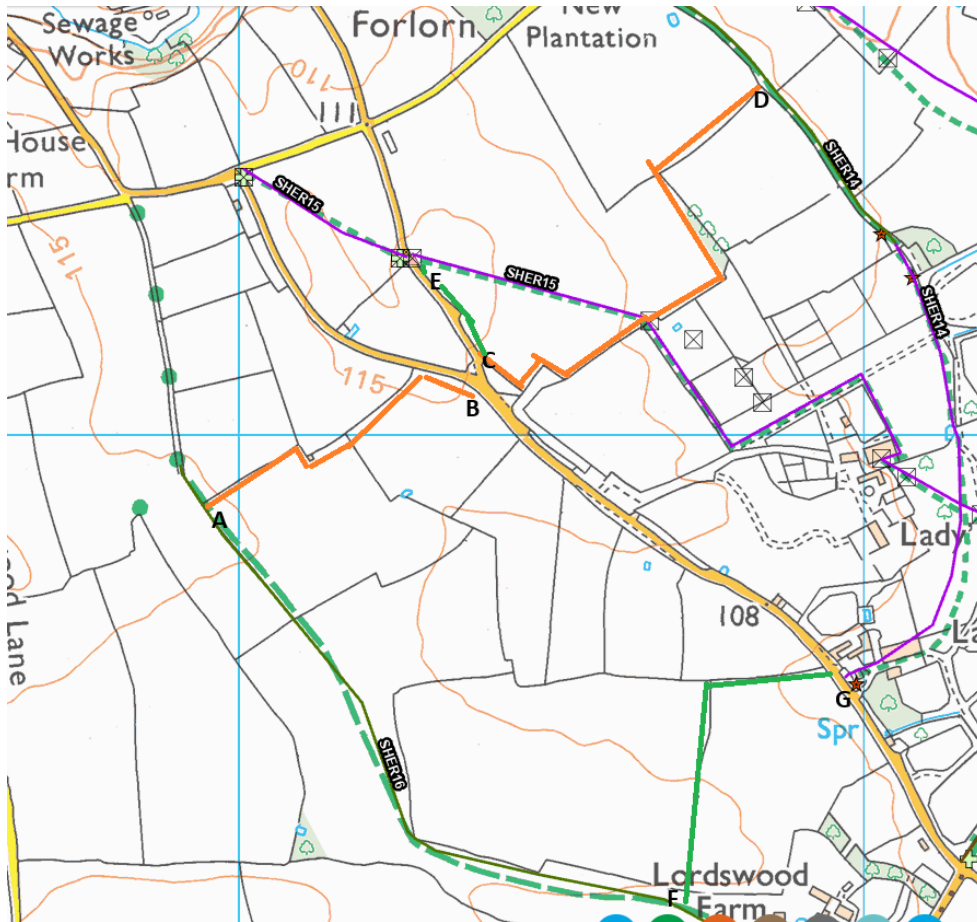


Figure 2

14.10 The council considers that the following improvements would be necessary:

- SHER15 (Grid references: 56828 85286 and 86654 85182) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- Off site works should include access furniture upgrades to SHER13, SHER11 and SHER10 pending an inspection of the Public Footpaths.

Lime Down Site B:

14.11 There are two PROW within the Lime Down B site being: Public Footpath NORT5 and Public Footpath NORT11. Six PROW connect with or are in the immediate vicinity of the site. These include: Byway Open to All Traffic SHER37, Public Footpath SHER15, Public Footpath SHER13, Public Footpath SHER11, Byway Open to All Traffic EGRE1 and Public Bridleway NORT11. Additionally, there are PROW which are near the Lime Down B site being: Byway Open to All Traffic NORT6, Public Footpath NORT4, Public Footpath SHER14, Public Bridleway NORT2 and Public Footpath NORT9.



14.12 Figure 3 displays the Site Extent of Lime Down B below:

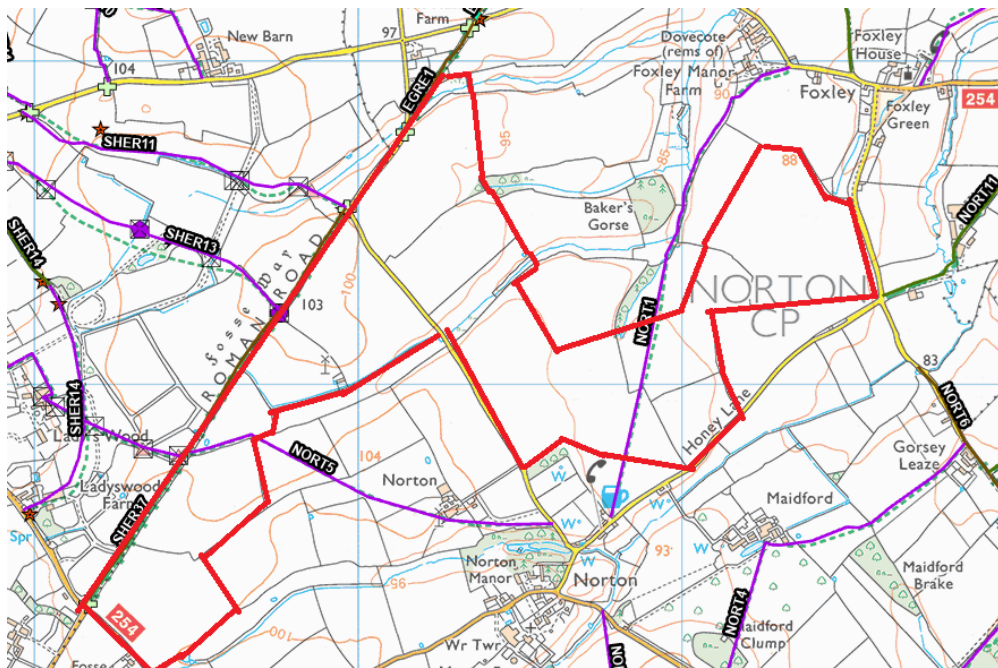


Figure 3

14.13 The proposals regarding Lime Down B, offer a very welcomed opportunity to link Public Bridleway NORT11 to Byways Open to All Traffic EGRE1 and SHER37, which could then in turn link the user to Bridleway SHER16 via a link through the Lime Down C site. This route is shown in Figure 4 below as A-B-C-D and A-B-E-F.

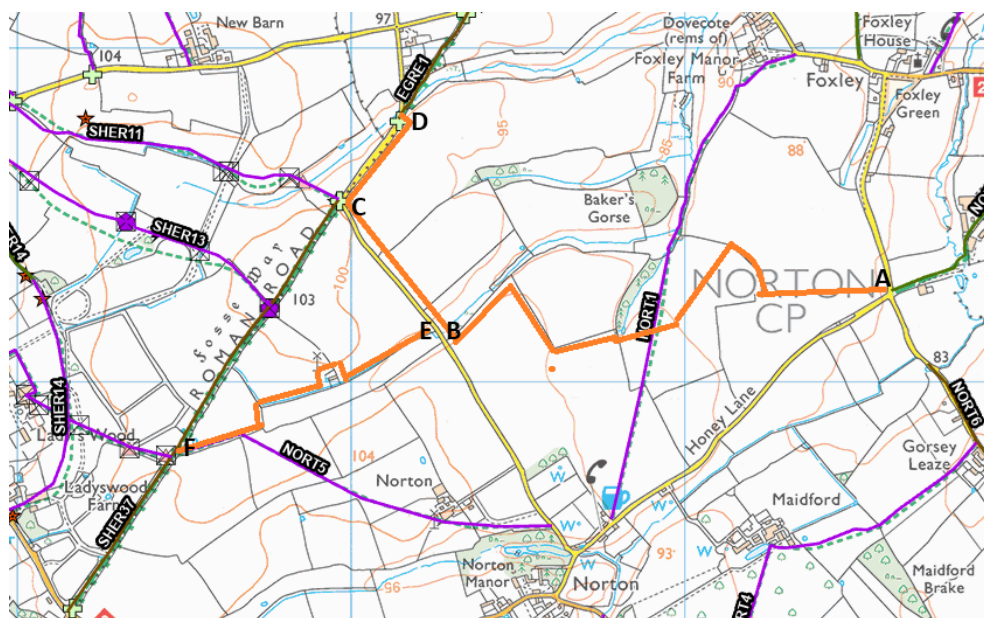


Figure 4

14.14 The council considers that the following improvements would be necessary:

- NORT5 (Grid reference: 87677 84841) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or

kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.

- NORT5 (Grid reference: 87492 84793) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a bridle gate if the route is to be upgraded to a Bridleway. If this is not possible, then a pedestrian or kissing gate should be installed only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- NORT1 (Grid references: 88920 85202 and 88815 84750) – If livestock is going to be present, then a pedestrian gate or kissing gate will be required. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- Off site improvements may be required to NORT5, NORT1, SHER15, SHER13 and SHER11 pending a site visit to assess access furniture.

#### Lime Down Site C:

14.15 There are six PROW within the Lime Down C site being: Public Footpath HULL23, Byway Open to all Traffic LUCK57, Byway Open to all Traffic SHER35, Public Footpath SHER18, Public Footpath HULL25 and Public Footpath HULL26. Eight PROW connect with or are in the immediate vicinity of the site. These include: Public Footpath HULL24, Public Footpath LUCK43, Public Footpath LUCK42, Public Footpath LUCK45, Public Footpath LUCK35, Public Footpath SHER17, Public Bridleway SHER16 and Byway Open to All Traffic SHER37. Additionally, there are PROW which are near the Lime Down C site being: Public Footpath HULL13, Public Footpath HULL17, Public Footpath HULL20, Public Footpath GRIT32, Public Bridleway GRIT22 and Public Footpath GRIT26.

14.16 Figure 5 displays the Site Extent of Lime Down C below:

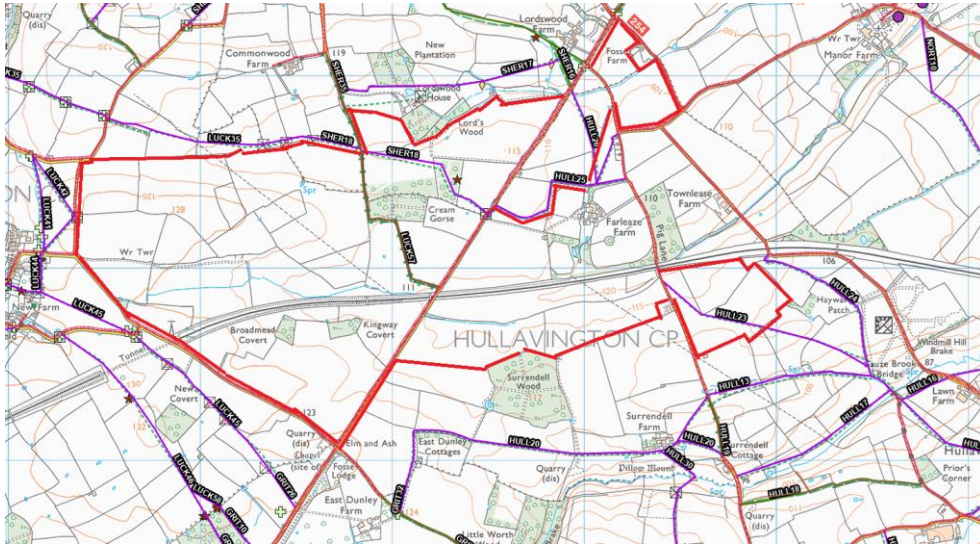


Figure 5

14.17 The proposals regarding Lime Down C, create an opportunity to create a new Public Bridleway on the west side of the Fosse Way. This could link the following public rights of way: GRIT22, LUCK57, SHER18, HULL25, SHER16 and SHER37. This is shown on Figure 6 below:

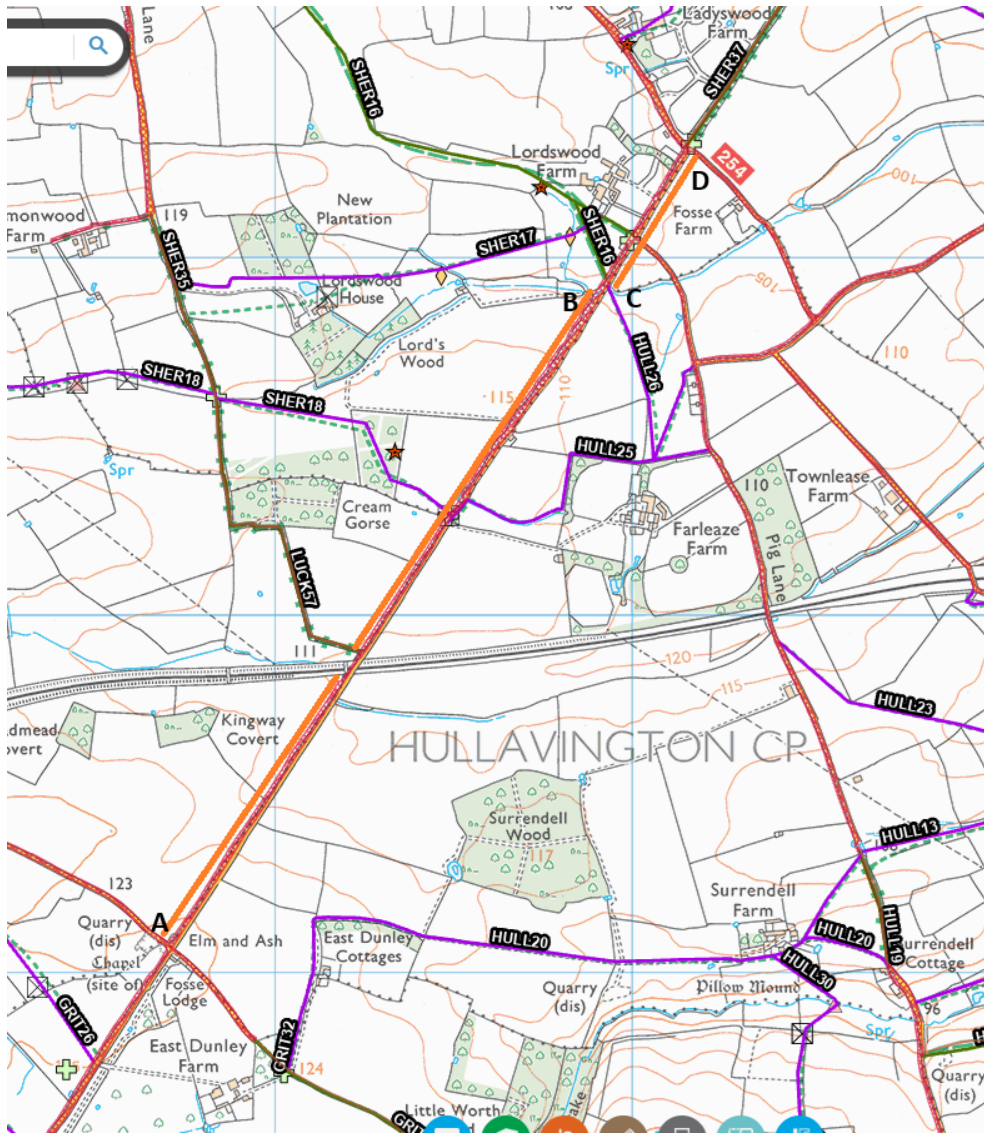


Figure 6

14.18 The proposals regarding Lime Down C also create an opportunity to provide a new Public Footpath. This route is shown on Figure 7 below as A-B and would link HULL23 with LUCK57. The council suggests that this is located on the south of the hedge and panels due to the user having improved views and also due to the access point onto the road.

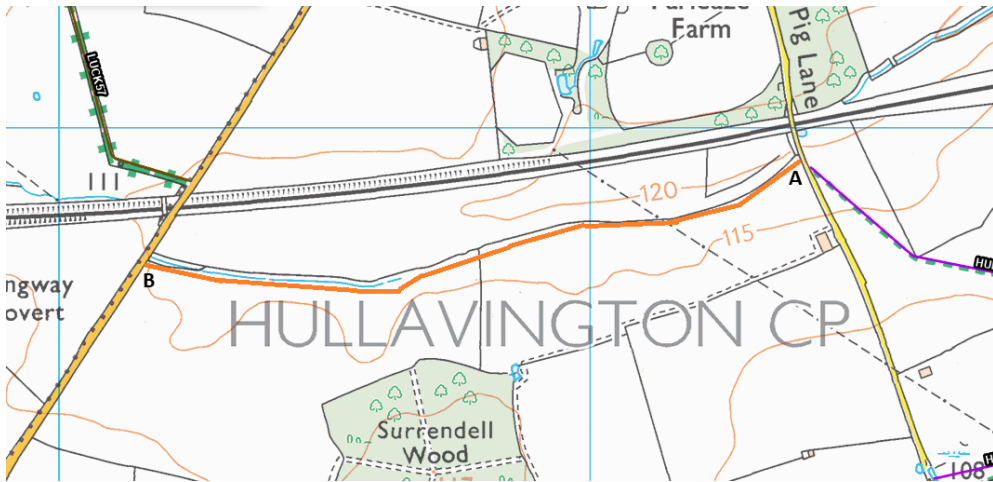


Figure 7

14.19 The council notes that the position of HULL23 (Figure 8 below) on the ground appears to be different to the Definitive Map line. The council's PROW officer suspects that the sign-post is about 60m to the south of where it should be. However, it is noted that the indicative Site Layout Plan appears to show the footpath in the correct position.



Figure 8

14.20 HULL23 (Grid reference: 87418 82924) would require improvement to install a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created with a new signpost.

14.21 Additionally, at HULL23 (Grid reference: 87917 82693), whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.

14.22 A new Public Bridleway (shown in Figure 9 below) should be created linking A-C-B, which will link Alderton and Luckington to LUCK57. A new Public Footpath should also be created between points D-C as this would create a circular route connecting with LUCK45.

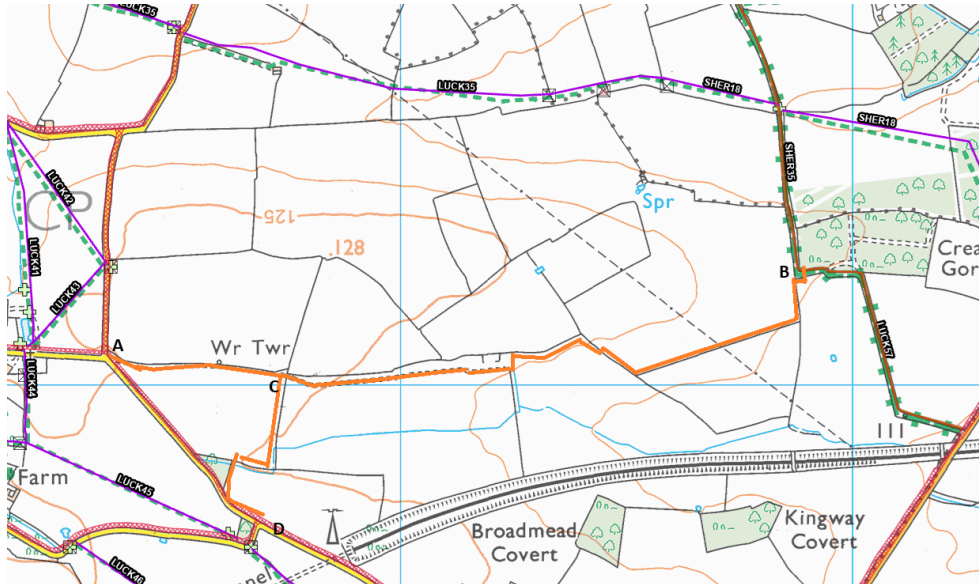


Figure 9

14.23 The council's PROW Officer is unsure whether SHER18 is available on the definitive line through Cream Gorse, therefore this proposal would give the option of improving the connectivity of the network and also improve land management. It may be possible to divert SHER18 onto the route A-B-D-E-F shown in Figure 10 below, which would also improve connectivity with HULL25. A Public Footpath dedicated along the route of A-B-C would also add to the connectivity of the public rights of way network.

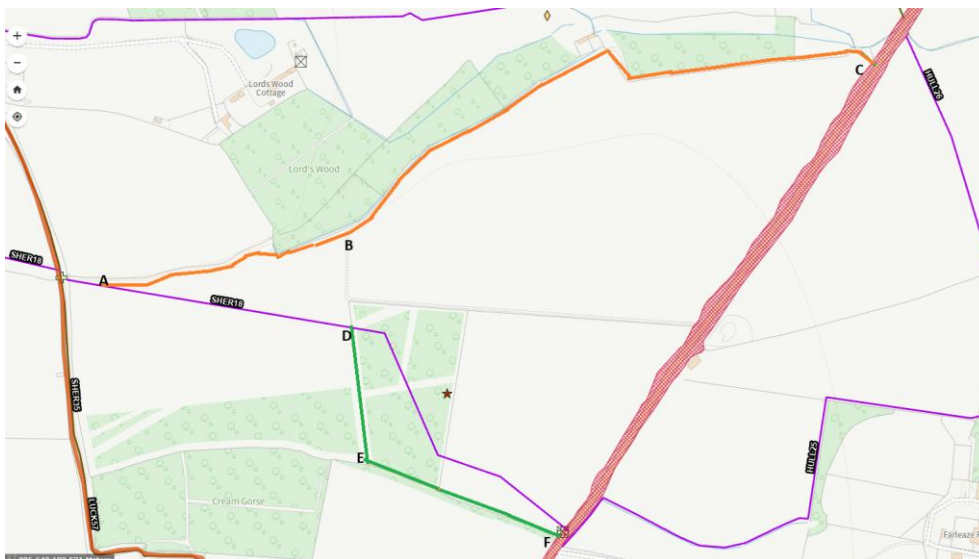


Figure 10

14.24 The council considers that it would be helpful to create a link from HULL24 to HULL23, as this would create a circular route to the west of Hullavington village. It would also

be possible to create a circular route of approximately 5km from the village via HULL1, HULL16, HULL13, HULL24 new footpath, HULL23, HULL13, HULL12 and HULL15. This route would have no road walking with just a couple of roads to cross.

14.25 The council considers that the following improvements would be necessary:

- SHER18 (Grid references: 85848 83607, 86217 83546, 86332 83378 and 86490 83280) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- HULL25 (Grid references: 86491 83264 and 86831 83451) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- HULL26 (Grid reference: 86938 83922) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- Off site improvements may be required to SHER17, SHER18, LUCK35, LUCK43, LUCK42, LUCK45, GRIT26, GRIT32, HULL20, HULL23, HULL24, HULL17 and HULL13 pending a site visit to assess access furniture.

14.26 The council advises the applicant that the working copy alignment of SHER18 has changed and therefore should be checked to ensure it is plotted correctly.

#### Lime Down Site D:

14.27 There are six PROW within the Lime Down D site being: Public Footpath HULL1, Public Footpath NORT10, Public Footpath HULL2, Public Footpath HULL4, Public Footpath HULL5 and Public Footpath HULL6. Five PROW connect with or are in the immediate vicinity of the site. These include: Public Footpath HULL8, Public Bridleway HULL7, Public Bridleway MALW51, Public Footpath MALW49 and Public Footpath MALW50. Additionally, there are PROW which are near the Lime Down D site being: Public Footpath NORT4, Public Bridleway MALW44, Byway Open to All Traffic MALW46 and Public Footpath MALW52.

14.28 Figure 11 displays the Site Extent of Lime Down D below:

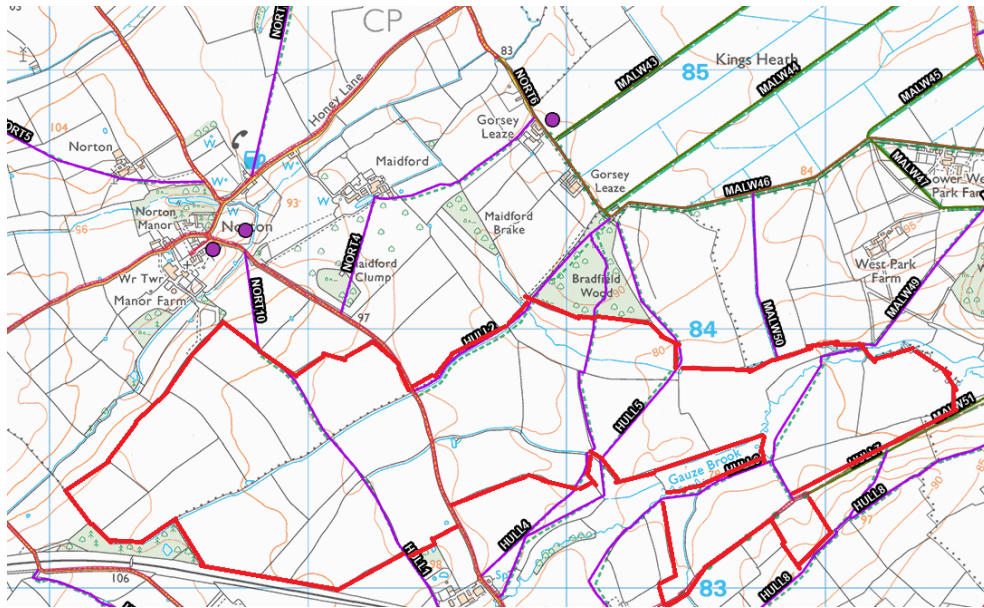


Figure 11

14.29 There is the opportunity within Lime Down D to link several Public Footpaths with an east west Public Footpath as it is noted that the site is quite well covered for north south PROW. It is considered that two additional PROW would provide some very welcomed new route options. It may also be possible to connect MALW46 with HULL7, but this will require further assessment by the council.

14.30 A new Public Footpath to link HULL2, HULL4, HULL5, HULL6 and MALW50 should be created between points A-B (as shown as the orange line in Figure 12 below). It is considered that this possible route would avoid the solar panels.

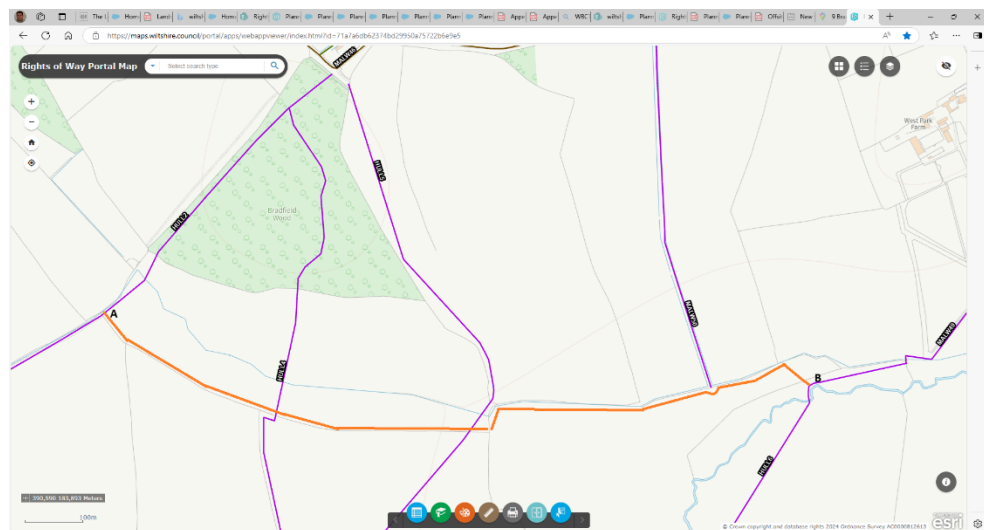


Figure 12

14.31 The council also considers that a new Public Footpath should be created between HULL1 and HULL2 as shown on Figure 13 below. HULL2 is currently isolated from the PROW network at its western end. The nearest public footpath is over 400m to the north along Norton Road and to the south, it is over 700m before a connection with



another PROW. If the applicant was to dedicate a new Public Footpath between HULL1 meeting Norton Road opposite HULL2, this would increase the walking options in the area, opening more circular route options. Furthermore, it is noted that there is a housing development of up to 71 units in construction at the southern end of HULL1, therefore it would be of benefit to the new residents.

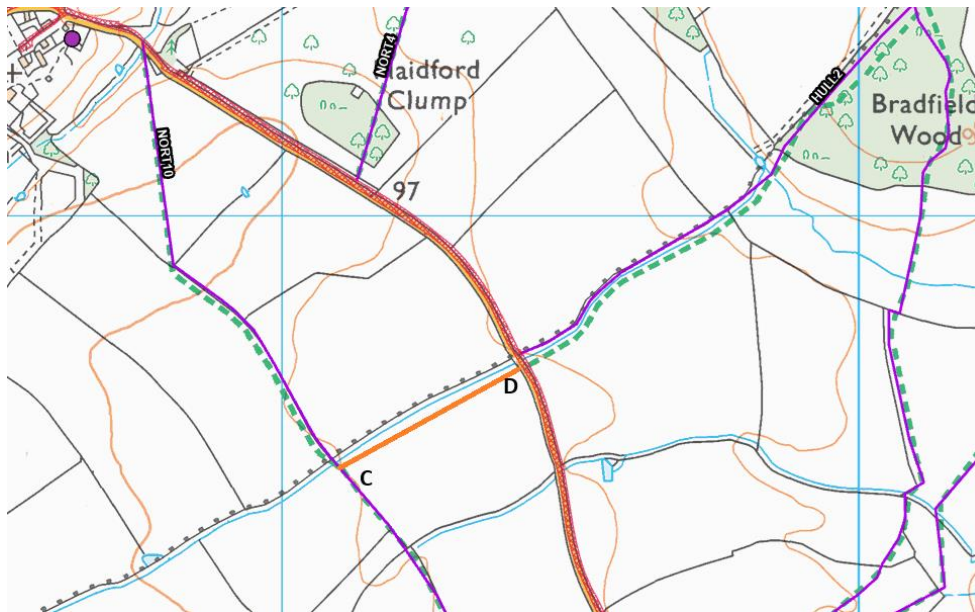


Figure 13

14.32 The council considers that the following access furniture improvements would be necessary:

- HULL1 (Grid references: 89366 83142, 89216 83421 and 89191 83458) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- HULL1 / NORT10 (Grid reference: 89087 83583) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- NORT10 (Grid reference: 88808 83920) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.

- HULL2 (Grid references: 89416 83762 and 89870 84114) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- HULL2 (Grid references: 89775 84012 and 89771 84067) – The council will determine whether a piece of access furniture may be required at these locations. Furthermore, Grid reference 89771 84067 may require a culvert.
- HULL4 (Grid references: 90110 84057 and 90086 83898) – Whilst the structure of the stile will need to be checked, the stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.
- HULL4 (Grid references: 90068 83840, 90081 83522 and 90042 83397) – The council will determine whether a piece of access furniture may be required at these locations.
- HULL5 (Grid references: 90130 83488, 90389 83811, 90411 83846 and 90436 83811) – The council will determine whether a piece of access furniture may be required at these locations.
- MALW50 (Grid reference: 90818 83888) – The council will determine whether a piece of access furniture may be required at this location.
- HULL6 / MALW49 (Grid reference: 91150 83934) – The council will determine whether a piece of access furniture may be required at this location.
- HULL6 (Grid references: 90989 83874, 90794 83502, 90293 83378, 90367 83344 and 90876 83346) – The council will determine whether a piece of access furniture may be required at these locations. The bridges will also need to be checked at Grid references 90989 83874 and 90293 83378.
- Off site improvements may be required to HULL1 between the site and HULL3, to HULL2 and HULL4 at Bradfield Wood and to HULL8 and MALW52. Improvements may also be required to NORT10, NORT4, HULL5, MALW50, MALW49 and HULL6.

## Lime Down Site E:

14.33 There are six PROW within the Lime Down E site being: Public Bridleway and Brown Track MALW54, Public Footpath MALW60, Public Footpath MALW68, Public Bridleway and Brown Track MALW59, Public Bridleway MALW61 and Public Footpath MALW62. Three PROW connect with or are in the immediate vicinity of the site. These include: Public Footpath SSTQ5, Public Bridleway SSTQ4 and Public Footpath GSOM15. Additionally, there are PROW which are near the Lime Down E site being: Public Bridleway SEAG23 GSOM9, Public Bridleway GSOM10, Public Footpath GSOM11, Public Footpath MALW64, Public Footpath MALW63, Public Footpath MALW65 and Public Footpath MALW55.

14.34 Figure 14 displays the Site Extent of Lime Down E below:

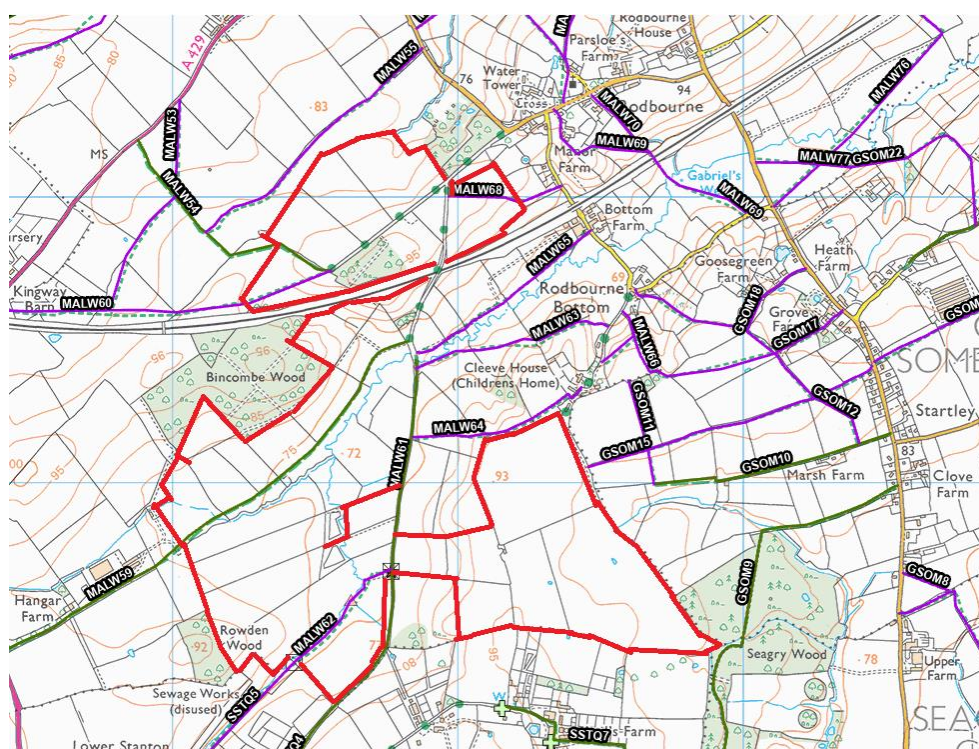


Figure 14

14.35 It is considered that a bridleway link could be created from Seagry Wood into the site SEAG23 / GSOM9 as the PROW network can often be fragmented with the road network often having to be used to connect Footpaths and Bridleways. Bridleway GSOM9 / SEAG23 runs within 40m of the southeast corner of the Lime Down E site. If a link could be created to the bridleway and the applicant dedicates bridleways around the south and east of the development, this would create a good local network for the people most impacted by the development. It would also allow a circular route using SSTQ7, SEAG23, MALW61 and SSTQ4 which would be about 3.7km. It is acknowledged that Seagry House would need to agree for this to be possible.

14.36 Furthermore, a Bridleway could be created up the east side of the Lime Down E site to link with MALW64 near Cleeve House. Please see Figure 15 below:

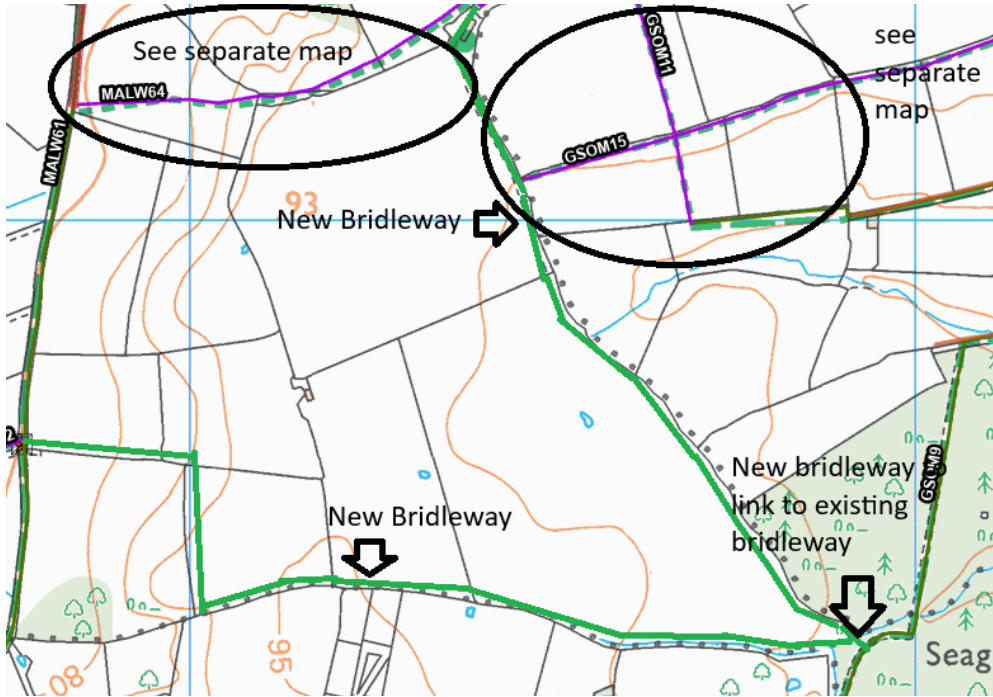


Figure 15

14.37 Additionally, part of GSOM11 and GSOM15 could be upgraded to a Bridleway or extend GSOM10 to meet Lime Down E as a Bridleway, which may result in the possibility to extinguish the north part of GSOM11 in exchange for network improvements. This is illustrated on Figure 16 below. It is acknowledged that Grove Farm would need to agree.

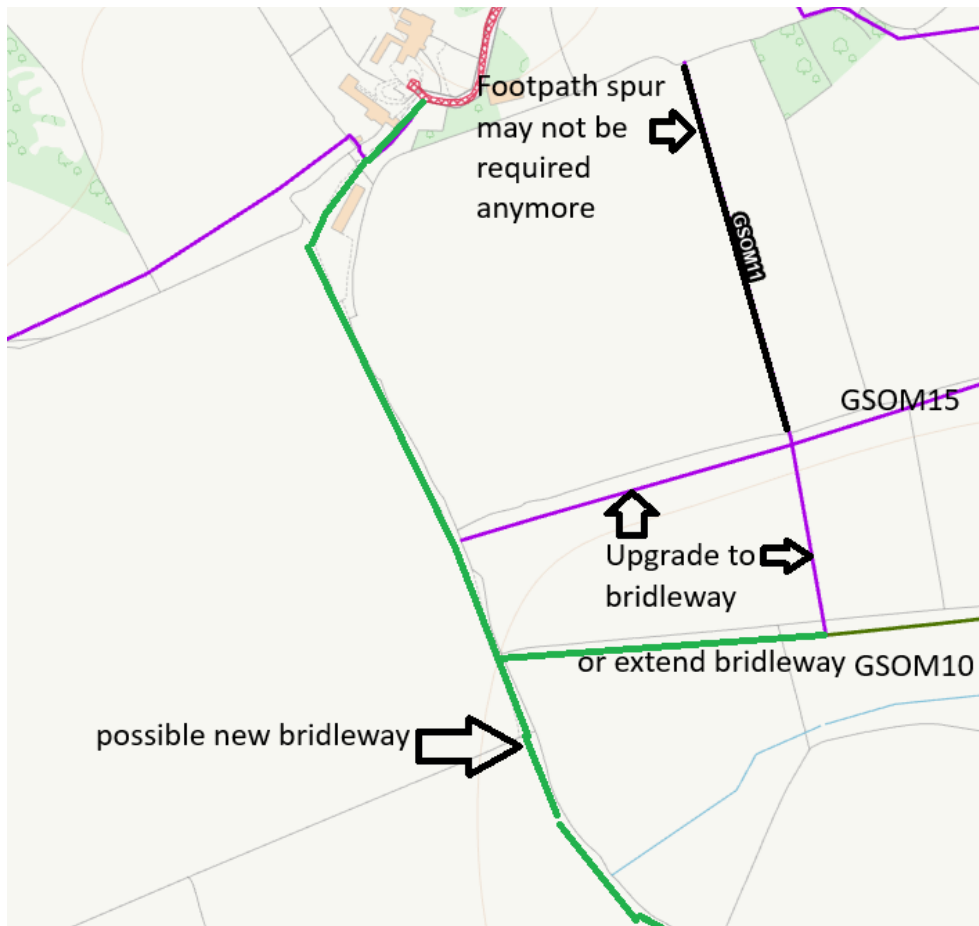


Figure 16

14.38 It may also be possible to divert MALW64 from its current alignment to a route following the field edge around the solar farm. This path could also be upgraded to a Bridleway as well to improve the bridleway network connectivity. It is noted that there are several possible route options, which could be considered. Figure 17 below illustrates one of them.

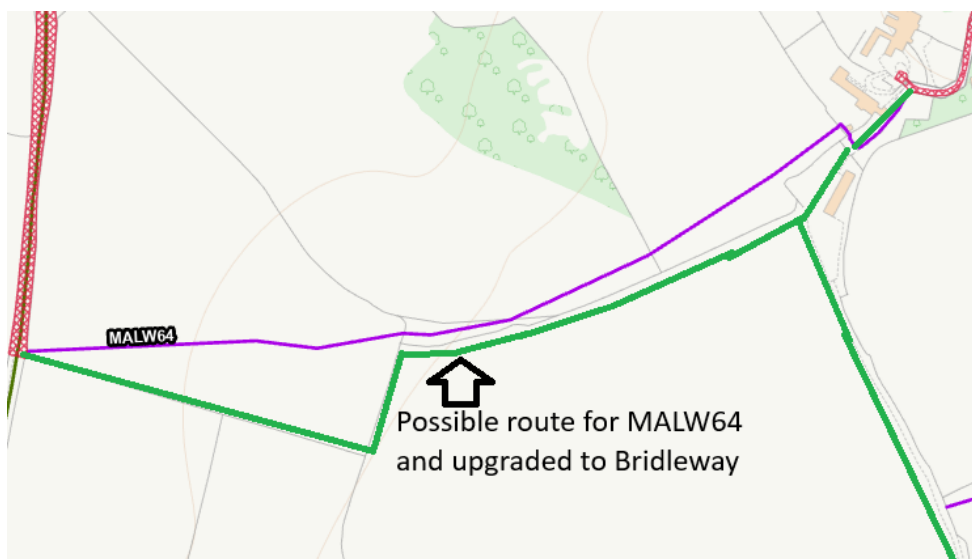


Figure 17

14.39 The proposed development on Lime Down E also provides the opportunity to link MALW59 to MALW61 (Figure 18). The western end of MALW59 terminates at the A429 (Figure 19). There is very limited highway verge at this location with over 650m of the A429 needing to be traversed to the south before being able to join a quieter and slower speed section of highway. Over 650m of the A429 also needs to be traversed to the north before the turning to Hullavington. Please see Figures below.

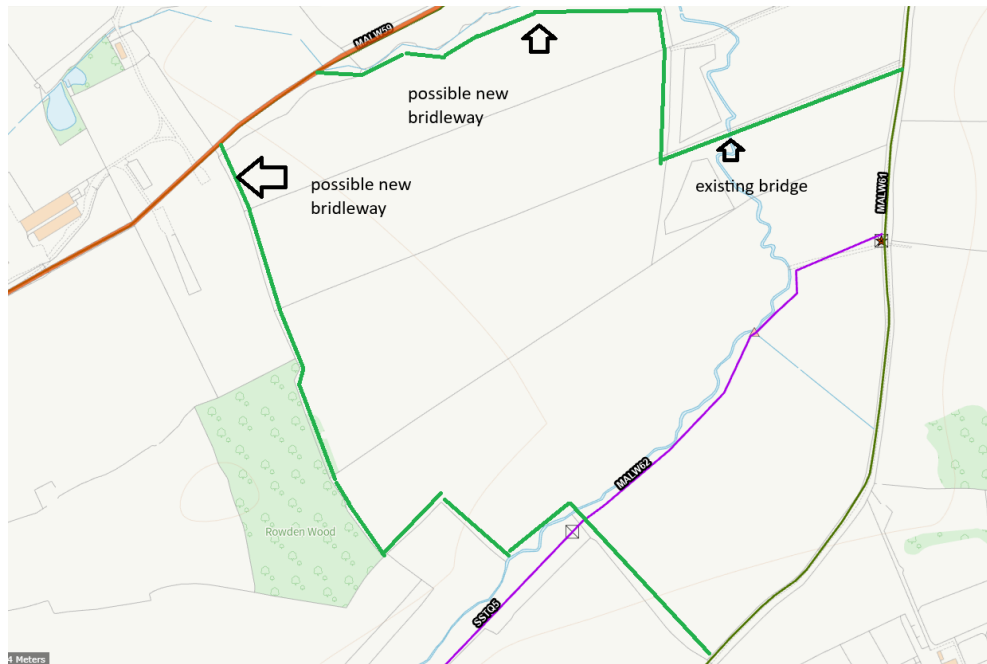


Figure 18



Figure 19

14.40 The council considers that the following access furniture improvements would be necessary:

- MALW62 (Grid references: 92440 81380 and 92770 81690) – The stile should be replaced with a pedestrian gate or kissing gate only if stock is to be present

either side of the hedge. Any access furniture will need to be authorised with a Section 147 application for erecting a structure on the highway. If no livestock are envisaged, then a gap should be created.

- MALW62 (Grid reference: 92631 81590) – A culvert will need to be installed.
- MALW60 – A site visit is required to be undertaken to assess access furniture. The provision of access furniture may be required.
- Off site improvements may be required to MALW55, GSOM15, MALW65 and MALW63. A site visit is required to be undertaken to assess access furniture at these locations. The provision of access furniture may be required. Additionally, the council would request a contribution with regard to SSTQ5 to allow for the replacement of the stile (Grid reference: 91758 80960) with more accessible piece of access furniture, if required for the control of livestock.

#### Community Benefit Fund:

14.41 The applicant has indicated that a Community Benefit Fund may be available for this scheme. This is of interest to the council as a means to improve the PROW network for the benefit of the residents of Wiltshire. For example, funding could be utilised to improve access furniture and the surface condition of some routes. Furthermore, depending on the sums involved, it could be utilised to improve the connectivity of the network away from the development site.

14.42 The council requests that the applicant considers whether an annual grant could be made available so that work could be planned (and schemes which require a larger sum could be planned over a couple of years). The council notes that the Cotswold AONB is located on the other side of the road from Lime Down Site C, and The Macmillan Way, which is a long-distance path, is located within 1km of the site as well.

## **15. Public Protection Considerations**

15.1 In preparing these comments, the council has considered the information contained within Chapter 14 (Noise and Vibration) and Chapter 15 (Air Quality) of the PEIR and the associated appendices. Appendix 20-4 of Chapter 20 (Other Environmental Matters) relating to the Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study has also been considered. This review has been undertaken with reference to the EIA Scoping Opinion, and comments previously provided by Wiltshire Council with regard to this.

#### Noise Associated with the Operation of the Scheme:

15.2 It is noted that the noise assessment is based on baseline and scheme design information available at the time of writing (January 2025). 44 noise sensitive receptors have been identified in Figure 14.2 of the noise assessment. Each receptor location is subject to a more detailed assessment of both operational and construction impacts, and the receptors have been selected to represent locations where noise /

vibration impacts associated with the scheme are most likely. A recent background noise survey was carried out by the applicant at 17 locations deemed representative of noise levels at the closest point of proposed receptors. However, background noise surveys have not been undertaken in the locality of the cable connection corridor and an undertaking to provide this data within the future ES has been given by the applicant.

- 15.3 The applicant has used 3D high resolution noise modelling software to predict noise impacts associated with the operation of the solar farm at each of the 44 noise sensitive locations with parameters set to provide a reasonable worst-case scenario. All residential receptors been set to be downwind of noise sources with wind speeds set to 3 m/s. Receiver heights are 1.5 metres (ground floor living rooms) and + 4 metres (first floor bedrooms). However, it is not clear whether the noise results in table 2 of Appendix 14-3 are for ground floor or first floor level and the applicant will need to provide clarity on this. It is the council's expectation that data should be presented for both receiver / receptor heights.
- 15.4 Furthermore, octave-band source data is not known for the following noise sources:
- Conversion units
  - Solar PV panels (tracking structures)
  - Substations (transformers)
  - Battery Energy Storage Systems (inverters)
- 15.5 Whilst the applicant has provided and modelled typical noise data for each of these components, they have undertaken to develop and refine the assessment *“as additional information becomes available and presented within the ES”*. The applicant will need to provide an updated BS4142 assessment once the octave-band data for the above sources is known.
- 15.6 It is noted that no noise contour map is provided. This makes it difficult to see noise propagation and the source / pathway / receptor relationship. The council requires a noise map showing each noise source for the operational stage and the location of each receptor to be provided.
- 15.7 Predicated noise levels at each receptor are provided in Appendix 14-3. However, these predictions are not broken down by source, meaning it is impossible to know the predicted contribution that each noise source makes to the noise level at each receptor. The council will therefore require a breakdown of each operational noise source (conversion units, solar PV panels (tracking structures), substations (transformers) and battery inverters) and a BS4142 rating calculation provided for each. Without this information, the council cannot comment on the accuracy of the noise predictions made in the report.
- 15.8 The assessment predicts that *“the assessment results presented within Table 2 of Volume 3, Appendix 14-4 demonstrates that noise levels from the Scheme are not predicted to exceed the existing background noise levels at the closest sensitive*



*receptors during the daytime or night-time which would lead to a Moderate/Minor effect and not significant*". It has not been possible to verify this statement as the council has been unable to locate Appendix 14-4. However, appendix 14-3 sets out noise assessments results and confirms that based on the design of the scheme, predicted operational noise levels will not exceed background levels at any residential receptor. Clarification is required from the applicant as to whether these predictions are based on any assumed mitigation inherent to the design of the scheme. It is noted that predictive calculations are based on all noise sources being fully operational during the day and night-time periods, when in reality, the level of noise is proportionate to the level of sunlight and therefore noise levels at night will be substantially lower than during the daytime. For example, for the conversion units, it is assumed that each unit will operate simultaneously at full capacity during the day and night-time to represent a worst-case scenario.

- 15.9 The applicant has advised that *"as the design of the Scheme progresses, the use of other embedded mitigation measures such as enclosures, louvres and/or acoustic barriers around inverters and BESS cooling fans will considered and set out within the ES"*. The statement implies that additional mitigation might be required, which seems contrary to the noise assessment's findings that there will not be any adverse noise impact on residential receptors. The applicant should explain the reasoning for the statement. Additionally, it is not clear at what stage the necessity for this mitigation will be decided.
- 15.10 The noise assessment confirms that *"further refinement"* to the design and layout of the scheme is possible. It is imperative that noise impacts from operational, construction and decommissioning stages are reappraised once the details of the final scheme are known and that this information is provided to the council at the earliest possible stage.
- 15.11 The consultation documents state that *"modifications to the Existing National Grid Melksham Substation would be undertaken by National Grid and do not form part of the Scheme"*. Whilst it is understood that the applicant may not be the legal person responsible for carrying out the modifications to the Melksham substation, these modifications are a direct consequence of the scheme and from a noise point of view are relevant to the DCO application for that reason. It is unclear whether the work to the National Grid substation will require planning permission or not. If it does not, the council is concerned that there could be noise impacts to enabling work associated with the scheme which are not controlled through the planning process via mitigation. As such, the council requires a BS4142 noise assessment for these works which sets out the predicted noise levels at residential receptors, including the detailing of any mitigation required in order to protect residential amenity.

#### **Noise and Vibration associated with Construction Impacts:**

- 15.12 The council notes that the ABC method of assessment as set out in BS5228-1 will be used to determine acceptable threshold values based on ambient level of noise at receptors as determined from the baseline survey for daytime. Mitigation is proposed

which is based on “*guidelines in BS 5228-1 and Best Practical Means (BPM) to minimize construction noise impacts as far as possible*”. The preliminary assessment has indicated that with an effective CEMP in place, noise and vibration impacts will not be significant for noise sensitive dwellings, however a full assessment is proposed for the ES. The council requires this assessment to follow the relevant methods of calculations as specified in section F of BS5228-1:2009+A1:2014. In addition, the council will require a validation sound monitoring during construction activities using one of the sampling methods specified in section G.2 of BS5228-1:2009+A1:2014 at noise sensitive dwellings to verify that the construction noise levels are acceptable and within limits.

- 15.13 It is noted that further noise surveys to establish baseline noise levels will be undertaken once the cable route corridor locations are defined and this assessment will be provided prior to the submission of the DCO application within the ES. The council expects the noise assessment to be revised once this level of detail is known and a review of the requirement for additional controls undertaken.

#### **Dust associated with Construction Impacts:**

- 15.14 The Construction Dust Assessment and Methodology Assessment report references the Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) guidance for controlling construction dust and uses the best practice therein as proposed mitigation measures.
- 15.15 The risk to ecology and human health from dust generated has been assessed and the latter is referenced as low impact for dust from site earthworks, construction and vehicle track out. Higher risk ratings have been allocated to ecological receptors.
- 15.16 As a result of the risk to ecology, the applicant has recommended that the best practice in the IAQM guidance be adopted throughout the project. The council requires the applicant to submit a site-specific Construction Management Statement to ensure appropriate dust suppression techniques are incorporated and implemented in full during construction works.

#### **Light including Glare from Photovoltaic Panels:**

- 15.17 The council notes that the applicant has not decided whether fixed south facing panels or single axis tracking panels will be used.
- 15.18 For fixed south facing panels, solar reflections are predicted to be experienced for more than 3 months of the year, but for less than 60 minutes in any given day. No significant impact is predicted for the majority of receptors as existing vegetation, buildings and / or intervening terrain is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels.
- 15.19 Five dwellings have been identified to have moderate impact from solar light reflection, and mitigation / gap filling is identified as being required. The council will

require the applicant to provide it with further detail on the exact nature and location of this screening mitigation.

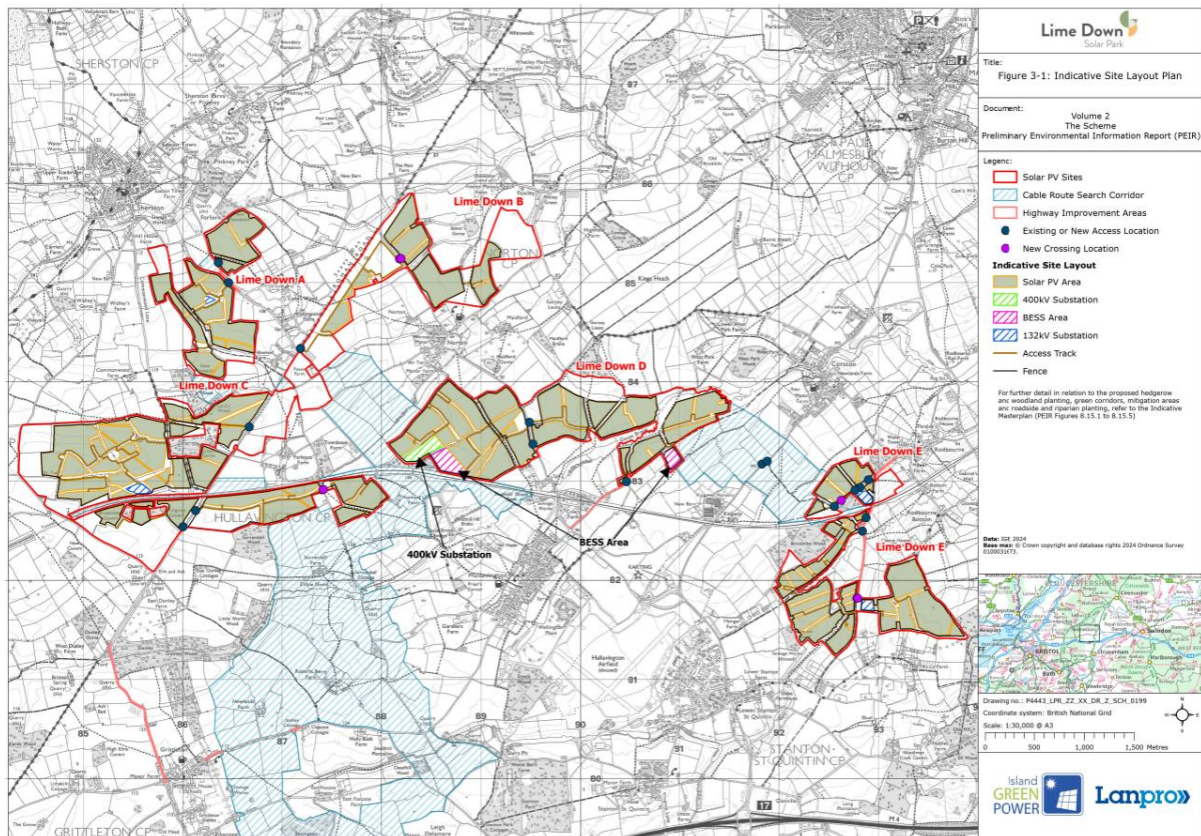
- 15.20 For single axis tracking panels, no significant impact is predicted, and no mitigation required.

### **Informative on the Potential Environmental Impacts of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)**

- 15.21 There are risks associated with Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) concerning the potential for toxic chemicals to enter soil and ground water in the event of a fire. The EA should be consulted on this matter as they are responsible for the protection of groundwater. The EA are likely to require that the site is designed with drainage features, suitable for containing contaminated surface water run-off in the event of a fire.
- 15.22 The council advise that the applicant develops and maintains a close working relationship with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service and develop a workable and comprehensive risk management plan and an emergency response plan as detailed in the National Fire Chiefs Council document "*Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage System planning – Guidance for FRS*" (see separate sub-section on fire safety).
- 15.23 At the present time, the council is not aware of any requirements for the applicant to apply for an Environmental Permitting Regulations Permit, and the activity associated with the scheme is not covered by Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015 (COMAH). These rules may, however, change during the life of the project.

## **16. Fire Safety of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Considerations**

- 16.1. The consultation documents confirm the development will include BESS containers. The precise number of individual BESS containers is subject to further development, but it is currently expected that the Scheme would include up to 270 BESS battery containers across either one or two locations (both of which are suggested as being located within Lime Down D in Field D1 and Field D18 as is shown in the below Indicative Site Layout taken from Chapter 3 (The Scheme) to the PEIR:



- 16.2. Chapter 20 (Other Environmental Matters) to the PEIR acknowledges that there may be some potential for fire(s) as a result of the BESS elements of the development. Although rare, fires and associated explosions have the potential to cause safety concerns to human health, including anyone working on site, or within the area of fire spread / associated contamination fall out. Fires also have the potential to have an impact on the natural environment including the habitats and species on site and surrounding area. For this reason, the PEIR confirms the need to assess the effects of such within the EIA.
- 16.3. The PEIR confirms that the battery technology proposed for the development will have built in safety features including fire resistant construction, fire detection, cooling and suppression systems, emergency stop functions and isolation monitoring, which are designed to regulate temperatures to within safe conditions to minimise the risk of fire. The PEIR also commits to an Outline Battery Safety Management Plan being prepared and submitted with the DCO submission. It is stated that this will be updated and maintained as a 'live document' throughout the operational phase of the scheme. The implementation of the strategy will be secured via a requirement to the DCO.
- 16.4. During the construction and decommissioning phase, the PEIR confirms that health and safety on-site would be managed by the contractor to mitigate the risk of fire in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance. This is to be set out further within the Outline CEMP and Decommissioning Strategy to be submitted with the ES.
- 16.5. Wiltshire Council does not retain in-house expertise to comment on the adequacy of the approach to minimise and mitigate the risk and effect of fire, but as is advised by

the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (Paragraph: 035 Reference ID: 5-035-20230814), the applicant should undertake full consultation with the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service. It is noted that Chapter 20 to the PEIR confirms the applicant's intention to engage with the fire service so as to inform the evolving scheme. Provided the applicant proceeds as is stated, and in accordance with the National Fire Chiefs Council advice referenced in the PPG, there is no reason for the council to take issue with the approach proposed.

## **17. Economic Considerations**

- 17.1. Chapter 16 (Socio-Economics, Tourism and Recreation) of the PEIR indicates that the main economic impact of the scheme will be during the two-year construction of the solar park, followed approximately thirty years later by the decommissioning of the original solar panels and the installation of new ones. As yet, there are no plans for the site following the final clearance of the solar panels in sixty years' time.
- 17.2. With regard to the employment impact of the scheme, the applicant projects that there will be 194 full time equivalent (FTE) employees per annum during the construction phase, with a peak of 558 FTE. The applicant suggests that based on analysis undertaken this could provide 145 FTE jobs for local residents, with a peak of 205 FTE jobs for local residents. The council has some concerns that these figures may be optimistic but acknowledge that this is not an exact science. It is noted that there will be further jobs created via the supply chain, however the council considers it unlikely that this will have a local benefit.
- 17.3. The applicant suggests that up to 20 FTE jobs will be lost in the agricultural sector due to the change of use of the land. Whilst this is disappointing, there is a shortage of agricultural staff so if this is the case, the council does not feel they will find it hard to find alternative employment in the sector. It could be the case that the loss of land on some holdings, particularly on tenanted farms, may make the holding unviable but this level of detail is not available to the council in the information provided.
- 17.4. It is noted that the applicant anticipates that this scheme will generate an uplift of £1.40m Gross Value Added (GVA) per annum to the UK economy for the duration of the project, and an uplift of £1.8m GVA per annum locally. The local GVA is mainly from the ground rents to be paid to landowners and some spend in the hospitality sector, for example, accommodation, daily needs of staff when needed at the site etc.
- 17.5. The applicant suggests that the scheme will provide an uplift of £21.1m GVA per year to the UK economy during the construction phase, of which £15.9m GVA will be generated in the study area. The study area is within 20km of the project and includes parts of Bath and NE Somerset, Cotswold, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Stroud, Swindon and Wiltshire. These are not insignificant figures, and the council hopes that local suppliers will be part of the supply chain, but notes the total current GVA of the study area is £67.3 billion. (This includes all of Somerset as data for Mendip was not available to the applicant).

- 17.6. However, the applicant has not been able to show the impact this project would have on the tourist sector to date and has indicated that this assessment would take place in the ES. The applicant does acknowledge that tourism is an important part of the local economy and that this scheme might have some limited impact on visitor numbers and spend. There may also be some visitor displacement during the construction phase as many of the local accommodation providers will be used by construction staff who do not live locally. It is however considered that this will be a benefit to those who offer accommodation as they will experience increased occupancy throughout the construction phase.
- 17.7. The council considers that the impact of this scheme on recreation will need further consideration as there are a significant number of public rights of ways that will be impacted by this development, both in the solar park and along the route of the cable connection. However, as the final route of the cable connection has yet to be determined, exactly which PROW's will be impacted is impossible to determine at the current time. The applicant considers the impact to be either moderate / minor adverse effect or, predominantly, minor adverse effect. Whether those wishing to use these PROW's will be of the same mind is a moot point. The council considers that a considerable amount of work will have to be done, particularly with the PROW's effected within the solar park, to ensure that the ability of local residents and other users of these PROW's to enjoy the full benefits that are currently available continue if this scheme is consented.
- 17.8. In conclusion, whilst there are some economic benefits to the local area of this scheme, both in terms of jobs created and uplift in GVA within the study area, which predominantly occur during the construction and decommissioning phases, the council considers that over the full lifespan of the project the economic benefits are marginal. However, this is subject to further work to be done on the impact on tourism and the benefits from increased biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- 17.9. The main benefits locally over the scheme's lifetime will be to landowners, though this may change if the prices of agricultural products change dramatically in the coming years. It will ensure the viability of agricultural holdings which in itself will mean local businesses will be able to continue to invest and spend locally, create jobs and continue to support the local economy.
- 17.10. The economic implications resulting from the loss of agricultural land are considered in the following section.

## **18. Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land Considerations**

### Policy Context

- 18.1. The Overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for energy (EN-1) provides guidance for developers of nationally significant energy infrastructure projects, advising that

applicants should seek to minimise impacts on the best and most versatile agricultural land. Following its publication, in May 2024, a WMS was made by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. The WMS sets out further detail on balancing the competing priorities of energy security and food production including the following point:

*“Due weight needs to be given to the proposed use of Best and Most Versatile land when considering whether planning consent should be granted for solar developments. For all applicants the highest quality agricultural land is least appropriate for solar development and as the land grade increases, there is a greater onus on developers to show that the use of higher quality land is necessary.”*

- 18.2. The NPS and NPPF defines best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification. Footnote 65 of the NPPF expresses the following:

*Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality.*

- 18.3. Paragraph 013 (ID: 5-013-20150327) of the PPG includes the following summarised guidance:

- The Local Planning Authority should encourage the effective use of land by focusing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land.
- Solar farms are normally temporary structure and planning conditions 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.

- 18.4. Policy CP42, criteria (viii) of the Wiltshire Core Strategy expresses the need for proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes to satisfactorily consider best and most versatile agricultural land.

- 18.5. The Wiltshire Climate Strategy (2022-2027) includes the following objective relevant to the natural environment, food and farming:

*Efficient and environmentally sensitive use of land, providing for the needs of an increasing population and nature; food production, renewable energy generation, housing and transport alongside woodland creation and nature recovery.*

- 18.6. Wiltshire Policy SCC3 to the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan requires standalone renewable energy schemes to, *inter alia*, demonstrate that the costs and benefits compare favourably with potentially less intrusive options, such as large scale building mounted renewable energy and proposals for ground mounted solar to make most effective use of the land around arrays through demonstrating that agricultural use

will continue, and/or by achieving a minimum of 10% BNG. It should be noted that the consultation documents suggest it will be only the underground cable connection to the Melksham sub-station which will pass through the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan area.

### Consultation Documents

- 18.7. In this case, the Solar PV Sites extend to around 878ha, with Chapter 17 (Soils and Agriculture) to the PEIR suggesting it consists of mostly agricultural land, primarily in arable use, with some areas of grassland in Lime Down B, Lime Down C and Lime Down E. The landform is typically level to gently sloping throughout. There is no reason to disagree with that description.
- 18.8. The PEIR also suggests that survey work of elements of the solar PV sites as well as the cable route search corridor have not yet been completed, but for the purposes of the PEIR, assessment has relied upon data from nearby areas which have been surveyed. The survey data obtained to date from the development area classifies around 30% of the agricultural land as BMV quality, mostly in grade 3a with a smaller proportion of Grade 2, and around 70% as Subgrade 3b and Grade 4 which is not BMV land. The areas of each grade confirmed by the survey work undertaken to date are set out within the consultation documents, and repeated below for convenience:

Grade	Description	Area (ha)	Area (% of agricultural land)
Grade 1	Excellent quality	0.0	0
Grade 2	Very good quality	28.8	6
Subgrade 3a	Good quality	167.2	24
Subgrade 3b	Moderate quality	245.7	44
Grade 4	Poor quality	191.6	26
Grade 5	Very poor quality	0.0	0
	Total agricultural	633.3	100
	Non-agricultural	9.4	-
Requiring survey		235.3	

- 18.9. From the evidence so far supplied, it is clear that a good proportion of the development area has yet to be surveyed, and that the survey data to date reveals a relatively high proportion of the land to constitute BMV agricultural land (i.e. some 30% being within grades 2 and 3a). Furthermore, whilst it is possible for the land to continue to be used productively for agricultural purposes during the operation of the solar PV, the PEIR assessment assumes there will be none, thereby taking account of a worst-case impact.



- 18.10. It is evident therefore, that the assessments so far undertaken suggest that the development will not entirely avoid BMV agricultural land. Whilst national policy does not preclude its use, given the continued assessments being undertaken, it will remain possible for the applicant to reduce the amount of BMV being used and to seek out previously developed and non-agricultural land, as is advised within the PPG. Clearly, should BMV agricultural land continue to be incorporated into the development site, it will weigh against the proposals in the planning balance.
- 18.11. It is unclear to what extent the development will impact upon the quality of agricultural soils and the ability for this land to be used for agricultural purposes beyond the lifetime of the development. It is recommended that the Examining Authority satisfy themselves that soil erosion would not result from this development.
- 18.12. From an economic perspective, and on the assumption that the arable production takes place on land other than Grade 4, that would equate to the loss of approximately 5000 tons of combinable crops, worth in the region of £750,000 per year. To put this in context, the UK produced 20 million tons of combinable crops in 2024, lower than normal due to the challenging weather conditions experienced in the growing season.
- 18.13. Due to a lack of information, the council is unable to assess the reduction in output from the grassland. However, the council are aware of the challenges currently facing the dairy, beef and sheep sectors and are of the opinion that profitability is currently marginal. The applicant states that there may be some grazing opportunities once the solar park is established which may offset the reduction in output from the current grassland, although this is considered to be unlikely.
- 18.14. It is however recognised, that one benefit of taking this land out of agricultural production for at least 60 years will be the improvement to soil health should this land revert to food production again, and the increased carbon sequestration that will occur compared with if it remains in its current use. An increase in biodiversity is also anticipated. Although, at this moment in time, it is very hard to monetarise these benefits.

## **19. Public Health Considerations**

### Response Context

- 19.1 It is acknowledged that the PEIR identifies those measures the applicant is proposing to reduce, enhance and improve the effects the proposed development may have on the environment, including on human health. Chapter 18 of the PEIR specifically addresses human health, which the council notes should be read in conjunction with 9 other chapters being: Chapter 7 (Climate Change), Chapter 8 (Landscape and Visual Impact), Chapter 11 (Hydrology, Flood Risk and Drainage), Chapter 13 (Transport and Access), Chapter 14 (Noise and Vibration), Chapter 15 (Air Quality), Chapter 16 (Socio-Economics, Tourism and Recreation), Chapter 19 (Ground Conditions and Contamination), and Chapter 20 (Other Environmental Matters), specifically section 20.7: Major Accidents and Disasters.

19.2 Given that the scheme’s approach and design is still evolving, and the council’s observations and issues on other environmental topics are contained within other sections of this consultation response, the council’s comments on public health matters have primarily been limited to the information contained within Chapter 18 at this time. Further consideration of these matters by the council will be undertaken upon DCO submission.

Consultation Documents

19.3 The council acknowledges that the PEIR reflects its initial comments, and those of the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), provided to the applicant at the EIA scoping stage. It is also considered that the applicant is including all the relevant and necessary areas for consideration.

19.4 However, where the report looks to reduce, enhance and improve the effects on human health, the council considers that the applicant does not consider proactive efforts to assist the communities in managing their wellbeing throughout the statutory consultation phase, the formal DCO process and the construction phases of the development. In the absence of specific national guidance, the council’s comments are based on the recommendations found in the [Community Engagement and Wellbeing Supplementary Guidance Document](#) and *Suffolk County Council P.G.17 Promotion of Good Emotional Health and Wellbeing*, which the applicant also refers to. As a NSIP Centre for Excellence, Suffolk have provided detailed guidance in this area, which in the absence of a Wiltshire Council equivalent, has guided the council’s comments.

19.5 It is noted that over 1,400 responses have been submitted, and several community groups have mobilised due to concerns about the project. This will place significant pressure on local political leaders (parish councils and local councillors) and increase anxiety among residents who feel affected by the development.

19.6 According to the preliminary environmental report (Volume 3, Appendix 18-3: Human Health Preliminary Assessment, January 2025, Table 3, p. 19), a Community Liaison Officer will be appointed.

Community Resilience and Influence	Medium (overall)	Change to sense of community sense of place, and impacts upon sense of control or feeling of inclusion in controlling and influencing their environment and surroundings	Continuation of channels of communications set out during statutory consultation and DCO process through to construction phase Provision of a Community Liaison Manager to process comments, concerns or complaints about the construction of the Scheme	Medium-term temporary minor adverse
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19.7 Whilst the council supports the creation of a Community Liaison Officer to manage communication and address complaints throughout the application and construction stages, this role does not specifically address mental health and wellbeing and potentially does not act independently to the applicant. Therefore, in line with the Suffolk guidance, consideration should be given to the employment of an independent third party to act as a “relationship manager” between the applicant, local authorities, and the impacted communities to ensure conversations remain positive and helpful.

- 19.8 Again, in accordance with the Suffolk guidance, the council considers that alongside effective communication about the proposed changes, communities should also be proactively helped to maintain their own wellbeing throughout the process, through provision of good quality information and support. The applicant should consider the 'empowering communities' Key Performance Indicator's (KPI) as set out in Appendix 1 of the above reference Suffolk County Council document as examples of good quality information and support in the management of community mental health and wellbeing.
- 19.9 Additionally, the council would like to draw the applicant's attention to the availability of local population profiles for consideration in any further assessment on this topic. A new data source, the *Population Health Profiles (2024/2025)*, was published in January 2025 and is available through the [Library Wiltshire Intelligence](#). These profiles, created for each of Wiltshire's 13 Primary Care Networks (PCNs), provide valuable information to help guide primary care in identifying and addressing health inequalities within their patient populations.

## **20. Minerals and Waste Considerations**

- 20.1. The council has reviewed the information contained within the Chapter 20 (Other Environmental Matters) of the PEIR and its supporting appendices.
- 20.2. Wiltshire Council considers that the applicant has given appropriate consideration to the topics of (i) Minerals and (ii) Minerals and Waste during this stage of scheme development.
- 20.3. The council concurs that the following mitigation measures should be secured as DCO requirements:
- 20.3.1. For topic (i) Minerals:
- Decommissioning Strategy – to secure the removal of plant and structures at the end of the design life of the Scheme so as not to affect the long-term viability of working the identified sand and gravel resource.
- 20.3.2. For topic (ii) Minerals and Waste:
- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) – to secure implementation of control measures and procedures for environmental impacts arising during construction.
  - Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP) – identifying the planned waste management action proposed for each different type, including on- or off-site reuse, on- or off-site recycling, or disposal.

- Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) – confirming the approach for material and waste management on-site, including component replacement during operation and maintenance.
  - Decommissioning Strategy – detailing the approach to be taken to maximise recycling and reuse of the scheme components at the end of their life.
- 20.4. Council officers will review the above-mentioned management plans once prepared to ensure that sufficient mitigation measures are proposed in relation to this scheme.

## **21. Procedural Issues and Next Steps**

- 21.1. As a NSIP, this scheme will be dealt with under the DCO process. The role of the council within this process is therefore as a statutory consultee. The council has considered its position on a number of aspects as set out in this statutory consultation response. Unfortunately, the council has insufficient information to reach a position on this scheme at the current time. Further information will be required in order for the council to make an objective balanced planning judgement in relation to the outputs of the assessments necessary to address the identified matters as set out in this consultation response.
- 21.2. Of particular concern is the lack of detailed assessment information in relation to the cable connection route. Island Green Power, the applicant, is recommended to undertake a further supplementary consultation in advance of the DCO application, so that consultees can consider the survey and further assessment information to ascertain whether the applicant’s assessment of the full environmental effects of the scheme is robust. This would also enable the scheme to comply with the Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report, which indicated that the PEIR would provide details of a refined cable route.
- 21.3. The council welcomes the applicant’s intention to submit a number of management plans with its DCO application. It is the council’s expectation that these documents would be prepared by the applicant in conjunction with council officers and other statutory organisations, with draft copies available for review and agreement prior to application submission. However, clarity is required on the intended consultation and approval processes for these proposed management plans. It is noted that the consultation documents indicate that some documents would be agreed with or approved by Wiltshire Council, but it is not clear whether this is intended to apply to all management plans proposed.
- 21.4. Clarity is also required on the extent of the proposed DCO order to be sought by the applicant. It is queried whether the DCO will be a “one-stop shop” application, whereby certain legislation is intended to be disapplied or whether certain consents, which normally fall within the remit of the Local Planning Authority or Lead Local Flood Authority, will remain. For example, Traffic Regulation Orders pertaining to PROW and local highways changes and Land Drainage Consents relating to ordinary water courses. It is the council’s expectation that the council would have early sight of the

draft DCO and the opportunity to input into it, in advance of the DCO application submission.

- 21.5. Furthermore, it is noted that the consultation documents indicate that the works at the National Grid substation in Melksham would be under National Grid control. Clarity is required on whether these works will be secured within the DCO order or whether separate consenting arrangements will be required. Clarification should also be provided on whether an environmental assessment of the proposed works at the Melksham substation would be included within the ES to be submitted at DCO application and whether these works would be managed through the CEMP and OEMP.
- 21.6. The council welcomes the opportunity to review the draft Commitments Register as part of the consultation material. However, it is the council's expectation that this Register will become further refined, with more prescriptive measures included, as the scheme becomes more defined. The council acknowledges the applicant's need to retain a level of in-built flexibility in the scheme, but it is the council's expectation that the draft DCO will contain clear parameters for the scheme in the form of defined limits of deviation.
- 21.7. It has been noted that a number of the references contained within the consultation documents are incorrect. For example, in Chapter 6 paragraph 6.8.12 it references "Volume 2, Figure 21-2" and in various paragraphs in Chapter 14 it references "Volume 3, Appendix 14-4". The above referenced documents have not been published as part of the consultation material. Going forward, and when considering the volume of material likely to be associated with this scheme at the DCO application stage, the applicant is requested to ensure that all references are correct to aid in the review and interrogation of the submitted material by all interested parties.
- 21.8. Wiltshire Council will continue to work with Island Green Power on the Lime Down Solar Park scheme in its role as Host Authority, and one of the key statutory consultees.
- 21.9. For clarity, the council has summarised the information and activities required to be undertaken in advance of the DCO application from its perspective and those requirements which it believes should be included within the DCO documentation in Appendices 1A and 1B respectively. These are not intended to be an exhaustive list as additional requirements may be identified once the detailed designs for the scheme are more advanced.
- 21.10. The consultation response feedback form asks consultees to suggest community benefit initiatives that could be undertaken both on-site and off-site through a community benefit fund. The council's suggestions for potential community benefit initiatives to be delivered by the scheme are set out in Appendix 1C.
- 21.11. Wiltshire Council asks that Island Green Power takes these comments into full consideration.

## **Appendix 1A**

### **Information / Activities Required in Advance of DCO Application**

1. Within its consultation response, the council has summarised the information and activities required to be undertaken in advance of the DCO application in order for it to be able to fully assess the scheme proposals and their associated impacts. For ease, these have been replicated in the paragraphs below.
2. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list and further information, assessment and documentation may be identified as required once the scheme proposals are further developed.

#### **Detailed Scheme Design Proposals:**

3. It is acknowledged that the detailed scheme design is still evolving and will be influenced by consultation responses and assessment and survey data. However, Wiltshire Council requires clarity on the following aspects of the scheme proposals:
  - a) The exact cable connection route, including any mitigation measures required.
  - b) The exact details of the temporary construction compounds and associated staff car parking, including their location, size and construction methodology.
  - c) The exact detailed landscaping proposals, including all embedded mitigation and enhancement measures.
  - d) The exact ecology and biodiversity proposals, including all embedded mitigation and enhancement measures for all species / species groups.
  - e) The exact design affecting watercourses. There must be no filling, alteration to or culverting of watercourses (either temporarily or permanently) without prior Land Drainage Consent from the Lead Local Flood Authority.
  - f) The exact mitigation measures proposed to address identified cultural heritage impacts.
  - g) The exact locations of any Highway Improvement Areas and confirmation of whether it is the intention for these to be removed once the construction works have been completed or whether they will remain in situ.
  - h) Assurance of the safety and suitability of anticipated vehicles movements in terms of route widths and passing.
  - i) The exact details of any traffic management measures proposed.

- j) The exact site access points and any works required to facilitate this. Cross-sections should be supplied to demonstrate permeability of access tracks and conformity to existing ground levels to not alter existing drainage conditions.
- k) The exact details of any amendment to or creation of Public Rights of Way within the scheme area. This should include its alignment, and any provisions required i.e. access furniture, to ensure its safe operation, as well as their treatment in relation to security fencing.
- l) The exact mitigation measures proposed to address identified noise and vibration impacts.
- m) The exact details of any works proposed at the National Grid substation in Melksham, including an assessment of the environmental impacts and any mitigation. This should include the consenting route and how these works are to be managed.
- n) The exact nature and location of screening mitigation associated with the solar photovoltaic panels, BESS and substations.
- o) Full and complete details of all security fencing to be erected.
- p) Final details of the physicality of the solar panels, as well as the location and external appearance of all supporting ancillary buildings as well as the BESS containers. Precise details of the mentioned fire mitigation measures and water supply in relation to the BESS should also be provided (as part of an Outline Battery Safety Management Plan).

**Surveys / Further Assessment Required to be Completed:**

- 4. It is acknowledged that the surveys and analysis work undertaken to date primarily relate to the solar panel sites. Significant survey and analysis work is yet to be undertaken in respect of the corridor route, which is required to fully assess the impacts of this scheme.
- 5. Council officers have identified the need for the following survey / further assessment work to be undertaken and urge IGP to complete this as soon as possible:
  - a) The impact of the proposed development on the electricity needs and requirements for Wiltshire's planned growth.
  - b) Completion of a detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in respect of the final scheme. The LVIA should of course take account of committed development of relevant types and, most particularly, the cumulative impacts of existing and permitted solar PV development.

- c) Production of Level 3 AVR photomontages for both winter and summer months from all relevant viewpoints for agreement with the CNLB and Wiltshire Council.
- d) Full and complete ecological surveys, with corresponding baseline information, which address the methodology deficiencies highlighted in this response, for the solar PV sites and cable connection route, ideally covering both seasons within same year period.
- e) Detailed Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment, including habitat condition assessment sheets, species lists and completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric.
- f) Detailed flood modelling, which confirm the predicted flood extents and depths to a higher degree of accuracy. This will likely require additional topographical survey to be undertaken.
- g) Detailed calculations to be undertaken and provided to the council to demonstrate that filter drains perform in accordance with the council's soakaway guidance.
- h) BRE 365 soakaway testing to be undertaken.
- i) Significance and setting assessment for all individual cultural heritage assets should be prepared and used to determine the contribution made by the site to this significance.
- j) Joint site visits to be undertaken with respect to the verification of cultural heritage matters.
- k) Full environmental assessment of the cable routes / cable connection corridor.
- l) Provision of further clarity on cumulative assessment methodology, applicable Zones of Influence and criteria for inclusion in the long and short lists. Mapping information should be provided to aid the Council in its assessment.
- m) Completion of the archaeological evaluation fieldwork.
- n) BS4142 noise assessment, setting out all receiver / receptor heights and octave-band data for all sources. This must also include a breakdown of each operational noise source and BS4142 rating calculations for each.
- o) BS4142 noise assessment for works to be undertaken at the National Grid substation in Melksham.
- p) Full BS5228 noise and vibration assessment for construction impacts including all relevant calculations and a validation of sound monitoring during construction activities.



- q) Conclusion of the agricultural land classification assessment for all parcels of land contained within the development proposals.

**Scheme Impacts:**

- 6. Once the detailed design proposals for the scheme are known, further information will be required by the council in order to fully assess the associated impacts of the proposals. To assist the council with this, further information is required as follows:
  - a) Refinement of the amount of electricity generating capacity to be achieved by the scheme.
  - b) A detailed Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP).
  - c) A detailed Decommissioning and Land Restoration Plan.
  - d) Detailed and robust assessment of the likely effects of the scheme, including the cable connection route and the solar PV sites, for ecology and biodiversity matters and in relation to all habitat types and species / species groups (please note this should also be provided for all other technical disciplines).
  - e) Detailed assessment of the potential noise and vibration effects from scheme components and associated hardware on ecological receptors/ species.
  - f) Detailed assessment of the potential effects to ecological receptors / species resulting from maintenance (cleaning) of the solar PV hardware.
  - g) Detailed assessment of the potential effects caused by lighting during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases on ecological receptors / species.
  - h) A full arboricultural impact assessment, with associated tree constraints plans, tree protection plans and arboricultural method statement, which has been prepared in accordance with BS5837:2012 for both the construction and decommissioning phases.
  - i) A detailed test regime to confirm which sites would or would not require soil remediation post construction. This should include details of intermediate remediation during construction to ensure that there is not an increase in flood risk resulting from soil compaction.
  - j) Confirmation that for 1 in 1 / 1 in 2-year events, runoff is restricted to 70% of existing greenfield rates for the same storm event.
  - k) The temporary drainage strategy for the scheme which demonstrates that local flood risk will not be temporarily increased.

- l) Applicant to undertake consultation with the EA on the foul strategy and provision of a septic tank.
  - m) Detailed assessment to confirm that there will be no change to existing overland flow routes to ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere.
  - n) Detailed assessment with calculations to demonstrate that the full fire suppression flows can be accommodated within the proposed drainage without causing flooding of the site and / or elsewhere.
  - o) A full cultural heritage impact assessment, which takes the findings of the significance and setting assessments into account. This should include impacts associated with the Highway Improvement Areas.
  - p) A detailed archaeological mitigation strategy.
  - q) A full noise impact assessment which covers the construction, operational and decommissioning stages of the scheme.
  - r) A full noise and vibration assessment which covers the construction, operational and decommissioning stages of the scheme.
  - s) A site-specific Construction Management Statement which covers dust suppression during construction works.
  - t) A full assessment of likely impacts on tourism arising from the scheme.
  - u) The identification of a suitable set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the applicant's activities against. Of particular interest, would be the generation of KPIs associated with 'empowering communities' and measures to monitor compliance with the Construction Traffic Management Plan and Construction Work Travel Plan.
7. It is also recommended that the applicant consider the employment of an independent third party to act as a "relationship manager" between the applicant, local authorities, and the impacted communities to ensure that conversations remain positive and helpful.

**Documentation to Accompany DCO Application:**

8. A comprehensive suite of documentation is required to accompany the DCO application for this scheme. Wiltshire Council requests that this includes the following:
- a) Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)
  - b) Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)

- c) Ecology Mitigation and Enhancement Plan (EMEP)
  - d) Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy
  - e) Lighting Strategy
  - f) Phasing Programme for Delivery of Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement
  - g) Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA)
  - h) Arboricultural Method Statement
  - i) Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP)
  - j) Construction Work Travel Plan (CWTP)
  - k) Public Rights of Way Management Plan (PRoWMP)
  - l) Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP)
  - m) Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP)
  - n) Decommissioning Strategy
  - o) Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan (DEMP)
  - p) Decommissioning and Land Restoration Plan
  - q) Outline Battery Safety Management Plan (OBSMP)
9. These documents should be prepared by Island Green Power in conjunction with council officers and other statutory organisations, with draft copies available for review and agreement prior to submission.

## **Appendix 1B**

### **Requirements for Inclusion in DCO Application**

1. Wiltshire Council has identified a number of requirements, which it believes should be included within the DCO application, within its response to the statutory consultation. These are replicated within the paragraphs below for ease.
2. These are not intended to be an exhaustive list and further requirements may be identified as the scheme proposals are further developed.

#### **Scheme Design Proposals:**

3. The detailed design for landscaping, including its specification, to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase.
4. An Ecology Mitigation and Enhancement Plan (EMEP) to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase. This should include a scaled drawing showing all existing ecological features, together with mitigation and enhancement measures in relation to the solar panel layout. It should also specify buffer distances, locations of new planting, sowing and other permanent features, whether retained or created.
5. A Phasing Programme for delivery of Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement alongside the construction of the solar farm should be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase.
6. The applicant is required to utilise horizontal directional drilling (HDD) under watercourses, woodland, hedgerows and any other habitats of importance lying along the cable connection route.
7. The location and specification for all scheme accesses and Highways Improvement Areas which affect the Local Highway Network are to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Highways Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase.
8. The applicant must seek approval for all required permits, licenses and orders relating to works on or affecting the Local Highways Networks, including Public Rights of Way, from the Local Highways Authority in advance of works commencing.

#### **Management Plans:**

9. A Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) is to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase. This will include obligations on the applicant for the implementation of landscaping proposals (including the replacement of planting failures during early years establishment) and maintenance of landscaping for the duration of the scheme. This

plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.

10. A Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy is to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase. This should detail surveys of habitats and species / species groups. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures. A monitoring contribution payable to the Local Planning Authority will be sought from the applicant (amount to be agreed).
11. A Lighting Strategy is to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase, which will contain sufficient consideration of / or provision of mitigation measures to protect the environment during the construction, operational and decommissioning phases.
12. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase which will contain sufficient mitigation measures to protect the environment during the construction phase. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.
13. A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), including any provisions for abnormal loads, to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Highway Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.
14. A Construction Work Travel Plan (CWTP) to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Highways Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.
15. A Public Rights of Way Management Plan (PRoWMP) to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Highways Authority prior to the commencement of the construction phase, which will contain sufficient mitigation measures to protect the safety and usability of the public rights of way network during the construction phase. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.
16. An Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) is to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the operational phase of this development which will contain sufficient mitigation measures to protect the environment during the operational phase. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.

17. A Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP) is to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the construction, operation and decommissioning phases of the scheme which will identify the planned waste management action proposed for each different type, including on- or off-site reuse, on- or off-site recycling, or disposal. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.
18. A Decommissioning Strategy and Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan (DEMP) are to be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the decommissioning phase of this development which will contain sufficient mitigation measures to protect the environment during the decommissioning phase. This will include maximising recycling and reuse of scheme components at the end of their life. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.
19. An Outline Battery Safety Management Plan (OBSMP) is referenced within the PEIR documents as being prepared and submitted with the DCO submission so as to clearly set out the mitigation measures to be put in place to prevent fire risk to the BESS. As is also referenced, this should be updated and maintained as a 'live document' throughout the operational phase of the scheme. This plan is to include suitable monitoring measures to assess compliance, including appropriate remediation measures.

## **Appendix 1C**

### **Ideas for Community Benefit Initiatives**

1. The council notes that the applicant has invited consultees to identify community benefit initiatives, which could be undertaken both on-site and off-site through a community benefit fund.
2. Wiltshire Council's suggestions for potential community benefit initiatives that could be delivered by the scheme are set out below:
  - a) The creation of permissive public paths and bridleways so as to provide additional linkages between existing Public Rights of Way. If those permissive paths could be dedicated as formal Public Rights of Way upon the development reaching the end of its life, there would be additional public benefits. Consideration could also be given to creating an annual grant for work to improve the PROW network.
  - b) The provision of public access land as part of the proposals, either in conjunction with proposals for biodiversity net gain or in other respects through making land available for specific uses which would benefit local communities. As part of other solar array type development in Wiltshire, this has sometimes taken the form of allotments, open space or perhaps even picnic or dog-walking areas.
  - c) Off-site community benefits may be brought through a fund which may be administered for the lifetime of the development through representatives of the relevant Town and Parish councils or perhaps via exiting Area Board structures. Such a fund could be used for local projects so as to bring economic, social and environmental benefits to the area. It may also be used as a source of educational purposes linked to the solar development.
  - d) The development could include a component of shared community ownership of the solar farm, with consequent savings on energy bills to the local community. Alternatively, it may be helpful if local communities were able to benefit from the development through the provision of free or reduced-price electricity.
3. The applicant also asked consultees to consider the framework, which could be put in place to manage and administer funding from the Community Benefit Fund.
4. The council has highlighted above that there is already a framework in place to facilitate grants through the Town and Parish councils and Wiltshire Council's Area Boards. In the event that the applicant did not wish to pursue management of the Community Benefit Fund through these mechanisms, the applicant could consider establishing a Community Forum for the scheme.
5. A Community Forum could act as a good conduit between the local communities and Island Green Power. In addition to the oversight and management of any community benefit fund, the Community Forum could also facilitate engagement and

communication between local communities, its elected representatives and the applicant throughout the life of the scheme.

6. If the applicant was minded to establish a Community Forum for this scheme, it is recommended that the applicant appoint an Independent Chair for the Forum so that it was impartial and run and steered independently. This could ensure that the Forum did not become monopolised by Island Green Power, its suppliers, or any one particular local group or interest.
7. The council considers that there is merit in the applicant considering the establishment of a Community Forum, even if any Community Benefit Fund was administered through different means, due to the lack of formal engagement channels between the applicant and interested parties once the DCO has been consented. The council would welcome the opportunity to work with the applicant to devise suitable terms of reference for this Forum.