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LAND AT MANOR FARM, NOKE, OXFORDSHIRE

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

ON BEHALF OF OXFORD NEW ENERGY

Pegasus Group

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DESIGN ENVIRONMENT PLANNING ECONOMICS HERITAGE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Terms of reference

1.1 Pegasus Group has been instructed by Oxford New Energy (the applicant) to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in relation to the proposed development of land at Manor Farm, Noke, Oxfordshire (hereafter referred to as the 'site').

1.2 Landscape character assessment is the systematic description and analysis of the landscape resource, including physical features and elements of the landscape, of how their composition forms distinct areas of character, appraisal of quality and sensitivity, and the potential effect of the proposed development on the landscape. These elements include topography and landform, vegetation pattern, land use, hydrology, development and transport patterns and public access.

1.3 Visual assessment is the description and analysis of the views experienced by receptors from residential properties, public buildings, public open spaces, public rights of way, open access areas, transport corridors and places of work, and the potential effect of the proposed development on these receptors.

1.4 The LVIA aims to identify and describe the effects that are likely to occur including whether they are adverse or beneficial. It aims to assess the likely significance of the effects identified; and it includes proposals for measures designed to avoid, prevent or reduce any significant adverse effects.

1.5 Principles and good practice for undertaking LVIA are set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', Third Edition (2013)[1], as published by the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). The detailed methodology used for this

[1] Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (April, 2013)

LVIA is included in **Appendix A**.

Site history

1.6 In December 2019, a Preliminary Landscape and Visual Constraints and Opportunities Briefing Note was prepared for the site (noting that this examined a larger site boundary than considered within this LVIA).

1.7 In June 2020, Cherwell District Council (CDC), which the site is within the administrative area of, prepared a Pre-Application report for a proposal of a solar farm development on the site (Pre-Application Ref. No.: 20/00653/PREAPP). This report acknowledged the Briefing Note previously prepared but requested more detailed information, which this LVIA seeks to provide.

1.8 In relation to landscape and visual matters, the Pre-application report highlights 'important views towards Islip Conservation Area and St Nicholas Church' as well as 'extensive views over the area from the scarp to the south'. The report notes the location of the site adjacent to a Special Landscape Area, however this designation is not found in local adopted policy.

1.9 Although not a specific landscape planning designation, the report also notes the location of the site within the Oxford Green Belt. The report also states that the proposal is considered to have a 'detrimental impact on the visual amenity' of the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network. These matters will be addressed within this LVIA.

Site context and overview

1.10 The site comprises ca. 44 hectares (ha) of land to the north of the village of Noke, Oxfordshire. This comprises a main site area and two linear strips of land to form the proposed construction and operational access tracks which extend south from the main site area and a small compound area along the southern boundary.

1.11 The site consists of land currently in agricultural use, which is split into multiple field enclosures, two of which are included fully within the site boundary and one which is partly included (the remaining part lying to the south of the site). The field enclosure boundaries are generally vegetated with native hedgerow and hedgerow trees, albeit fragmented in places. The River Ray forms the northern extent of the site, a tributary of which runs to the east of the site. Both of which are vegetated with relatively more mature tree belts and hedgerow vegetation.

1.12 A smaller area of land (ca. 3.0 ha) lies to the north of the site between the route of the River Ray and New River Ray. This area is additional land within landowners control (refer to **Figure 2, Site Location and Planning Designations**). This area will be used for ecological management and maintenance with no proposed built form and is therefore not further referred to within this LVIA.

1.13 The village of Noke lies to the south of the site and is located ca. 420m from the main site area. The village comprises a linear residential development along an unnamed road with several larger properties and their grounds to the north of this road. St. Giles' Parish Church is also located along this road. The edge of the city of Oxford is located ca. 4km to the west of the village.

1.14 The proposed operational access track extends south from the main site area along an existing farm track into the northern edge of Noke. For the avoidance of construction traffic through Noke, a temporary construction access is proposed south of the main site area to follow, in part, existing farm tracks and partially through existing agricultural fields to join an unnamed road on the approach to Noke from the west. A small temporary compound will be located south of the main site.

1.15 A public footpath (309/1/10) extends north from the village of Noke and runs through the site. This route then turns east at the northern site boundary, continues along part of the northern boundary and then extends north towards Oddington across the River Ray corridor. A public bridleway (209/16/10) lies adjacent to the eastern site boundary, which extends from Oddington to the north and continues south towards the eastern edge of Noke. There are several

other PRoW within the vicinity of the site which extend across the wider landscape.

1.16 The northern boundary of the site is defined by the route of the River Ray. Riparian hedgerow and tree vegetation are associated with the route of the River, notably the mature tree belt along the north-eastern site boundary. The remaining site boundaries generally follow existing field enclosure boundaries defined by native hedgerow and hedgerow trees.

1.17 The local landscape consists of a relatively flat landform associated with various watercourses and moorland, including the River Ray adjacent to the site. The landscape rises to the west and south-west of Noke, before falling again towards the course of the River Cherwell. The landform also rises relatively steeply further to the south-east forming an escarpment towards the settlement of Beckley.

1.18 The surrounding landscape context is characterised by agricultural field enclosures. It is also influenced by the various settlements located in the surrounding area and interspersed pockets of development, including farm buildings, the closest being Logg Farm located ca. 110m to the north of the site. The surrounding landscape is also influenced by transport corridors, including the railway line (Oxford to Bicester Rail Link) which runs through Islip to the north-west of Noke.

1.19 The scheme (referred to as 'the proposed development') is for the erection of a ground mounted solar farm incorporating the installation of solar photovoltaic panels, associated infrastructure, a new temporary construction access and temporary compound and use of an existing access for an operational access.

1.20 Additional information and a more detailed description on the physical components, landscape character and visual amenity of the site and study area are set out in later sections of this LVIA.

2.0 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

2.1 The approach and methodology used for this LVIA has been developed using best practice guidance, as set out in the following documents:

- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition;
- Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment; and
- Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals (September 2019).

2.2 Reference has also been made to several additional sources of data and information; these are referred to in the relevant sections of the baseline information. A number of drawings have also been produced as part of this LVIA and are included as **Figures 1 to 9**.

Level of assessment

2.3 The third edition of the Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) was published in April 2013. This guidance acknowledges that LVIA can be carried out either as a standalone assessment or as part of a broader EIA. The GLVIA3 note that the overall principles and core steps in the process are the same but that there are specific procedures in EIA with which an LVIA must comply.

2.4 This report has been prepared as a detailed LVIA and addresses matters of individual resources, character areas and representative viewpoints. The LVIA includes analysis of sensitivity of receptors (both landscape and visual) and magnitude of impact and also professional judgements on the consequential likely effects.

2.5 The proposed development incorporates a landscape mitigation strategy which will avoid, reduce or remedy adverse impacts.

Approach

2.6 The overall approach to the identification, evaluation and assessment of landscape and visual effects is summarised as follows:

- Determine the scope of the assessment;
- Collate baseline information for landscape and visual receptors, including completing desk study research and undertaking field based survey work;
- Review the type of development proposed and identify and describe the likely impacts (enabling specific judgments to be made on sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors);
- Establish the sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors (balancing judgments on value and susceptibility);
- Determine the magnitude of impacts (balancing judgments on size / scale, duration and reversibility); and
- The assessment of the significance of likely landscape and visual effects through a balanced approach and clear description of professional judgments on sensitivity and magnitude.

Scope of assessment

2.7 The spatial scope (or study area) for the LVIA is initially determined by reference to the area of landscape that may be affected and from which the proposed development may be visible.

2.8 The preliminary study area for the LVIA has as such been set at an approximate radius of 2.5km from the site. Based on data produced by the computer generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and the consideration of potential impact on visibility from the escarpment to the south (raised in the Pre-Application process by CDC) this is deemed to be sufficient to account for the likely impacts that will be generated by the proposed development. That is not to say that the proposed development may still have some influence on landscape character or visual amenity beyond this distance, but any effects are judged to be not significant.

2.9 The professional judgements in this LVIA consider landscape and visual effects in the short term, at completion, but also in the longer term after fifteen years when mitigation measures (such as planting) will have matured and the mitigation measures are likely to perform the intended function (for example, screening or enhancement of landscape infrastructure).

2.10 Supporting photographs used in this LVIA have been taken in late summer (October 2020) when deciduous vegetation is in leaf and therefore likely to be providing the maximum visual screening effect. However, given the potential for decreased screening during the winter months, a balanced approach and professional judgement has been applied.

2.11 Landscape features and elements provide the physical environment for flora and fauna and the associated importance of biodiversity assets. This LVIA does not consider the value, susceptibility or importance on ecology and biodiversity, nor does it consider impacts from an ecological stance.

2.12 Heritage assets such as Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas all contribute to the overall present-day landscape character, context and setting of an area. These aspects have been given consideration in the LVIA in terms of physical landscape resources (for example trees and hedgerows) and also landscape character. However, this LVIA does not address the historic significance, importance or potential impacts on heritage assets and designations; these assets are assessed in the context of landscape and visual matters only.

Night-time impacts/lighting impacts

2.13 At paragraph 6.12, GLVIA3 notes that for some types of development, the visual effects of lighting may be an issue, and in such cases, it may be important to carry out night-time 'darkness' surveys of the existing conditions in order to address the potential effects of lighting.

2.14 The proposed solar farm development is not considered to produce considerable light pollution and therefore matters regarding night-time impacts

and lighting are not further referred to within this LVIA.

Cumulative effects

2.15 Chapter 7 of GLVIA3 sets out guidance in respect of cumulative landscape and visual effects, and specifically at paragraph 7.2 notes that cumulative landscape and visual effects must be considered in LVIA when it is carried out as part of an EIA. This development proposal is not the subject of an EIA.

2.16 Paragraph 7.9 notes that cumulative effects can be relevant to any form of development, and that a proportional response to the particular development proposal should be reached. Paragraph 7.10 notes that in most cases the cumulative assessment will be on the additional effect of the project in conjunction with other developments of the same type – in this case, renewable energy.

2.17 There are no approved recent planning applications in close proximity to the site. Therefore, it is not considered that there are likely to be any significant cumulative effects and so is not further referred to within this LVIA.

Collating baseline information

2.18 Information has been collated using a process of desk study and field survey in order to capture a comprehensive description of the baseline position for landscape and visual receptors. The desk study includes reference to published landscape character studies.

2.19 Field survey work was completed during October 2020. A series of representative photographs were taken during the field work. These photographs were taken with a digital camera with a 50mm lens (equivalent focal length) at approximately 1.6 metres in height. These are presented as both a series of contextual panoramic photographs with a 60° horizontal field of view (HFoV), supplemented by a full-size single image centred on the site, with a 39.6° HFoV and a 27° vertical field of view (VFoV), as advised by the

Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19. These have been used to inform the assessment of both landscape and visual impacts.

Assessment of effects

2.20 Having established the relevant baseline position, the assessment process then completes the following specific stages:

- Evaluate the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and visual receptors, specifically in response to the nature of the proposed development (sensitivity is not standard and depends on the nature and type of development proposed and also the value and susceptibility of the receptor to that type of development);
- Identify the potential magnitude of impact on the physical landscape, on landscape character and on visual receptors; and
- Combine judgments on the nature of the receptor (sensitivity) and the nature of the impact (magnitude) to arrive at clear, professional judgments of significance.

2.21 For both landscape effects and visual effects, the final conclusions on significance are based on professional judgements combining the specific analysis of the sensitivity of receptors and detailed predictions on the magnitude of change (or impact). GLVIA3 advocates a balanced justification of these issues using professional judgement rather than formulaic matrices. The rationale for the overall judgement on significance is based on the application of professional analysis and judgement and the subsequent combination of each of the criteria in order to reach a conclusion.

2.22 The detailed thresholds and criteria for each of the stages of analysis and assessment of landscape and visual impacts are included in the detailed methodology (**Appendix A**).

3.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY BACKGROUND

3.1 This section sets out a review of national and local policy relevant to landscape and visual matters.

3.2 In the context of the relevant planning framework, this section also sets out a summary of those policies specific to the landscape and visual issues pertaining to the proposed development (refer to **Figure 2: Site Location and Planning Designations**).

European Landscape Convention

3.3 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes. The convention was adopted on 20 October 2000 and came into force on 1 March 2004. The ELC is designed to achieve improved approaches to the planning, management and protection of landscapes and organises cooperation on landscape issues. The convention defines landscape as:

3.4 *"...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors)"*

3.5 The importance of this definition is that it focuses on landscape as a resource in its own right and moves beyond the idea that landscapes are only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity.

National Planning Policy Framework

3.6 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published with new updates by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) July 2021, setting out the Government's planning policies for England and providing a framework within which the appropriate local council can produce local and neighbourhood plans; the NPPF is a material consideration

in planning decisions[2].

3.7 The NPPF sets out three dimensions to achieving sustainable development that include economic, social and environmental considerations. It places an onus on the planning system to perform a role in relation to the environment that 'contributes to the protection and enhancement of our natural, built and historic environment...' going on to note that sustainable solutions should take account of local circumstances and reflect the character of each area. This underpins the strategic guidance set out in the NPPF in relation to landscape and visual matters.

3.8 In relation to landscape and visual matters, achieving well-designed places (Section 12) aims to ensure that developments are 'visually attractive', are sympathetic to local character (including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting) and to establish and maintain a strong sense of place[3].

3.9 Section 13 of the NPPF addresses 'Protecting Green Belt land'. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence[4]. The five purposes of the Green Belt are: to check unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas; to prevent neighbouring towns merging; to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; to preserve the setting of historic towns; and to assist in urban regeneration. As opposed to policy, this LVIA seeks only to consider the Green Belt insofar as landscape and visual matters may be relevant.

3.10 Section 15 of the NPPF addresses on 'conserving and enhancing the natural environment' stating that policies and decisions should contribute to this by 'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (noting that this should be commensurate with a statutory status or identified quality identified in a development plan) and also recognising the 'intrinsic character and beauty of

[2] Para 2, MHCLG, NPPF (July 2021)
[3] Para 130, MHCLG, NPPF (July 2021)
[4] Para 138, MHCLG, NPPF (July 2021)

the countryside'[5].

3.11 NPPF notes the importance that designs 'evolve' in response to local issues and to the views of the community[6].

Planning Practice Guidance

3.12 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is a web-based resource prepared by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The NPPG sets out guidance across various topics and effectively supersedes previous guidance on many aspects of planning; topics are updated as required.

3.13 The PPG for the 'Natural Environment' (updated July 2019) addresses agricultural land, green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape.

3.14 In relation to green infrastructure (GI) the PPG acknowledges how a 'range of spaces and assets' can provide 'environmental and wider benefits'. The PPG states that GI can include[7]:

3.15 *"…parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and 'blue infrastructure' such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies."*

3.16 The PPG goes on to recognise how GI can help achieve well designed spaces, and conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. The PPG also recognises the benefit of considering GI 'at the earliest stage of development proposals, as an integral part of development and infrastructure provision, and taking into account existing natural assets'.

3.17 In relation to landscape, the PPG reiterates the requirements of the NPPF in

[5] Section 15 and para 174, MHCLG, NPPF (July 2021)
[6] Para 132, MHCLG, NPPF (July 2021)
[7] PPG, Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 8-004-20190721 (21 July 2019)

terms of 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'. The PPG states that[8]:

3.18 "*Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary*."

3.19 The PPG also notes the relevance of landscape character assessment, landscape sensitivity/capacity assessment and landscape and visual impact assessment. However, whilst recognising these different aspects of landscape analysis, the PPG does not reflect the subtle variations in these and potential overlap between their different uses and requirements.

3.20 This LVIA includes reference to published landscape character assessments which have been prepared at a range of scales and detail. Reference has also been made to the local landscape character by reference to the key characteristics of the site and its immediate context, including existing, enhanced and potentially new green infrastructure. Consequently, this LVIA responds fully to the requirement of the PPG.

Local planning policy

3.21 The following section sets out the local planning policy background relevant to the site. The site is located within the administrative area of Cherwell District Council.

Adopted policy

3.22 At the time of writing, the planning context for the area is set out in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 (adopted July 2015 and re-adopted

[8] PPG, Paragraph: 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721 (21 July 2019)

December 2016).

3.23 The adopted Development Plan for CDC consists of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1, adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 Partial Review – Oxford's Unmet Housing Need, Minerals and Waste Core Strategy, 'Made' Neighbourhood Plans, saved policies of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and saved policies of the Oxfordshire County Council's Minerals and Waste Local Plan 1996.

3.24 Policies contained within the Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 relevant to a study of landscape and visual issues are set out in **Table 1** as follows.

Table 1: Adopted Local Plan Part 1 (2015) policies relevant to landscape and visual matters

Policy reference	Summary
Policy ESD5: Renewable Energy	This policy sets out that CDC will support renewable energy schemes due to the range of benefits they provide if 'adverse impacts can be addressed satisfactorily'. The policy also highlights key areas of consideration which include: • "*Landscape and biodiversity designations, protected habitats and species, and Conservation Target Areas;* • *Visual impacts on local landscapes;* • *The historic environment including designated and non-designated assets and their settings;* • *The Green Belt, particularly visual impacts on openness;* and • *Residential amenity*". The proposed development forms a renewable energy proposal.
Policy ESD10: Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment	This policy sets out a list of criteria which need to be achieved in order to protect and enhance the biodiversity and natural environment in the District. These include: • "*In considering proposals for development, a net gain in biodiversity will be sought by protecting, managing, enhancing and extending existing resources, and by creating new resources;* • *The protection of trees will be encouraged, with an aim to increase the number of trees in the District*; and • *If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or as a last resort, compensated for, then development will not be*

	permitted". The remaining criteria in the policy highlight the need for benefits of proposals to outweigh harm and also mitigation in order to result in a net gain in biodiversity.
Policy ESD11: Conservation Target Areas	This policy notes that where a proposed development lies within or adjacent to a Conservation Target Area: "*…biodiversity surveys and a report will be required to identify constraints and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement*". The eastern area of the site lies within a Conservation Target Area.
Policy ESD13: Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement	This policy focuses on opportunities to: "*…secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape…through the restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscapes, features or habitats and where appropriate the creation of new ones, including the planting of woodlands, trees and hedgerows*". Regarding local landscape character, the policy notes new developments should 'respect and enhance' and provide appropriate mitigation where this is not possible. It also highlights the importance of avoiding 'visual intrusion into the countryside' and protecting 'important natural landscape features'. The policy also notes specific published guidance in which development proposals should consider.
Policy ESD14: Oxford Green Belt	This policy sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt (set out in the NPPF) and notes that development proposals will need to consider published Government guidance. The policy also highlights the importance of 'openness' within the Green Belt. The site lies within the Oxford Green Belt and this matter will be further referred to later in this LVIA.
Policy ESD15: The Character of the Built and Historic Environment	This policy states that: "*New development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design*". The policy sets out a list of criteria which new development proposals should do; these include: • "*Contribute positively to an area's character and identity by creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness and respecting local topography and landscape features, including skylines, valley floors, significant trees, historic boundaries, landmarks, features or views, in particular within designated landscapes, within the Cherwell Valley and within conservation areas and their setting;* and • *Integrate and enhance green infrastructure and incorporate biodiversity enhancement features where possible*".
Policy ESD17: Green Infrastructure	This policy highlights the importance of maintaining and enhancing the District's green infrastructure network. It sets out a number of ways in which to do this, such as: "*Ensuring that green infrastructure network considerations are*

	integral to the planning of new development".

3.25 The Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 Partial Review – Oxford's Unmet Housing Need focuses on strategic housing site allocations and is therefore not relevant to the site or proposed development.

3.26 The Partial Review did however provide an update to the Policies Map to support the adopted Local Plan therefore this is used to inform this LVIA (refer to **Figure 2, Site Location and Planning Designations**).

Saved policy

3.27 A number of policies from the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 (adopted November 1996) remain part of the statutory Development Plan and are 'saved' to sit alongside those policies within the adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1. The saved policies from the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 relevant to landscape and visual matters are set out in **Table 2** as follows.

Table 2: 'Saved' Local Plan 1996 policies relevant to landscape and visual matters

Policy reference	Summary
Policy C5: Protection of Ecological Value and Rural Character of Specified Features of Value in the District	This policy outlines various features which are considered by CDC to be protected for their ecological value and rural character. These include 'Otmoor and the Flood Plain of the River Ray'. The policy states 'apart from the need to protect green areas', 'trees and rural landscapes' also need to be protected. It also recommends native planting within new landscaping proposals to increase habitat creation. The site lies to the west of Otmoor and immediately south of the River Ray.
Policy C8: Sporadic Development in the Countryside	This policy states that: "*Sporadic development in the countryside must be resisted if its attractive, open, rural character is to be maintained*".

Policy C28: Layout, Design and External Appearance of New Development	This policy states that design of new developments should be: "*…sympathetic to the character of the urban or rural context of that development*".

3.28 The remaining parts of the adopted Development Plan for CDC, consisting of the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy, 'Made' Neighbourhood Plans, and saved policies of the Oxfordshire County Council's Minerals and Waste Local Plan 1996, are not considered to be relevant to this LVIA.

Emerging policy

3.29 CDC is currently in the process, alongside the other five Oxfordshire authorities, to produce the strategic planning document Oxfordshire Plan 2050 which will form a joint statutory spatial plan. The Oxfordshire Growth Board published an update on progress in November 2020 which stated that Consultation on 'Spatial Growth Options' are expected in Summer 2021.

Other relevant landscape planning guidance

Countryside Design Summary Supplementary Planning Guidance (1998)

3.30 The Countryside Design Summary Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) was published in June 1998 as the 1995 Cherwell Landscape Assessment 'provided a basis for further research' (this document will be referred to later on in this LVIA).

3.31 The adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 notes that this SPG should be considered regarding the conservation and enhancement of the character of the countryside. This SPG states its aim is to:

3.32 "…*guide development in the rural areas so that the distinctive character of the district's countryside and the settlements and buildings within it are maintained and enhanced*".

3.33 The study identified four 'Countryside Character Areas' (CCA) within the District which they exhibit their own characteristics, the site lies within the 'Clay Valley of Otmoor' CCA. The study gives an overview of the 'Character' of the CCA, which includes reference to 'Otmoor', located to the east of the site. The study states:

3.34 "*Otmoor is a unique area to the south of the River Ray, which for the most part lies below 60m. It is of great ecological importance with a series of grassland types within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. A wider area, almost 3km across remains free from all development*".

3.35 Regarding new development, the study highlights the importance of hedgerows and advises against loss as it will be damaging to the landscape character 'by creating monotonous exposed plains'. It notes that 'views and settings of churches' in the CCA are 'very important and must not be undermined or interrupted by new development'. It also sets out that trees and hedgerows should be proposed in association with developments to maintain character.

3.36 It should be considered that at the time of writing this study was produced almost 23 years ago therefore the baseline situation is likely to have changed somewhat but the general guidance remains relevant and is considered in this LVIA.

Otmoor Conservation Target Area Statement (2019)

3.37 The Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxfordshire includes reference to Conservation Target Areas (CTAs) and were originally set out for Oxfordshire County Council (by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre) in 2006. The CTA maps and statements were updated by Wild Oxfordshire in 2019, including the Otmoor CTA Statement (the Otmoor CTA lies within the eastern area of the site).

3.38 The Otmoor CTA Statement notes the CTA to be 1918ha in size and describes the area as follows:

3.39 "*This area includes the wet low lying Otmoor basin and adjacent areas extending north of Charlton-on-Otmoor and eastwards to Whitecross Green Wood*".

3.40 Regarding landscape and visual matters, the Statement identifies 'hedgerows with good structure' across the area. The Statement also notes that a number of footpaths and bridleways exist through the area.

Other relevant guidance

3.41 Although not a specific landscape designation, the adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 Partial Review (2020) referred to Green Belt studies in 'understanding the likely impact on the Green Belt of site options'. It is therefore considered relevant to refer to the County and District studies relating to Green Belt.

Oxford Green Belt Study (2015)

3.42 The Oxford Green Belt Study was published by Oxfordshire County Council in October 2015. The aim of the study was 'to assess the extent to which the land within the Oxford Green Belt performs' against the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF. The study is not intended to advise of 'suitability' or 'potential' of land for development.

3.43 The study gives examples of 'areas of significant environmental sensitivity within the Oxford Green Belt' which include Otmoor because of its 'biodiversity interest and flood risk'.

3.44 The study sets out 'land parcels' for review, which included 'smaller parcels' and 'broad areas'. The study then assessed the defined parcels against Green Belt Purposes 1-4 (not sufficient evidence available to assess against Purpose 5) and the following ratings applied:

- *"High: Parcel performs well.*
- *Medium: Parcel performs moderately well.*
- *Low: Parcel performs weakly.*
- *No Contribution: Parcel makes no, or negligible contribution*."

3.45 The site is identified in the study to be located within 'Broad area 3', which consists of an extensive area to the north-east of Oxford, separated mainly from the built-up area by 'Broad area 2'.

3.46 'Broad area 3' is found to make 'No Contribution' in the study to Green Belt Purposes 1 or 2. The area is rated 'High' in relation to Green Belt Purpose 3 (to assist in the safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment) and 'Low' for Green Belt Purpose 4 (to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns).

3.47 The location of the site within the Oxford Green Belt is considered later in this LVIA.

Cherwell Green Belt Study (2017)

3.48 The Cherwell Green Belt Study was published by CDC in April 2017. The aim of the study was to assess 'strategic development sites within the District against the five nationally defined purposes of the Green Belt' in order to meet housing needs. The proposed development is not for housing nor is the site identified within the study as part of a 'strategic development site', consequently this study is not considered to be relevant to this LVIA.

Summary of landscape policy guidance

3.49 The local planning guidance for the site and surrounding area recognises the benefit of renewable energy proposals. It highlights the importance of retaining existing and proposing green infrastructure where possible. This specifically includes new native hedgerows and trees where possible to enhance local landscape character, such as in relation to the Otmoor CTA (located partly within the site) where these are characteristic. Views towards Churches are

regarded as being 'very important'. Guidance also notes the Oxford Green Belt and the contribution of land to its five purposes which will be considered later in this LVIA.

Designations

3.50 The eastern part of the site is located within the Otmoor CTA (refer to **Figure 2, Site Location and Planning Designations**). Although not a specific landscape designation, the site, as well the surrounding landscape and settlements, is located within the Oxford Green Belt. It should be noted that these designations cover an extensive area, of which the site is a small part.

3.51 The site itself is not located within any other areas subject to policies in relation to landscape and visual matters. There are a number of designations within the study area. Together these are considered in judgements on landscape value as part of this LVIA.

3.52 Other related designations include:

- Ancient Woodland – several in the surrounding area, the closest being located ca. 85m to the north of the site;
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) Access Land – a couple of areas on the outskirts of the village of Islip, the closest being located ca. 1.1km to the west;
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – Woodeaton Quarry SSSI located ca. 845m to the south-west, Woodeaton Wood SSSI located ca. 1.4km to the south-west and Otmoor SSSI located ca. 1.6km to the east;
- Local Wildlife Site – Otmoor RSPB Reserve is located adjacent to the eastern boundary;
- Listed Building – several in the surrounding area, including those within the settlement of Noke to the south and Logg Farmhouse, barn approximately 30m to south' (Grade II)) located ca. 210m to the north and also including 'Church of St Nicholas' (Grade I) located ca. 1.3km to the west;

- Conservation Area – several in the surrounding area, the closest being Islip

Conservation Area located ca. 900m to the west; and

- Scheduled Monument – several in the surrounding area, the closest being 'Romano-Celtic temple N of Woodeaton' located ca. 230m to the south-west.

3.53 Overall, policy matters and designations within the study area have been considered in the LVIA process.

4.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

4.1 The following section describes the individual components of the physical landscape that are present in the study area. These have been described to establish an understanding of the specific landscape baseline, including individual elements and more distinctive features which together contribute to landscape character.

Physical landscape elements and features

Topography and landform

4.2 The topography of the site rises gradually from the northern boundary adjacent to the River Ray corridor towards the south-west. Levels sit at ca. +56m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to ca. 59m AOD along the northern and eastern site boundaries. These levels rise to the south-west gradually to form a localised soft 'dome' in the south-western part of the main site area, rising to ca. +65m AOD. The landform then continues to rise to the south of the main site area to the south-west and rises along the route of the proposed construction access track to ca. +89m AOD.

4.3 In the wider landscape, the landform continues to rise to the south-west of the proposed construction access track to a hill rising to ca. +102m AOD north of the settlement of Woodeaton. The remaining landscape is generally low-lying and with gentle undulations, influenced by the valley and floodplain landscape associated with the River Ray. The various settlements in the surrounding landscape, including Noke, Islip and Oddington, and the site are generally located on slightly higher landform (ca. +60-70m AOD) than the surrounding landform (ca. +50-60m AOD). Further to the south-east of the study area, the landform rises steeply to a ridge known as the 'Oxford Heights'. This rise in landform reaches a localised highpoint of ca. +141m AOD to the south-west of the settlement of Beckley.

Hydrology and water features

4.4 There is seasonal flooding within the north-eastern part of the site from the River Ray. The route of the River Ray lies immediately to the north of the site and a tributary lies adjacent to the east.

4.5 In the wider landscape, the New River Ray splits from the River Ray to the north of the site. The New River Ray continues broadly adjacent to the River Ray for a short distance eastward until redirecting north-east adjacent to the north-eastern corner of the site. The River Ray continues westward where it joins the River Cherwell south of Islip which is ca. 1.6km to the west of the site. The surrounding landscape is characterised by tributaries from the main River corridors, notably the marshland landscape immediately east of the site with many waterbodies also.

Land use

4.6 The site consists of several field enclosures currently in agricultural use. There is an existing slurry tank adjacent to the southern site boundary. The linear strip for the temporary construction access, which extends to the south of the main site area, lies across an agricultural field. There is an existing access to the site along the southern boundary via a local farm track which extends north from the village of Noke which is proposed as the operational access. Several overhead electricity pylons and powerlines exist across the site (11KV and 33KV).

4.7 In the wider landscape, the settlement of Noke predominately comprises residential land use. Other settlements in the surrounding area typically comprise schools, village halls and public houses. The edge of the city of Oxford and the settlement of Kidlington ca. 4km to the south-west and west of Noke represents a relatively more urban fringe landscape, with land uses such as golf courses.

4.8 Beyond the settlement boundaries, the landscape is generally characterised by a mixture of arable and pastoral field enclosures. These tend to be medium to large-scale in size, with some smaller enclosures surrounding settlement boundaries/interspersed farmstead developments. The landscape to the east is characterised by moorland associated with Otmoor. Other land uses include Woodeaton Quarry which is located ca. 1.6km to the south-west of the main site area.

Vegetation patterns

4.9 The boundaries of the field enclosures within the site boundary are generally defined by native hedgerow with hedgerow trees. Some are fragmented and with gaps, notably along the north-western site boundary and alongside part of the western edge of the public footpath broadly through the centre of the site. The Pre-development Arboricultural Report and Method Statement, Revision 1 (Wharncliffe Trees and Woodland Consultancy, October 2021) notes that the trees are located on field boundaries within and around the site and that hedgerows are a 'significant feature of the site'.

4.10 The western part of the southern boundary of the main site area is not vegetated where the field enclosure extends south. The northern and eastern boundaries of the site lie adjacent to relatively more mature riparian vegetation associated with the River Ray and a tributary. The part of the proposed operational access track immediately to the south of the main site area is vegetated on either side.

4.11 In the wider landscape, the agricultural field enclosures are generally enclosed by native hedgerow with hedgerow trees which are generally in a good condition. The moorland landscape to the east of the site comprises mainly marshland vegetation with frequent mature tree belts. There are some pockets of 'productive' landscapes, including orchard planting within the grounds of residential properties within Noke, to the south.

4.12 Mature vegetation within the wider landscape consists of linear strips of riparian vegetation associated with the numerous watercourses, including the

River Cherwell to the west. There are also varying sizes of woodland, including Prattle Wood located ca. 1.1km to the south of the main site area and several relatively large areas of woodland on the rising land to the south-east of the study area.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and access

4.13 A public footpath (ref. 309/1/10) runs through the centre of the site and partly along the northern boundary, which then extends north and south to the settlements of Oddington and Noke respectively. A public bridleway (ref. 209/16/10) lies adjacent to the eastern site boundary, which extends from Oddington to the north and continues south towards the eastern edge of Noke. The Oxfordshire Way recreational route lies ca. 550m south of the main site area. The construction access track runs through a section of the Oxfordshire Way recreational route on its approach to the settlement of Noke.

4.14 In the wider landscape, the network of PRoW comprises numerous routes through the local landscape connecting the various settlements (refer to **Figure 6, Viewpoint Locations and PRoW**). The Oxfordshire Way and Oxford Greenbelt Way transverse the local landscape, including on the relatively higher ground to the south through the settlement of Beckley. Several public footpaths and bridleways also run through the Otmoor marshland to the east of the site. National Cycle Network Route 51 lies ca. 3.2km to the north-west of the site.

Development and transport patterns

4.15 The village of Noke lies to the south and is located ca. 420m from the main site area. It forms a linear settlement pattern, and is primarily residential extending along an unnamed road with several larger properties and their grounds to the north of this road. St. Giles' Parish Church is also located along this road. Logg Farm lies ca. 110m to the north of the site beyond which, separated by several field enclosures, lies the settlement of Oddington to the north.

4.16 In the wider landscape, there are several small villages including Islip to the west and Woodeaton to the south-west. The landscape of Otmoor to the east of the site is generally free from development. Farmsteads are also common within the wider landscape as well as a relatively recent solar farm development at Rowles Farm, Bletchington located ca. 2.1km to the north-west of the main site area which was consented at Appeal (Appeal Ref: 13/00066/REFAPP). The edge of the city of Oxford and the settlement of Kidlington are located ca. 4km to the south-west and west of Noke.

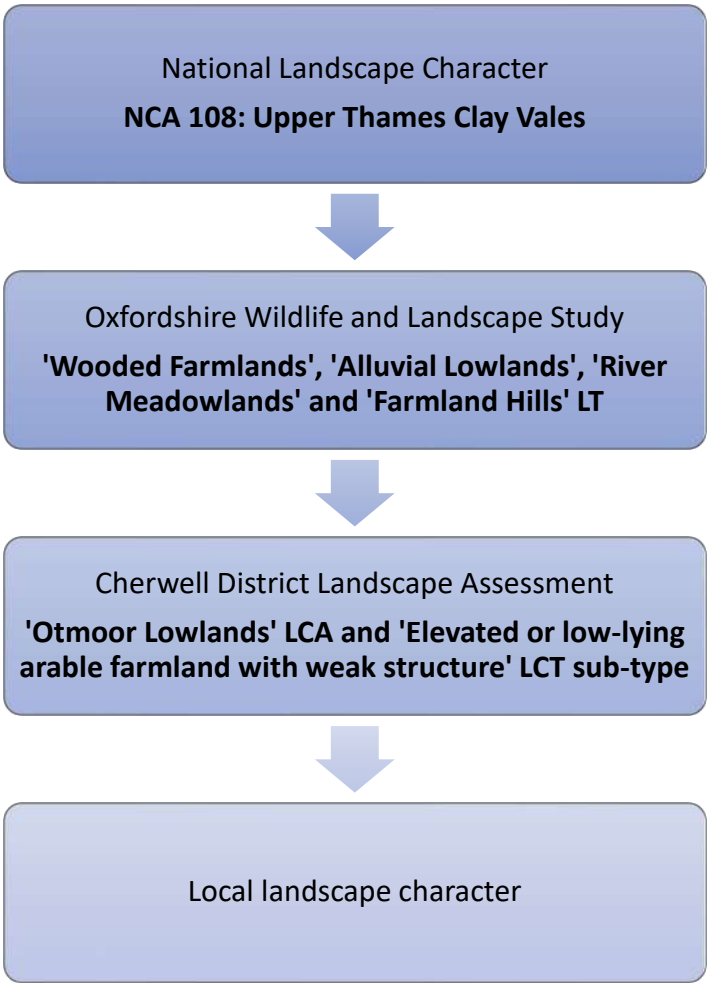
4.17 The B4027 corridor forms one of the main transport routes within the surrounding area and this runs through Islip to the west and lies ca. 900m to the south-west of the main site area. There is a network of secondary routes linking the various settlements. A railway line (Oxford to Bicester Rail Link) also runs through Islip, located ca. 1.1km to the north-west of the site. The A34 corridor is located ca. 2.5km to the north-west of the site which connects to the M40 corridor further north, which, at its closest point, lies ca. 3.5km to the north-east of the site.

Landscape character

4.18 In addition to the physical description of the site and its local landscape context, reference has been made to published guidance on landscape character for the area. The site is in the following landscape character types/areas (LCT/As) (refer to **Figure 4, County Landscape Character** and **Figure 5, District Landscape Character**):

- National level – NCA 108: 'Upper Thames Clay Vales';
- County level – 'Wooded Farmlands', 'Alluvial Lowlands', 'River Meadowlands' and 'Farmland Hills' LTs; and
- District level – 'Otmoor Lowlands' LCA and 'R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure' LCT.

Plate 1: Summary of landscape character hierarchy



4.19 The following sections set out a summary of the characteristics contained in published guidance, relevant to the site and study area.

National landscape character

4.20 At a national level, the site is situated within the National Character Area (NCA) 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales[9]. This NCA 'covers an extensive area of low-lying land extending from west of Swindon through to Aylesbury in the east, and completely encircles the Midvale Ridge NCA'.

4.21 A Statement of Environmental Opportunity set out in published guidance for

[9] NE570: NCA Profile: 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales, Natural England (June, 2014).

this NCA relates to the creation and management of greenspace in association with developments to benefit elements including biodiversity.

4.22 Whilst the key characteristics of the NCA tend to be more generalised across the wider area there are some descriptors which are relevant to the site and study area, including:

- *"Low lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits…creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands of the gravel;*
- *The large river system of the River Thames drains the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north or emitting from the spring line along the Chilterns and Downs escarpments;*
- *Woodland cover is low at only about 3 percent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by lines of willows;*
- *Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls;*
- *In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats…There are also rich and extensive ditch systems;* and
- *Settlement is sparse on flood plains, apart from at river crossing where there can be large towns…the outer suburbs of Oxford…spread into this NCA. Market towns and villages are strung along the spring lines of the Chilterns and Downs. Major routes include mainline rail, canals, a network of roads including the M40".*

4.23 Given the scale of the NCA and the diversity of the key characteristics, the landscape components which define the character at this regional level are represented across the wider context of the NCA. Therefore, in this context changes at a site level will be small scale and not likely to impact upon landscape character as defined by the NCA.

4.24 To complete a more detailed appraisal of potential landscape and visual issues,

reference has been made to the published landscape character assessment prepared at a finer grain and more local scale.

County landscape character

4.25 In 2004, Oxfordshire County Council published the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS)[10]. The main purpose of this study was to assess the landscape character/biodiversity of the County to inform its protection, maintenance and enhancement. The study identifies twenty-four Landscape Types (LTs) within the County. The LTs are further sub-divided into Local Character Areas, which are named in relation to nearby places and are unique geographical areas.

4.26 The majority of the site area is located within the 'Wooded Farmland' LT, the study sets out the 'Key Characteristics' for the LT as follows:

- "*Large blocks of ancient woodland and a large number of plantations;*
- *A varied field pattern of arable land and pasture enclosed by woodland and hedges;*
- *Species rich hedgerows with many hedgerow trees;* and
- *Dispersed settlement pattern with settlements and scattered farms*".

4.27 The part of the 'Wooded Farmland' LT within the study area is identified as 'Horton-cum-Studley' Local Character Area. OWLS provides a unique description of the 'Landscape Character' in this area. Those relevant to the site and the study area are as follows:

- "*Medium to large-sized, regularly-shaped arable and grass fields, which are enclosed by woodland and hedges;*
- *To the south-east of the area, the pattern of enclosure is mainly defined by hedges and ditches;*
- *Mature hedgerow trees of oak and ash are a prominent feature, and provide a unifying element throughout. They are denser along roadsides and lanes;*
- *Large blocks of ancient woodland are locally prominent on the slopes of the*

[10] Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study, Oxfordshire County Council, 2004.

surrounding hills; and

- *Most hedges are in good condition…Bordering roads and lanes they are frequently tall, thick and species-rich…Hedges next to ditches are also taller, with dense tree belts.*"

4.28 OWLS then sets out 'Forces for Change' for the 'Wooded Farmland' LT. These include that the LT has an 'unspoilt rural character' but notes that a 'number of factors' have impacted. The study states that hedgerows are largely intact and in a 'good condition' but are 'fragmented or lost in areas where arable farming is dominant'. The study also makes reference to some 'residential developments and farm buildings that are out of character' within the LT.

4.29 OWLS also identifies a 'Landscape Strategy' for the 'Wooded Farmland' LT which states:

4.30 "*To conserve the interlocking mosaic of woodlands, fields, hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and distinctive patterns of settlements and buildings*".

4.31 This statement is supported within the study by a number of 'Guidelines' for 'Landscape Strategy', those relevant to the site and study area are as follows:

- "*Strengthen the pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where it is weak, by planting up gaps using appropriate native tree and shrub species. Hedgerow trees are a key feature of this landscape type and felling of mature specimens should be resisted whereas the planting of new hedgerow trees and tree belts should be encouraged;*
- *Maintain local distinctiveness by controlling the quality of built development, taking into account its scale, setting and use of local building materials;* and
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses*".

4.32 This site is also located partly within the 'Alluvial Lowlands', 'River Meadowlands' and 'Farmland Hills' LTs. The 'Landscape Strategy' set out in OWLS for these LTs notes the enhancement of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses. The study promotes maintenance, including 'layering', of hedgerows to be 'appropriate to the landscape type'. The study also

promotes grassland creation, 'particularly on land adjacent to watercourses'. The study notes visual impacts can be limited with 'judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area'.

District landscape character

4.33 In 1995, Cherwell District Council published the Cherwell District Landscape Assessment (CDLA)[11]. The aim of the study was to:

4.34 "*…contribute to an increased understanding of the landscape resources of the District and to be used by the District Council as the basis for the development of a consistent, coordinated approach to planning policy, development control, landscape management/conservation, recreation and tourism*".

4.35 The study identifies eight distinct LCAs. These broad areas are then sub-divided into a number of LCTs, which repeat across the District. Seven main LCTs were identified, which are then further sub-divided.

4.36 The site is identified in the study to be located within the 'Otmoor Lowlands' LCA, which is an extensive area extending from the urban edge of Bicester in the north to the edge of the Oxford Heights in the south. The study provides a detailed description of the LCA, those parts relevant to the site and study area are summarised as follows:

- "*Essentially a flat, wet, low lying landscape;*
- *Distinctive hills isolated from the main ridge of rising ground [within Otmoor area];*
- *Displays considerable variation owing to particular landform features and built development;*
- *Traditional land cover has consisted of grazed wet meadows;*
- *Much of the grassland is now divided into fields with hedge and ditch boundaries;*
- *Substantial part of land now in arable cultivation;*

[11] Cherwell District Landscape Assessment, Cherwell District Council, 1995.

- *Fields are large with weak boundaries, giving rise to an open, exposed landscape;* and
- *Isolated hills [to south] which form such distinct focal features have woodland cover on their brows*".

4.37 The study sets out 'Special features' in relation to the 'Otmoor Lowlands' LCA, these focus on ecological interests. The study notes the international importance of Otmoor, which lies to the east of the site.

4.38 The site is identified in the study to be located within the wider 'R1: Large-scale open farmland' LCT and the LCT sub-type of 'R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure', (hereafter referred to as the LCT). The southern section of the proposed operational access track is located within LCT sub-type 'R4a: Strongly undulating complex of farmed hills and valleys', however this is not considered due to the very minor part of the site located within this LCT sub-type). The study describes the LCT specifically in the context of the 'Otmoor Lowlands' LCA, which states:

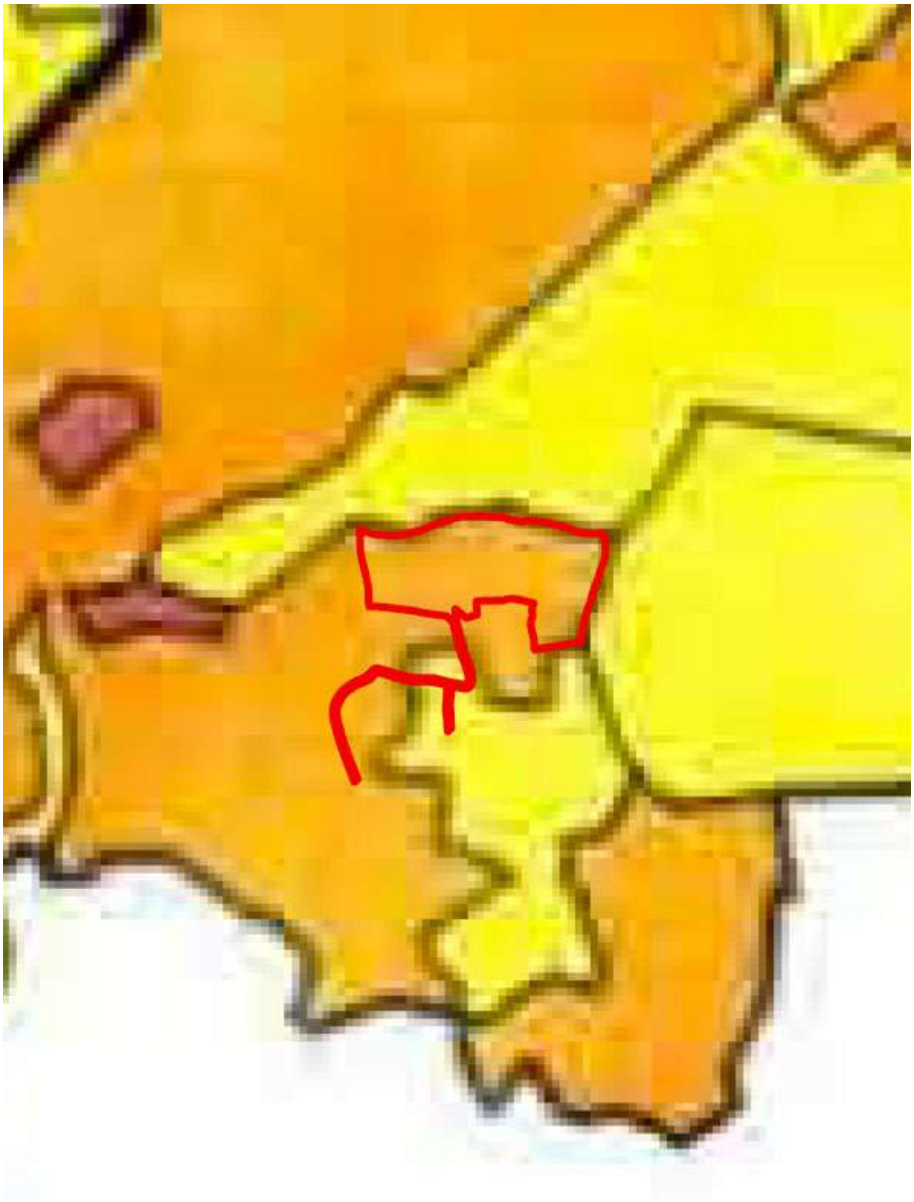
4.39 "*Where drainage has been improved, the heavy clays have been brought into arable cultivation, creating a low lying flat arable farmland with weak structure (R1a). Fields are large, regular and open, surrounded by ditches and hedges. The roads which cross this landscape are usually built up above the level of the surrounding fields, so the hedges appear to be sunken and have little impact on the landscape. There are very few trees to interrupt the long views across the floodplain*".

4.40 Immediately north and south, the LCT changes to 'R4a: Strongly undulating complex of farmed hills and valleys', and immediately east, the LCT changes to 'R1b: Flat, low-lying open wet pasture'. This demonstrates the interface of the site between varying characters and landscape features, as noted above in the study describing the wider LCA. The LCT in which the site is located continues to the west where it is more continuous in terms of area instead of intersected by other LCTs as it is near to the site.

4.41 The study also identifies conservation and enhancement priorities within the District based on the LCT areas. The vast majority of the site is identified within

the study to be located within an area of 'Repair' (orange) and is generally surrounded by areas identified as 'Conservation' (yellow), as shown on **Plate 2** below.

Plate 2: Extract from 1995 Cherwell Landscape Assessment showing 'Enhancement Strategy' (site boundary shown in red)



4.42 The study describes 'Repair' landscapes as having a 'reasonably strong' landscape character but as 'showing noticeable decline' (as opposed to 'Conservation' landscapes which are regarded in the study as having

'particularly strong' landscape character). The study sets out 'specific enhancement measures' for 'Repair' landscapes, those relevant to the site and study area are summarised as follows:

- "*Good management of hedgerows. Removal of hedges should be strong resisted and gapping up carried out where hedges are becoming thin;*
- *Continued renewal of hedgerow trees should be encouraged to prevent the decline of the hedgerow tree network;*
- *Traditional management of willow trees along watercourses and ditches;* and
- *Development should be permitted only if the scale, size, materials and character of the scheme are designed so as to blend in to the area with sensitive siting*".

4.43 It should be considered that, at the time of writing, this study was produced almost 26 years ago therefore the baseline situation is likely to have changed somewhat but the general guidance remains relevant and is considered in this LVIA.

Cherwell District Council Landscape Character Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2017)

4.44 The CDC Landscape Character Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment was published by CDC in June 2017 as part of the Evidence Base for the Local Plan Part 1 Partial Review. The study focuses on specific sites within the District of which the site is not located within. Consequently, this study is not considered to be relevant to this LVIA.

Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (2017)

4.45 The Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation project was published by Oxfordshire County Council in 2017 and updated in 2018. The study identifies the site as 'Enclosure' as a 'Broad Type', which makes up 76% of Cherwell District and is therefore not considered to be rare.

4.46 The study identifies the site as 'Prairie/Amalgamated Enclosure' 'Historic Landscape Characterisation Type' (HLCT) in the 21st Century. This is one of two most frequently occurring HLCT in Cherwell District, as stated in the study, and is therefore also not considered to be rare.

4.47 The study also states, noting that the site is located within the south of the District:

4.48 "*There is quite a distinction apparent between the land in the north of Cherwell District and that in the south. The former is more rural and dotted with small settlements; the latter is more diverse and includes large military, industrial and ornamental landscapes*".

4.49 The study also gives information of capacity of landscape for the creation of 'new woodland and new large-scale urban development'. The proposed development is considered to be 'large-scale', therefore this is not considered to be relevant information for this LVIA.

4.50 The landscape components identified in baseline character are identified as constraints and opportunities in relation to the site. The design evolution for the site masterplan is then able to respond appropriately to the context of the local landscape character (refer to **Figure 8, Landscape and Visual Analysis**). Furthermore, the design of the site masterplan can incorporate measures which respond to the more specific guidance set out by published landscape character assessments.

Landscape character of the site and its local landscape context

4.51 The published landscape character assessments are usefully informative insofar as they offer context and descriptions of the prevailing landscape. Whilst the site and study area do share some commonality with the published assessments, it is useful to go a step further and consider the site and its more local landscape character in order to understand what, if any, further influences are at play.

4.52 The local landscape context of the site is considered to be, for the purposes of this LVIA to be the River Ray corridor to the north, extending to the edge of the Otmoor to the east and agricultural land to the west and south.

4.53 In terms of condition, the hedgerow vegetation across the site is generally fragmented and lost in places, as referenced in published guidance. The eastern part of the site, located within the Otmoor CTA, is generally in a good condition and has a strong relationship and shares some characteristics with the wider Otmoor landscape further to the east.

4.54 The mature vegetation on the northern settlement edge of Noke and alongside the River Ray south of Logg Farm creates localised containment of the site. Minor parts of views are available across the site towards built form in Noke and also the Church in Islip which emphasises the proximity of existing built form. Electricity pylons and overhead wires also run across and above the site, comprising detracting features which serve to reinforce the influence of infrastructure across the local landscape context.

4.55 This analysis of the local landscape character of the site and its context is taken through to inform judgements on value, susceptibility and overall landscape sensitivity, included later in this LVIA.

Visual baseline

4.56 This section provides a description of the nature and extent of the existing views from, towards and between the site and the surrounding area. It also includes reference to specific locations that will potentially be subject to impacts as a result of the proposed development.

4.57 Establishing the specific nature of these views provides an understanding of the context and setting of representative viewpoints and also the nature of views in terms of distance, angle of view, and seasonal constraints associated with specific visual receptors. The identification of key sensitive receptors and links to the representative viewpoint are carried forward to the assessment process (refer to **Figure 7, Viewpoint Photographs**).

Overview

4.58 The visual envelope is the area of landscape from which a site or proposed development will potentially be visible. It accounts for general judgements on the theoretical visibility of a site or proposed development and sets a broad context for the study area within which to address landscape and visual impacts. The extent of a visual envelope will be influenced by the physical landscape components of an area, such as hedgerows, woodlands or buildings and can also be influenced by distance from a site.

4.59 It can be summarised as:

- From the north, views of the site are limited due to intervening vegetation, notably along the River Ray immediately to the north of the site;
- From the east, views of the site are limited by intervening vegetation within Otmoor and along various watercourses;
- From the south, views from the middle distance are predominantly limited by existing built form within Noke to the south and intervening vegetation, including Prattle Wood, however some views are available from the Oxfordshire Way to the west of Noke. Longer distance views from the rising land to the south-east are available at various points when intervening vegetation is not restricting views; and
- From the west, views of the site tend to be limited by landform, existing built form and intervening vegetation.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

4.60 To further test the visibility of the proposed development, a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) was conducted (refer to **Figure 1, Zone of Theoretical Visibility**).

4.61 A ZTV is not a conclusive product in terms of determining the visibility of a given development proposal; nor does a ZTV define the degree of change or impact. Instead, the ZTV is used as a tool that provides an indication of 'potential' visibility, which then guides the spatial extent of a study, informs

the nature and location of potential receptors and contributes to an understanding of scale of impacts (in terms of area covered).

4.62 Digital information inputs into the ZTV include:

- Input from OS mapping and LIDAR data for topography and blocks of vegetation; and
- The proposed solar panel heights (set at a maximum of 2.8m above level ground).

4.63 It should be noted other aspects of the proposed development falling within the development envelope used for the ZTV are likely to be less than the maximum 2.8m of the panel heights. Therefore, the ZTV represents worst case scenario. Approximate heights are detailed below:

- Inverters – ca. 2.6m;
- Spares container – ca. 2.6m;
- DNO substation/customer switchgear building – 2.3m; and
- Security fencing – ca. 2.1m.

4.64 The ZTV has been modelled upon a screened model scenario which adds existing buildings and existing blocks of vegetation, as identified by OS mapping and LIDAR data.

4.65 The resulting ZTV was then used to inform possible viewpoint location selection, field survey work was then undertaken. Several other views were taken to further test visibility, as described below:

- From near to Woodeaton Wood, which was not identified on the screened ZTV, to test the visibility from the elevated landform to the south as well as the south-east;
- From the Church of St Nicholas in Islip, which was not identified within the screened ZTV, to demonstrate the relationship between the site and this Listed Building. However, the view was heavily screened by built form and is not carried forward to the assessment within this LVIA, a representative

view on the edge of Islip, identified in the screened ZTV, is used instead; and

- From Charlton-on-Otmoor, which was not identified in the screened ZTV, to demonstrate the relationship between the settlements in the surrounding landscape and the site.

4.66 It should be noted that GLVIA3 acknowledges that ZTV is the desk study component of the visibility analysis and that several landscape components that effect visibility may be difficult to add to digital models accurately. Input to ZTVs for existing vegetation includes only data quantified in LIDAR and OS data; therefore, only larger blocks of woodland are included as input to the model, whilst hedgerow trees and linear tree belts tend to be excluded.

4.67 For the landscape in which the site is located, published landscape character assessments note that a key characteristic of the local landscape are hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees. It is likely therefore that some layers of vegetation will be underrepresented in the ZTV.

4.68 Several areas are shown on the ZTV as zones with potential visibility, for example from part of the Oxfordshire Way to the north of the site and also the PRoW network within Otmoor to the east. However, the actual intervisibility was less clear when tested in the field, due to landform and intervening layers of vegetation along field boundaries and watercourses (refer to **Viewpoints 10 and 12, Figure 7, Viewpoint Photographs**). As advocated in GLVIA3, site surveys are essential to provide an accurate baseline assessment of visibility.

4.69 This initial appraisal of theoretical visibility has then been used to inform the field work, subsequent assessment and input into design and mitigation.

Representative viewpoints and visual receptors

4.70 The visual assessment references a series of viewpoints that are representative of visual receptors in the area. These illustrate views towards the site in the context of the surrounding landscape and are used to inform judgements on

impacts for specific receptors (refer to **Figure 6, Viewpoint Locations and PRoW**, and **Figure 7, Viewpoint Photographs**).

4.71 A detailed description for each of the locations identified as receptors for this LVIA, including judgements on overall sensitivity of visual receptors, is included in later sections of this report under the assessment of visual effects.

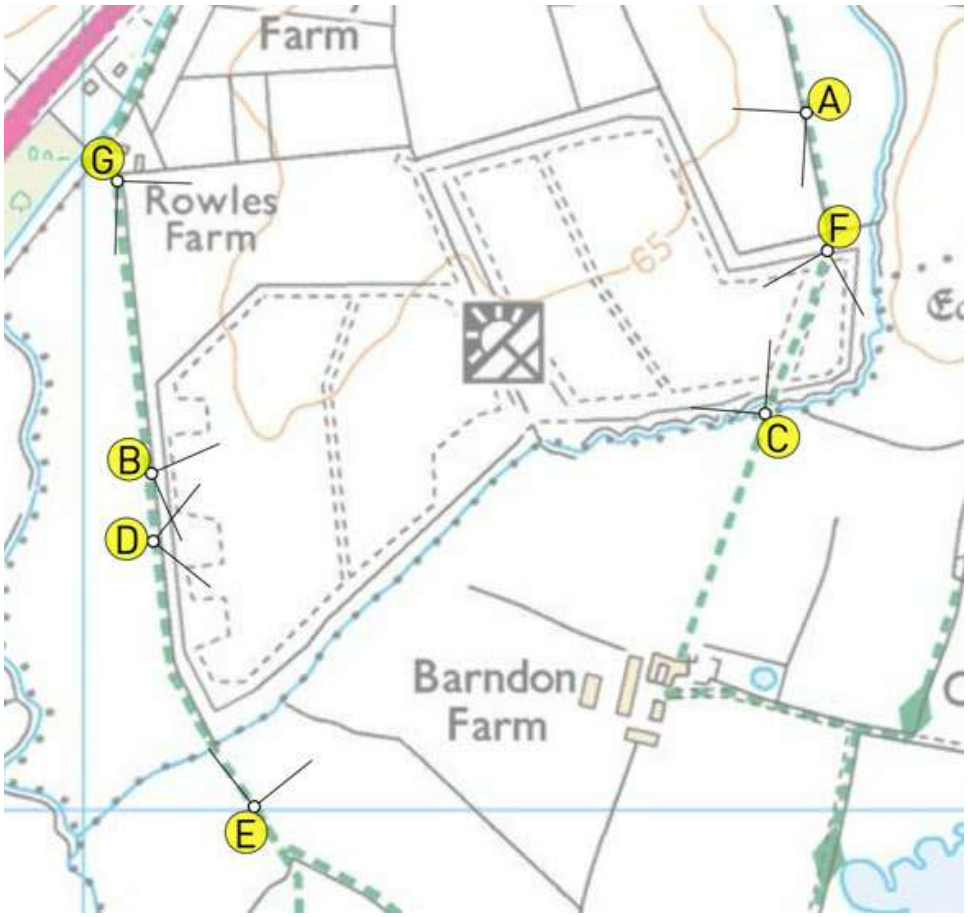
Photomontages

4.72 Four photomontages have been prepared for selected representative viewpoints and are included at **Appendix C, Photomontages**. These will be referred to later within the LVIA.

Consideration of precedent solar scheme

4.73 In May 2021, a site visit was undertaken to the recently constructed solar farm development at Rowles Farm, Bletchington (Appeal Ref: 13/00066/REFAPP). This site is located ca. 2.1km to the north-west of the Noke site area. Viewpoint photographs were taken from two public footpaths which pass through and adjacent to the Rowles Farm site, where the routes of the footpath are located adjacent to the solar farm development, refer to **Plate 3** below.

Plate 3: Map showing the locations of additional views taken at Rowles Farm, Bletchington



4.74 The following sections set out a brief consideration of the context to the footpath and views of the constructed solar farm at Rowles Farm and how this context is similar to that of the public right of way through the site at Noke.

Screened views towards the development

4.75 From the public footpath to the north-east of the development and the northern part of the public footpath adjacent to the western edge of the development, both extending south from the A34 corridor, there are screened views towards the development (refer to **Views A and B** below). This is due to mature vegetation on the edges of the development.

View A: View from public footpath north-east of development

View B: View from public footpath adjacent to western edge of development

Filtered views towards the development

4.76 There are filtered views available to the development through vegetation on

its boundaries from the public footpath on the southern edge of the development and the southern part of the public footpath adjacent to the western edge of the development (refer to **Views C, D and E** below).

View C: View from public footpath south-east of development

View D: View from public footpath adjacent to western edge of development

View E: View from public footpath south-west of development

Direct views towards the development

4.77 There are several parts of the public footpath network where there are direct views of the development, including from the route through the development (south-eastern corner) and to the north-west near to Rowles Farm (refer to **Views F and G** below).

View F: View from public footpath through development

View G: View from public footpath north-west of development

4.78 Overall, whilst the Rowles Farm solar farm development is contained by mature vegetation on some boundaries there are several points at which there are direct/filtered views of the constructed solar farm development from the surrounding PRoW network at a local level. This includes the part of the PRoW

network which extends through the development, where there is no mitigation planting, and from breaks in the boundary vegetation. This informs the design of the proposed solar farm at Noke, where mitigation planting can be incorporated to reduce/filter views of the solar farm at a local level and from the surrounding landscape.

5.0 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS AND LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

5.1 This section considers the type of development proposed and the nature of the impacts that are likely to occur; thereafter it draws the landscape and visual baseline information together and summarises the key constraints and opportunities in the existing landscape.

5.2 In summary the proposed development comprises:

- Development of a ground mounted solar farm incorporating the installation of solar photovoltaic panels with perimeter security fencing;
- Inverters and associated infrastructure including spares containers, customer switchgear building and DNO cabin;
- Temporary construction and permanent operational site access tracks and internal services tracks;
- A small temporary compound area; and
- Retained and proposed green infrastructure including a designated ecology enhancement area.

Likely causes of impact

5.3 Although a landscape has some intrinsic sensitivity, different landscapes contain a range of components which will respond differently to change, subject to the type of the development that is proposed. Therefore, in order to inform the analysis of impacts, judgements should be made with reference to the specific changes which arise from the type of development being considered.

5.4 The following section sets out the likely causes of impacts which would occur in relation to the specific type of development proposed (i.e. renewable energy led development - solar farm).

Causes of temporary impact during construction

5.5 The temporary construction works which may give rise to impacts on landscape

and visual receptors are listed as follows:

- Site clearance and accommodation works (including vegetation clearance where required);
- Movement and presence of associated construction vehicles and plant;
- Presence of construction compounds, site offices and welfare facilities; and
- Highways and junction improvements and formation of visibility splays for construction and operational site access.

Causes of impacts at completion

5.6 The permanent components of the proposed development which may give rise to impacts on landscape and visual receptors are listed as follows:

- The solar photovoltaic panels (i.e. the physical presence of equipment);
- Site access track (temporary construction and operational) and internal services tracks;
- A small temporary compound area; and
- Associated infrastructure including inverters and security fencing.

5.7 It should be noted that the components of the proposed development at completion are temporary but considered to be long-term.

Landscape and visual analysis

5.8 On the basis of the description of the landscape and visual baseline, the landscape and visual analysis is illustrated on **Figure 8: Landscape and Visual Analysis** and summarised as follows.

- The site lies in an area which is populated by strong landscape boundaries: the River Ray and its associated mature riparian vegetation, a tributary of the River Ray and the marshland landscape of Otmoor;
- Built form is prevalent including the settlements of Noke and Islip to the south and west;
- The site lies in a 'transitional' area which is 'separated' from the wider

agricultural landscape, as highlighted in published landscape character guidance in which the site was identified in four different LCTs, this is predominantly associated with the difference between the river corridor/settlement area to the north, flat landform in which the majority of the site is situated, rising landform to the south-west and ecologically rich marshland of Otmoor to the east;

- The site is located in an area subject to influence from infrastructure features such as overhead wires and electricity pylons through both the site and surrounding local landscape, which further 'separates' the site from the wider landscape;
- Transport networks within the local landscape, including the B4027 and railway corridors which run to the south-west and north-west of the site respectively, serve to reinforce references to infrastructure and built form across areas that are otherwise agricultural countryside;
- In contrast to the flat landscape in which the site is located, topography rises to the south-west of the site towards a hill, and consequently built form in Noke to the south becomes visible in the surrounding landscape;
- The site and local landscape reflect some of the key characteristics identified in published landscape character guidance, including the network of hedgerow and hedgerow tree vegetation which is fragmented in places and in need of 'repair' as stated in published guidance;
- Woodland blocks and mature vegetation along watercourses/field boundaries in the local landscape which offer localised containment and screening, noting that CDLA described the hedges to 'have little impact on the landscape' and 'uninterrupted views', which is not considered to be representative for the site and its locality;
- Views of interspersed development within the flat landform from relatively elevated areas are common, notably from 'Oxford Heights' to the south-east of the study area towards the settlement of Beckley; and
- From a recreational perspective, the PRoW network indicates that the local landscape is well used, including the public footpath which runs through the site itself.

Green Belt: Landscape and visual analysis

5.9 Green Belt is not a landscape designation and it does not consider landscape

character or other matters such as intrinsic value of landscape character or components. However, the impact on the 'openness' of the Green Belt is closely related to landscape and visual considerations, as are the matters of incursion into the countryside (sprawl) and physical and visual coalescence (merging). Therefore, as the site is located in an area designated as Green Belt, it is important to understand the 'role and function' of the site and its local landscape context in Green Belt terms where considered against landscape and visual issues.

5.10 As detailed in Section 3 of this LVIA, the Oxford Green Belt Study (2015) assesses land against four out of the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF (under paragraph 138)[12]. The site is identified within the study as in 'Broad area 3' which is concluded to make 'no contribution' to Green Belt Purposes 1: 'To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas' or 2: 'To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another'. This is considered to be an accurate conclusion in respect to the site due to distance from a 'large built-up area' and physical separation from neighbouring settlements of Noke, Oddington and Islip.

5.11 The study identifies 'Broad area 3' as having a 'High' contribution to Green Belt Purpose 3: 'To assist in the safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment'. In the context of the site and its local landscape context, although physically and visually separated at a localised level, Logg Farm lies in close proximity to the north which offers context of built form, notably in views from higher ground. In comparison to the wider rural landscape further to the east and west, the site lies in an area between, although separated from, settlement areas. The site is constrained by such areas as well as the River Ray corridor to the north and wider Otmoor landscape to the east. It should also be noted that the proposed solar farm development is temporary in nature. All forms of development are likely to comprise encroachment to a greater or lesser extent. In this case, the site is extremely small relative to its Green Belt context, limiting this prospect.

5.12 The study identifies 'Broad area 3' as having a 'Low' contribution to Green Belt

[12] MHCLG, NPPF (July 2021)

Purpose 4: 'To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns'. There is sufficient distance and physical separation relating to landform which reduces any intervisibility between the site and the outskirts of Oxford to the west and south and so the site does not play a role in preserving the setting and special character of a historic town.

5.13 The solar farm development proposal is also considered a temporary development with an expected lifespan of 40 years. At the end of this period the solar photovoltaic panels and associated infrastructure can be dismantled and restored to its existing arable land use.

5.14 On balance, it is considered that the any impact on the Green Belt in landscape and visual terms will be limited.

Constraints and opportunities

5.15 In the context of the analysis set out above, together with the likely impacts, the following constraints and opportunities have been identified (with reference also to the fieldwork and landscape character assessment work).

Constraints

5.16 Constraints for the site are considered to be:

- The removal of vegetation to facilitate a construction and operational access route to the site from the south;
- Views of the site from the PRoW network across the site and on higher ground to the south-east of the study area, noting the frequent views of existing interspersed development from these views and the opportunity for enhancement of existing boundary vegetation along the boundaries and within the site and mitigation planting;
- The location of part of the site within Otmoor CTA; and
- Although not a specific landscape designation, the location of the site within the Oxford Green Belt.

Opportunities

5.17 Opportunities for the site are considered to be:

- The opportunity to continue the 'enclosed' character of the public footpath through the site from the south to enhance existing hedgerow vegetation/green infrastructure as well as minimising visual impacts from this route;
- The location of the site within a 'transitional' area, with precedent set by infrastructure features such as overhead wires and electricity pylons across the site;
- The mature vegetation along the northern edge of the settlement of Noke which restricts potential views of the proposed development from residential receptors;
- Mature vegetation along part of the northern and eastern site boundaries, which provide physical and visual containment of the site;
- The opportunity to retain an existing view towards Church of St Nicholas in Islip to the west (Grade I Listed Building) from the public footpath through the site;
- The location of the site on relatively low-lying land which results in the landscape to the south of the site being more visually prominent in the wider landscape;
- Woodland blocks and mature vegetation along watercourses/field boundaries in the local landscape, as identified in published guidance, provide 'layered' screening of views within the flat surrounding landscape and some screening from relatively elevated areas; and
- The opportunity to complement the local landscape character and improve the visual and physical containment of the proposed development with enhancement to existing and new native hedgerow and hedgerow tree planting, as advocated within published landscape character guidance.

Landscape strategy components

5.18 In response to the constraints, opportunities and likely impacts which may arise from the proposed development, the following components of the

landscape strategy have been proposed and incorporated into the development framework plan and detailed landscape design (refer to **Appendix B, Development Framework Plan** and **Appendix D, Detailed Landscape Design**). Together these demonstrate the positive influence of landscape mitigation on the proposed development as a whole and its potential impacts and effects.

Development envelope

5.19 The development envelope for the site has been informed by the landscape and visual analysis and pays particular attention to several landscape related constraints and opportunities. These include existing vegetation along the boundaries of the site and internal field boundaries, Otmoor CTA, topography and the public footpath which runs through the site.

5.20 The development envelope, which includes the solar panels, inverters and their associated infrastructure and security fencing, is located in the western three field enclosures and allows a 10m buffer from the River Ray corridor to the north. This area is characterised by low-lying landform associated with the River Ray corridor to the north, in contrast to the gently rising landform to the south-west which is more visually prominent in the surrounding landscape.

5.21 The security fencing has an offset for maintenance purposes of 4m generally and 1m along the northern boundary adjacent to the river corridor beyond which there is significant proposed planting (**refer to Appendix D: Detailed Design**).

5.22 The development envelope is setback from the south-western site boundary to allow an existing view to be retained towards the Grade I Listed Church of St Nicholas in Islip to the west from the public footpath through the site as it reaches the southern site boundary. This view is regarded to be important within the Pre-application report from CDC and local adopted policy. Views of the development will also be screened from this location by planting along the south-western edge of the development envelope.

5.23 The solar panel development envelope is split into several areas to allow the existing field boundaries, and their associated vegetation, to be retained. The areas are also split within the existing field pattern due to overhead electricity pylons and powerlines (11KV and 33KV) which run through the site. The development envelope is sufficiently setback from the existing vegetation adjacent to the site boundaries and along internal field boundaries to allow this to be retained and enhanced.

5.24 This approach places limits on the spatial extent of development and ensures that the design process considers the specific constraints and opportunities of the site and surrounding context and addresses them. This in turn is likely to promote a better quality of design, avoids or minimises impacts, and enables a scheme to develop in a way that responds to local landscape character.

Temporary construction and operational access

5.25 The proposed construction access track extends north from an unnamed road on the approach to Noke from the west and will use temporary construction matting. The route utilises an existing access from the unnamed road which will minimise vegetation loss and passes north through an agricultural field enclosure. The route also passes the Oxfordshire Way recreational route which users of will have priority over construction vehicles.

5.26 The construction access route is curved to allow the existing vegetation within the field enclosure in which is passes through to be retained. The route then continues east along an existing farm access track to meet the route of the proposed operational access track. Minor hedgerow removal will be required for the temporary access to join the existing track. The proposed operational track follows the route of an existing farm access and enters the main site area on the southern edge to connect to internal service tracks.

5.27 During construction, there will be a temporary footpath diversion as the proposed construction access (and operational access) lies on the route of the public footpath which extends north through the site. This diversion will follow the same route as the existing footpath but on the eastern side of the hedge

and will be accessed from a field gate to the north-east of Manor Farm to further reduce the risk of pedestrians mixing with construction traffic. This diversion will then reconnect to the existing public footpath route broadly adjacent to the southern site boundary.

5.28 A small temporary compound will be located south off the main site area and to the west of the central access point into the site.

Landscape scheme and detailed design

5.29 The existing hedgerow and hedgerow tree network along the site boundaries and internal field enclosures make a contribution to the local landscape character and is retained where possible. The Pre-development Arboricultural Report and Method Statement, Revision 1 (Wharncliffe Trees and Woodland Consultancy, October 2021) confirms that trees around the boundaries and within the interior of the site will remain unaffected by the proposed development subject to protection during the construction phase (detailed in the Arboricultural Method Statement).

5.30 This existing vegetation network is somewhat fragmented or lost and therefore such networks will be enhanced with new native planting along the site boundaries to 'layer' this network, as advocated in published guidance and local adopted policy. Such enhancements will have benefits including screening the development across the surrounding low-lying landscape, strengthening the local landscape character and improving the green infrastructure network for ecological benefits.

5.31 Enhancements alongside the public footpath through the centre of the site includes a minimum of ca. 2m between the existing hedgerow and security fencing to enable an additional double row of hedgerow planting, native shrub planting and native trees with adequate growth and maintenance space for the future. The development envelope is setback from the southern part of this route within the site boundary to allow additional space for users of the route.

5.32 The proposed native hedgerow planting alongside the footpath will supplement

the existing hedgerow to the west, which is fragmented and lost in places, and a new native hedgerow to the east of the route to maintain the nature of experience from the existing hedgerow on either side of the public footpath to the south. This additional planting will enhance existing and enable new habitats in terms of foraging and connectivity to create green movement corridors and will also minimise potential impacts from sensitive visual receptors along this route. The constructed Rowles Farm development illustrates the nature of direct views from the public footpath through the scheme and this mitigation will avoid/minimise such views occurring at the Noke site (refer to Chapter 4 of this LVIA).

5.33 Published character guidance also recommends native tree and shrub planting to visually contain new developments. In addition to the enhancement of hedgerow and hedgerow tree network detailed above, a landscape buffer of shrub, hedgerow and woodland/copse planting is proposed along the south-western edge of the development envelope. This planting, along with the existing landform, will minimise views of the development from the Oxfordshire Way recreational route to the south-west. Native planting across the site will also assist containment of the development from views from the escarpment landscape to the south-east, which are noted in the CDC Pre-application report.

5.34 For the purposes of verified photomontage production (refer to **Appendix C, Photomontages**), the proposed vegetation is modelled at 60-80cm and 2m for planting along the southern boundary at Year 1 and 3m at Year 10. Proposed hedgerow vegetation shall be maintained at no less than 3m in height. The proposed landscape buffer on the south-western edge of the site will comprise a matrix of woodland/small copse transplants with hedgerow whips and are modelled at 60-80cm at Year 1 and 5m at Year 10. Standard trees are modelled at 2.5m at year 1 and 7.5m at Year 10. These heights are based on worst case scenarios.

5.35 The offset from the security fencing around the solar panel areas will be planted with biodiverse grassland planting, as advocated by OWLS in particular on land adjacent to watercourses. This is limited to 1m along the northern edge of the development envelope to enable space for additional planting adjacent to the River Ray corridor to further visually and physically contain the development,

including from those using the public footpath adjacent to part of the northern site boundary.

5.36 Development is restricted from the eastern part of the site which is located within the Otmoor CTA. To the north there is an area proposed for ecological enhancement with wetland and meadow planting which will enhance biodiversity and the green infrastructure networks between the site, Otmoor CTA and the River Ray. The restriction of development from this area will also avoid short-distance views of potential development from the public bridleway which lies adjacent to the eastern edge of this area and the site.

5.37 Where existing vegetation will be lost, the landscape and green infrastructure strategy address this loss through proposed native planting where appropriate. This will be limited to where hedgerow vegetation will be lost to facilitate the proposed construction access track and four minor (ca. 6m) gaps in the hedgerow vegetation along the internal field boundary in the eastern field to facilitate suitable access (two of which have existing gaps).

5.38 The selection of species for the shrub, hedgerow and hedgerow tree planting refers to native species as well as those present in the context of the local landscape character. For example, Blackthorn which has benefits for the locally present but nationally scarce black and brown hairstreak butterflies. The high-quality detailed landscape scheme will reflect positively on the design quality of the proposed development as a whole.

5.39 In summary, the landscape strategy for the proposed development has been influenced by landscape and visual constraints and opportunities, published landscape character guidance and adopted local policy. The development envelope is determined in response to a number of factors including existing vegetation and field boundary offsets, Otmoor CTA, rising landform to the south and the local PRoW network with associated sensitive receptors. The development envelope also allows the view towards the Grade I Listed Church of St Nicholas in Islip from the public footpath to be retained.

5.40 The landscape scheme enhances the local landscape character with

enhancements to existing fragmented networks and native landscape planting, which in turn increases the physical and visual containment of the site from the wider landscape, as advocated in published landscape character guidance. It also provides a range of biodiversity benefits, notably in the eastern part which lies within the Otmoor CTA. The minimal vegetation removal will be addressed through proposed native planting.

5.41 Landscape mitigation measures are considered integral to the proposed development and have been developed as part of an iterative assessment process. Therefore, mitigation measures are considered in the balance of judgements when determining the magnitude of impacts and significance of effect.

6.0 ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

Overview of landscape effects

6.1 Landscape sensitivity is a term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements on the value related to a landscape (i.e. the receptor) with the susceptibility of the landscape to the specific type of change proposed. Receptors can include specific landscape elements or features or may be judged at a wider scale and include landscape character parcels, types or areas.

6.2 Although a landscape has some intrinsic sensitivity, in LVIA, landscape sensitivity is specific to the location in question (in terms of value) and also to the particular project or development that is being proposed (in terms of the susceptibility of a landscape to the specific type of development).

6.3 Consequently, and in accordance with the GLVIA3, to inform a detailed assessment of impacts, landscape sensitivity needs to be determined with reference to the value of the landscape and its susceptibility to change.

6.4 In the context of the site, this includes reference to the 'R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure' LCT, as identified within the Cherwell District Landscape Assessment (refer to **Figure 5, District Landscape Character**). The assessment is then also applied at a more refined level to consider additional judgements based on the landscape character of the site and local landscape context.

Landscape sensitivity

6.5 In order to inform judgements on value and susceptibility the following section refers to the baseline information (Section 4) and additional consideration of the local character in relation to the site and local landscape context. These judgements are then carried through to the analysis of landscape sensitivity.

Landscape value

6.6 In LVIA, landscape value is the value attached to a potentially affected landscape. It is relative in relation to the different stakeholders and different parts of society that use or experience a landscape.

6.7 This section determines the value of the defined LCT (and local landscape context) relevant to the site and study area. The considerations and professional judgements used in determining value are summarised in the following tables, with reference to GLVIA3, page 84, Box 5.1.

Value of LCT R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure

Table 3: Determining the value of LCT R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure

Considerations	LCT R1a
Designations	The LCT is not covered by any form of landscape/visual amenity planning designation. Although not specifically a landscape designation, the LCT (and entire study area) is covered by the Oxford Green Belt.
Landscape quality (condition) and scenic quality	In overall terms, the landscape quality of the LCT is moderate. This is due to a disparity between mature vegetation along some field boundaries in good condition and the poor condition of other hedgerow boundaries due to many gaps in the network. This is corroborated within published landscape character guidance which states that the LCT is a 'repair landscape' which is 'showing noticeable decline'. There is an urbanising/infrastructure influence across the LCT due to overhead electricity pylons and powerlines which run across the agricultural landscape and through the settlement of Islip and are detracting features in terms of scenic quality. The railway line and settlement of Islip tend to be visually contained from the wider LCT due to intervening vegetation.
Perceptual aspects	The published landscape guidance states that there are 'long views across the floodplain' due to 'very few trees'. It should be noted that within the study area mature tree groupings are present, including on the edge of Islip, which

	results in moderate visibility. Seclusion and remoteness are moderate in the LCT, due to the general physical and visual containment of built form at a local level and views across the wider agricultural landscape. However, the B4027, A34 and railway line cross this LCT which reduces the sense of tranquillity.
Rarity and representativeness	The LCT predominantly contains arable field enclosures which are not considered to be particularly unique features. The LCT is also located in several other areas within the District.
Conservation interests	Several scheduled monuments and listed buildings lie within the LCT, including the Church of St Nicholas' (Grade I) in Islip. A very small part of the LCT lies within the Otmoor CTA.
Recreational value	There are numerous PRoW routes across the LCT, notably through the agricultural landscape to the north of Islip. The Oxfordshire Way recreational route also passes through the LCT.
Associations	There are no known associations with people or events in history specifically related to the LCT.

6.8 On balance, it is considered that, in the context of the site and wider study area, the LCT R1a Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure is of **medium value** in landscape terms.

Value of the site and its local landscape context

Table 4: Determining the value of the site and local landscape context

Considerations	Site and local landscape context
Designations	The site is not covered by any form of landscape/visual amenity planning designation. Although not specifically a landscape designation, the site (and entire study area) is covered by the Oxford Green Belt.
Landscape quality (condition) and scenic quality	In overall terms, the landscape quality of the site and its local landscape context is generally poor. This is due to some fragmentation to boundary vegetation and loss of hedgerow in parts. The quality of the landscape is good within the eastern part of the site adjacent to Otmoor and adjacent to the River Ray to the north-east. The scenic quality of the site and its local landscape context is influenced by overhead electricity pylons and powerlines which run across the site and are detracting features. Albeit relatively well contained by vegetation, a slurry tank lies

	adjacent to the southern site boundary which further decreases the scenic quality.
Perceptual aspects	The site itself feels open in parts due to fragmented hedgerows and the large field enclosures, resulting in filtered views to the settlement edge of Noke to the south. However, the internal hedgerow vegetation, notably through the centre of the site alongside the public footpath, and mature vegetation along the eastern and northern site boundaries generally result in an enclosed feeling from the wider, flat landscape. Seclusion and remoteness are generally high due to the distance/intervening vegetation between existing built form and main transport routes through the local area. However, urbanising features include the overhead electricity pylons and powerlines and slurry tank.
Rarity and representativeness	The site and its local landscape context predominantly contain arable field enclosures which are not considered to be particularly unique features and are generally 'ordinary' or 'unremarkable'. The hedgerow and mature vegetation network within the site and its local landscape context are considered to be well represented within the local landscape.
Conservation interests	In respect of the site and its immediate landscape context, other than part of the eastern area of the site located within the Otmoor CTA, there are no immediate conservation interests. There is a view to the Grade I Church of St Nicholas' (within Islip to the west) from a break in vegetation adjacent to the southern site boundary from the public footpath which runs through the site.
Recreational value	The local PRoW network passes through the site itself, broadly through the centre and also adjacent to the north and eastern site boundaries. The Oxfordshire Way recreational route runs through the route of the proposed access track. These routes also pass through the settlements of Noke, Oddington and past Logg Farm and therefore their amenity is influenced by urban land uses.
Associations	There are no known associations with people or events in history specifically related to the site or its local landscape context.

6.9 On balance, it is considered that the local landscape character of the site and its local landscape context is of **low to medium value** in landscape terms.

Landscape susceptibility

6.10 In LVIA, landscape susceptibility is the ability of a landscape to accommodate change without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline

situation. Different types of development can affect landscapes in different ways and consequently landscape susceptibility is specific to the type of development proposed (i.e. renewable energy led development (solar farm)).

6.11 This section determines the susceptibility of the defined LCT as well as the site and its local landscape context. The considerations and professional judgements used in determining susceptibility are summarised in the following tables.

Susceptibility of LCT R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure

Table 5: Determining the susceptibility of LCT R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure

Considerations	LCT R1a
Scale of enclosure	There are mixed levels of enclosure across the LCT within the study area. The LCT is described within published landscape guidance as having 'open' fields and 'very few trees to interrupt the long views across the floodplain', which is accurate where boundary vegetation is lacking/fragmented. However, mature vegetation in some parts of the LCT, including Prattle Wood, and along field boundaries provide a sense of enclosure. The rising landform to the south-west of Noke also provides a localised sense of enclosure.
Nature of land use	Land use across the LCT is predominantly arable, as noted within the published landscape guidance. Farmsteads and the settlement of Islip are also located within the LCT and are interspersed within the wider arable landscape. A solar farm at Rowles Farm is also located within this LCT, which gives reference to the type of development proposed.
Nature of existing elements and features	The LCT contains some positive attributes in terms of a strong hedgerow network in parts and pockets of mature vegetation, which are relatively easy to replace/substitute. However, overhead electricity pylons and powerlines are detracting features in the LCT. Although not generally visible but often audible, the main transport networks of the B4027, A34 and railway line also run through this LCT.

6.12 On balance, it is considered that, in the context of the site and wider study

area and the consideration that the proposed development is temporary in nature, the LCT R1a Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure is of **medium susceptibility** in landscape terms.

Susceptibility of the site and its local landscape context

Table 6: Determining the susceptibility of the site and local landscape context

Considerations	Site and local landscape context
Scale of enclosure	The site is generally well enclosed to the north and east by mature boundary vegetation and adjacent watercourses. The internal hedgerow network, despite being fragmented or lost in places, also contributes to localised enclosure. The site is relatively open to the west and south in terms of vegetation cover but is enclosed somewhat by the rising landform in this direction.
Nature of land use	Land use across the site itself mostly comprises arable farmland and so there is little reference to the type of development proposed. However, there are filtered views across the site to the settlement of Noke to the south which offers context in terms of built form. Notwithstanding the change in part of the site to built form, part of the site is designated as an ecological enhancement area which will create an appropriate transition between the development and landscape of Otmoor to the east.
Nature of existing elements and features	The site and its local landscape context provide some positive attributes in terms of some hedgerow and tree vegetation in good condition and are relatively easy to replace/substitute. The nature of the medium to large scale field enclosures within the site result in the internal hedgerow networks able to be readily accommodated into the layout of the solar farm development and addressed by appropriate stand offs between the solar panels and vegetation. This opportunity to retain existing vegetation/field boundaries and enhance fragmented hedgerow vegetation reduces the susceptibility. Overhead electricity pylons and powerlines across the site itself and the existing slurry tank immediately adjacent are detracting features.

6.13 On balance, with the consideration that the proposed development is temporary in nature the local landscape character of the site and its local landscape context is of **low to medium susceptibility** in landscape terms.

Landscape sensitivity

6.14 The following conclusions on sensitivity are based on the detailed description and justification presented in the previous sections, balancing the professional judgements on value and susceptibility. Following a review of the types of impact on physical landscape resources, the conclusions on landscape sensitivity are then taken forward to address the impact and effect on landscape character.

6.15 Overall, the landscape analysis has determined the LCT R1a Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure to be of **medium value** and **medium susceptibility**. Therefore, the LCT is considered to be of **medium sensitivity** in landscape terms.

6.16 Overall, the landscape analysis has determined the character of the site and its local landscape context to be of **low to medium value** and **low to medium susceptibility**. Therefore, the site and its local landscape context is considered to be of **low to medium sensitivity** in landscape terms.

6.17 These judgements on sensitivity are taken forward to judgements regarding magnitude of change (or impact) and the subsequent balance to determine significance of effects.

Landscape impacts

Impacts on physical landscape resources

6.18 The following section describes the predicted changes to the physical landscape elements and features on the site that will give rise to the subsequent perceived changes in landscape character.

6.19 Construction impacts will include initial ground clearance, earthworks and limited clearance of existing vegetation. This process will also include the implementation of temporary measures such as site hoardings, temporary

fencing and vegetation/tree protection measures. These impacts will be temporary.

6.20 Impacts at completion are concerned with the long-term alteration in the landscape from the current undeveloped context of the site to the future scenario of the proposed development. The photovoltaic panels and associated infrastructure will be complete and are temporary but considered to be long-term.

6.21 In the long term, impacts will be associated with the influence of mitigation measures on landscape character. This establishes the changes to landscape character accounting for the proposed mitigation measures fully established and performing their intended function. The impacts are considered to be long term and not reversible.

6.22 In terms of physical landscape resources, the direct changes will be restricted to the site. These will include the change in land use from the current area of arable farmland to that of a solar farm and associated access track to the south and service tracks throughout the site. Existing green infrastructure will be retained and enhanced where possible, notably where the hedgerow network is fragmented and lost, and substantial new landscape planting. A new ecological enhancement area is proposed within the eastern part of the site, adjacent to the wider Otmoor landscape to the east.

6.23 The exception to this is where some areas of hedgerow will require removal in order to facilitate access across the site. This loss will be mitigated by proposed planting throughout the site.

6.24 Overall, the physical landscape impacts are considered to be direct and will be limited to the extent of the site only. There will be no additional direct impacts on the wider landscape context.

6.25 In the context of the impacts considered above, the following sections set out an assessment of the likely landscape effects on the relevant LCT and local landscape character.

LCT R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure

6.26 The site forms a minor part within the wider LCT, which extends across the majority of the western part of the study area. The LCT is influenced by pylons, overhead power lines, the settlement of Islip and interspersed development within the wider agricultural landscape. An existing solar farm near to Rowles Farm is located within the study area and so the LCT is already influenced by the type of development proposed. The scale of change is therefore considered to be small in terms of the introduction of built form within this LCT.

6.27 The published character guidance identifies differing LCTs in close proximity to the site (refer to **Figure 5, District Landscape Character**). This highlights the transitional nature of the landscape in close proximity to the site. The LCTs surrounding the site are identified as 'Conservation' landscapes within the published guidance, rather than a 'Repair' landscape in which the vast majority of the site is located. This presents an opportunity to enhance the site in line with the immediate surrounding area. This includes within the eastern area of the site adjacent to the wider landscape of Otmoor, identified within published guidance as a 'special feature' of 'international importance' and which also provides a physical barrier to the wider LCT in this location.

6.28 The existing hedgerow and mature tree network adjacent to the site and internal field boundaries are to be retained and enhanced where possible, which is advocated in the published landscape guidance for the LCT and considered to be critical to the character of the LCT. The main impacts are likely to arise from the change in land use from predominantly agricultural field enclosures to a solar farm development at a local level. Such changes are temporary but considered to be long-term.

6.29 Therefore, the magnitude of impact on this LCT will be **low**; assessed alongside the **medium sensitivity**, this will result in a **minor adverse effect**.

6.30 At year 10 after completion, the proposed landscape planting strategy will have established sufficiently to help further contain the proposed development in the wider landscape and enhance the local landscape character and transition

to Otmoor to the east. The magnitude of impact will reduce to **negligible** and there will be a **negligible to minor adverse effect**.

Landscape character of the site and its local landscape context

6.31 Effects on the local landscape character are defined as those occurring on the site and in the local landscape context of the site.

6.32 In the context of the site and its local landscape context, the proposed development will influence the landscape at a local scale and will result in the direct loss of several agricultural field enclosures. The boundaries of which and associated vegetation will be retained where possible, with appropriate setbacks from the development envelope. This change is to be balanced against the enhancements regarding opportunities for high-quality landscape planting to complement the local landscape character, including the ecological enhancement area within the eastern part of the site. The retained, enhancements and new landscape planting and 'buffers' throughout the site will contribute to breaking down the scale and massing of the proposed solar farm.

6.33 The proposed development will form the introduction of solar panel development in the relatively flat and low-lying area between, but physically separated from, the settlements of Noke, Oddington and Islip. The site also lies in close proximity to Logg Farm and associated built form to the north, but is separated physically and visually by mature vegetation associated with the River Ray and New River Ray. The development envelope is restricted from the eastern part of the site as this represents a key interface with the wider Otmoor landscape to the east.

6.34 Overall, the magnitude of impact on the local landscape is considered to be **medium**. This includes a balanced judgement in respect of the design of the masterplan and its associated inherent landscape mitigation. Assessed alongside the **low to medium sensitivity**, this will result in a **moderate adverse effect**.

6.35 At year 10 after competition, the proposed landscape planting strategy will have established sufficiently to help further integrate the proposed development into the surrounding landscape character. The magnitude of impact will reduce to **low to medium** and there will be a **minor to moderate adverse effect**.

7.0 ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS

Visual sensitivity

7.1 The sensitivity of a visual receptor is a function of the value attached to a particular view balanced with the susceptibility of the visual receptor to changes in a view and/or visual amenity. The criteria for the sensitivity of visual receptors are set out in the detailed methodology (**Appendix A, Methodology**).

Visual impacts

7.2 Visual impacts are considered separately to landscape impacts. For landscape impacts it is necessary to understand the combination of direct and indirect impacts on the landscape resources potentially affected by a proposed development and therefore it is possible to provide a description and overview of the key impacts that are likely to affect the study area.

7.3 However, for visual receptors it is necessary to understand the specific, direct impacts on each view. Therefore, the causes of impact are considered on the basis of individual receptors and are set out in the following sections as an integral part of the assessment of visual effects.

Visual effects

7.4 The following section summarises the main visual impacts which are likely to be generated by the proposed development. This includes reference to the likely significance of effects on specific visual receptors. Several representative viewpoints were captured during the field work and these are presented as a series of panoramic photos and included as **Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs**.

7.5 A detailed analysis has been completed for each of the representative viewpoints. This includes reference to the sensitivity of the visual receptors and

the nature and degree of the likely changes to the view.

7.6 **Table 7** sets out the detailed visual impact assessment and is followed by a summary description of visual effects.

Table 7: Assessment of visual effects

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Description of change and nature of impact	Magnitude and significance of effects Completion	Magnitude and significance of effects Year 10
VP1: View looking west from public footpath adjacent to the southern site boundary. This viewpoint is representative of short-distance views from users of the local PRoW network through the site between the settlements of Noke and Oddington.	High	From this location, there are direct views across the western part of the site. The rising land to the south-west of the site is visible in the left hand side of the view. The Grade I Listed Church of St Nicholas in Islip is visible in the distance above intervening vegetation to the east of the village. Electricity pylons and overheard wires which run through the site are also visible. It should be noted this view is taken from a break in vegetation and that views from the public footpath to the north of the viewpoint location are generally screened to the west further north due to adjacent hedgerow vegetation with some breaks where it is fragmented. Further south, hedgerow is adjacent either side of the public footpath which limits views to both the east and west. From this location, there are likely to be filtered views to solar panels and associated infrastructure through the landscape planting proposed along the south-western site boundary however this will largely be limited to within close proximity of the site. Many views will be set back from the solar panels and associated infrastructure due to the proposed	Magnitude: **Medium** Significance of effect: **Moderate to Major adverse**	Magnitude: **Low to Medium** Significance of effect: **Moderate adverse**

		landscape planting and distance from the site. The view corridor to the Grade I Listed Church in Islip from this specific viewpoint location will also be retained as demonstrated by **Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 1 Photomontage (Year 1).** Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm as demonstrated by **Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 1 Photomontage (Year 10).**		
VP2: View looking east from public footpath within the site boundary. This viewpoint is representative of short-distance views from users of the local PRoW network through the site between the settlements of Noke and Islip.	High	From this location, there are direct views across the eastern part of the site which is relatively flat. Views of the ground plane of the far eastern part of the site are limited due to internal hedgerow vegetation in the middle ground. Electricity pylons and overheard wires which run through the site are also visible. The view also demonstrates the fragmented boundary vegetation across some parts of the site, including adjacent to the southern boundary in the right hand side of the view. From this location, there are likely to be views of proposed solar panels and associated infrastructure through the proposed planting to the east of the public footpath in close proximity. Such views however will be set back due to an area of grassland planting proposed alongside the footpath. The panels are also set back from this location to allow more space along the public footpath.	Magnitude: **Low to medium** Significance of effect: **Moderate adverse**	Magnitude: **Low** Significance of effect: **Minor to moderate adverse**

		Existing hedgerow is adjacent on either side of the footpath to the south and therefore this character of the footpath to the south will be continued as it passes through the site. Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm.		
VP3: View looking south-west from public bridleway at north-eastern corner of the site boundary. This viewpoint is representative of short-distance views from users of the local PRoW network adjacent to the site between the settlements of Noke and Islip and on the edge of the wider landscape of Otmoor to the east.	High	From this location, there are direct views over the eastern most part of the site. The ground plane of the main part of the site is generally screened by internal hedgerow vegetation in the middle ground. The view demonstrates the containment of the site to the north by the River Ray and associated mature riparian vegetation. Electricity pylons and overheard wires which run through the site are also visible. The rising ground to the south-west of the site is visible in the left hand side of the view, as well as filtered views of existing built form within Noke above intervening vegetation. From this location, views will predominately be of the proposed ecological enhancement area within the eastern part of the site in the foreground which will be a high-quality landscaped area and highly beneficial in ecological terms. The existing hedgerow network along the eastern edge of the main site area largely screens existing views of where the proposed development is located in the middle ground. This vegetation will be supplemented with additional native landscape	Magnitude: **Low** Significance of effect: **Minor to moderate adverse**	Magnitude: **Negligible to low** Significance of effect: **Minor adverse**

		planting to enhance the local landscape character whilst also further containing the proposed development. Therefore, the size and scale of change will be small and proportion of the view will be limited. There is a very limited view of the spire of the Grade I Listed Church in Islip in the right-hand part of the view which is likely to be lost in order to further contain the proposed development along the eastern edge. However, this view is limited and it should be noted that this the viewpoint photograph is taken from a break in vegetation along the western edge of the bridleway and therefore the church is largely screened from this bridleway. Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm.		
VP4: View looking north from Oxfordshire Way near to Rectory Farm. This viewpoint is representative of short-distance views from users of the Oxfordshire Way recreational route on the northern edge of Noke.	Very high	From this location, there are no views towards the site due to the mature vegetation network on the northern edge of Noke. Due to intervening vegetation, from this location there are no anticipated views of the proposed development.	Magnitude: **Nil** Significance of effect: **Nil**	Magnitude: **Nil** Significance of effect: **Nil**

The viewpoint is also representative of residential receptors on the northern edge of Noke.				
VP5: View looking north-east from Oxfordshire Way west of Noke. This viewpoint is representative of short-distance views from users of the Oxfordshire Way recreational route between the settlements of Noke and Islip.	Very high	From this elevated location, there are direct views of the western part of the site in the middle ground which slopes down towards the River Ray corridor along the northern site boundary. Views to the ground plane of the eastern part of the site are filtered somewhat by internal hedgerow vegetation, however many of which are fragmented and so allows direct views. Mature vegetation is visible in the background adjacent to the River Ray and watercourse to the east of the site which offers containment of the site. Existing farm buildings to the north of the site are visible as well as electricity pylons and overheard wires which run through the site. From this location, there will be views of the upper extents of the solar panels and associated infrastructure as demonstrated by **Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 5 Photomontage View (Year 1)**. There will be views of the construction access track from this location as it passes in close proximity, which is temporary in nature and similar in character to the surrounding context of agricultural farm tracks.	Magnitude: **Low to Medium** Significance of effect: **Moderate adverse**	Magnitude: **Low** Significance of effect: **Minor-Moderate adverse**

		Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm assimilating the proposed development into the surrounding landscape. Over time views of the solar farm will become less discernible as demonstrated by **Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 5 Photomontage View (Year 10).**		
VP6: View looking north-east from Oxfordshire Way east of Islip. This viewpoint is representative of middle-distance views from users of the Oxfordshire Way recreational route between the settlements of Noke and Islip. The viewpoint is also representative of those visiting the 'Islip Roman villa' Scheduled Monument site.	Very high	From this location, there are views of the site in the middle ground and background which are somewhat filtered due to intervening vegetation. However, the majority of vegetation along the western site boundary is fragmented and so allows views to the ground plane of the site. This viewpoint is from a less elevated position than Viewpoint 5 located further east and so views of the site are screened more heavily by existing vegetation along intervening field boundaries. Mature vegetation is visible in the background adjacent to the River Ray which offers containment of the site. Existing farm buildings to the north of the site are visible as well as electricity pylons and overheard wires which run through the site. From this location, there are likely to be filtered views of the upper extents of the solar panels and associated infrastructure. Views will be further filtered by proposed planting alongside the southern and eastern edges of the development.	Magnitude: **Low to medium** Significance of effect: **Moderate adverse**	Magnitude: **Low** Significance of effect: **Minor to moderate adverse**

		Views of the construction access track are likely to be screened from this location due to rising landform and intervening vegetation. Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm, assimilating the development into the surrounding landscape.		
VP7: View looking east from Middle Street. This viewpoint is representative of middle-distance views from users of the local road network on the exit of Islip. The viewpoint is also representative of residential receptors along Middle Street. The viewpoint is also representative of the edge of Islip Conservation Area.	High	From this location, views in the direction of the site are largely screened by mature vegetation adjacent to Gallos Brook which lies to the west of Islip. An existing residential property along Middle Street on the edge of Islip is visible in the foreground. The rising ground to the south-west of the site is visible in the right hand side of the view in the background. From this location, the viewpoint is taken from a similar elevation to the site and due to considerable intervening vegetation between this and the site, therefore there are unlikely to be views of the proposed development. Any potential views of solar panels and associated infrastructure would be heavily filtered by existing and proposed landscape planting along the western edge of the development and within the context of existing built form. The size and scale of change will be very small and proportion of the view will be very limited.	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of effect: **Negligible adverse**	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of effect: **Negligible adverse**
VP8: View looking south-east from Bletchington Road	Medium	From this location, views in the direction of the site are largely screened by intervening vegetation along field boundaries and associated with Gallos Brook.	Magnitude: **Negligible**	Magnitude: **Negligible**

(B4027). This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the local road network on the approach to Islip.		The route of Bletchington Road is also visible. The view demonstrates the relatively flat land in the direction of the site and a gentle rise in landform in the right hand side of the view to the north-west of Islip. From this location, the site lies at a similar topographical level as the viewpoint location and the landform between remains relatively flat and so due to the intervening vegetation there are unlikely to be views of the proposed development. Any views would be heavily filtered by existing and proposed landscape planting along the northern and western edges of the development. The size and scale of change will be very small and proportion of the view will be very limited.	Significance of effect: **Negligible adverse**	Significance of effect: **Negligible adverse**
VP9: View looking south from Middle Street. This viewpoint is representative of middle-distance views from users of the local road network between Islip and Oddington/to the north.	Medium	From this location, there are views across the agricultural fields to the north of the site as the landform falls away towards the River Ray and its associated vegetation. There are partial views from this location to the western part of the site where there is less vegetation along the River Ray corridor, the eastern part is heavily filtered by intervening vegetation, including the Ancient Woodland block to the north of the site. The landform then rises in the background where there are partial views of existing built form within Noke. Further in the background the landform continues to rise, to the south-west of Noke, and there are views of surrounding agricultural fields and the route of the Oxfordshire Way.	Magnitude: **Low** Significance of effect: **Negligible adverse**	Magnitude: **Negligible to low** Significance of effect: **Negligible adverse**

		From this location, there will be partial views of the development within the eastern part of the site as the landform rises south of the River Ray corridors, as demonstrated by **Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 9 Photomontage View (Year 1).** Such views will be filtered further by proposed mature planting alongside the northern site boundary and in the context of existing built form in the background. as demonstrated by **Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 9 Photomontage View (Year 10).** There are unlikely to be views of the proposed development in the eastern part of the site due to intervening mature vegetation. The size and scale of change will be small and proportion of the view will be limited. There may be filtered views of the construction access track from this location on higher ground in the background, which is temporary in nature and similar in character to the surrounding context of agricultural farm tracks.		
VP10: View looking south from Oxfordshire Way near to Oddington Grange. This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the Oxfordshire Way recreational route	Very high	From this location, long-distance views towards the site are heavily screened by intervening mature vegetation. From this location, the landform remains relatively flat from this location towards the site and so there are unlikely to be views of the proposed development due to intervening mature vegetation. The size and scale of change will be very small and proportion of the view will be very limited from this distance.	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of effect: **Neutral**	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of effect: **Neutral**

between Islip and Weston-on-the-Green.				
VP11: View looking south-west from public bridleway on footbridge over New River Ray south of Charlton-on-Otmoor. This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the local PRoW network south of Charlton-on-Otmoor.	High	From this location, there are no views towards the site due to intervening mature 'layered' vegetation along field boundaries and within woodland blocks. Due to distance and intervening vegetation, from this location there are no anticipated views of the proposed development.	Magnitude: **Nil** Significance of effect: **Nil**	Magnitude: **Nil** Significance of effect: **Nil**
VP12: View looking south-west from public bridleway east of Oddington. This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the local PRoW network within Otmoor.	Very high	From this location, long-distance views towards the site are heavily screened by intervening mature vegetation. It should also be noted that this viewpoint is taken from a 'break' in the mature vegetation along this route. From this location, the landform remains relatively flat from this location towards the site and so there are unlikely to be views of the proposed development due to intervening mature vegetation. The size and scale of change will be very small and proportion of the view will be very limited from this distance.	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of effect: **Neutral**	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of effect: **Neutral**
VP13: View looking	Very high	From this elevated location, the landform falls away	Magnitude:	Magnitude:

north-west from Oxfordshire Way north of Church Street. This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the Oxfordshire Way recreational route between Beckley and Noke.		in the direction of the site and the surrounding low-lying landscape. In the middle ground Sling Copse is visible on lower ground which screens some of the low-lying landscape in the background. The site is visible in the background above Sling Copse. The western part of the site is largely screened by intervening vegetation on the northern edge of Noke, however there are views of the eastern part of the site in the background. It should be noted that views towards the site from the route of the Oxfordshire Way immediately south of this location are largely screened by intervening vegetation/built form in Beckley. Further north-west along this route the landform falls rapidly and so views are likely to be screened by Sling Copse. Therefore this view is only representative of a short section along the Oxfordshire Way. From this location, there are likely to be filtered views of the upper extents of solar panels and associated infrastructure in the distance. Such views will be somewhat filtered due to proposed mature planting alongside the southern and western edges of the development. The size and scale of change will be small and proportion of the view will be limited from this distance as demonstrated by **Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 13 Photomontage View (Year 1).** Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm as demonstrated by **Appendix C**	**Negligible to Low** Significance of effect: **Minor adverse**	**Negligible** Significance of effect: **Negligible Adverse**

		Photomontages: Viewpoint 13 Photomontage View (Year 1).		
VP14: View looking north-west from Oxfordshire Way north of Noke Wood. This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the Oxfordshire Way recreational route between Beckley and Noke.	Very high	From this location, which is at a similar topographical level as the site, views towards the western part of the site are heavily screened by mature vegetation on the southern edge of Noke which is visible in the middle ground. Partial views are available towards the eastern part of the site, which are filtered somewhat by Lower Farm and intervening vegetation. The farm buildings to the north of the site are partially visible in the background. Lower Wood's Farmhouse is visible in the middle ground on the left hand side of the view. From this location, due to the similar topographical level of the viewpoint, views will be heavily filtered by proposed mature planting alongside the southern and eastern edge of the development. Any heavily filtered views will be within the context of existing built form in the middle ground and background. The size and scale of change will be low and proportion of the view will be limited from this distance. Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm.	Magnitude: **Negligible to Low** Significance of effect: **Minor adverse**	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of effect: **Negligible adverse**
VP15: View looking north-west from Common Road.	Medium	From this elevated location, the landform falls away in the direction of the site and the surrounding low-lying landscape. Existing built form is visible in the middle ground and background, including Lower Farm	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of	Magnitude: **Negligible** Significance of

This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the local road network on the approach to Beckley.		on the southern edge of Noke and the farm buildings to the north of the site. This view demonstrates how the mature vegetation to the west of Beckley screens some views towards the site from the higher ground. The majority of the western part of the site is heavily screened by intervening vegetation. Partial views are available towards the eastern part of the site, which are filtered somewhat by intervening vegetation. From this location, there are therefore likely to be filtered views of the upper extents of the solar panels and associated infrastructure. This will be somewhat filtered due to proposed mature planting alongside the southern and western edges of the development. The size and scale of change will be small and proportion of the view will be limited from this distance. Over time, proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm.	effect: **Negligible Adverse**	effect: **Negligible Adverse**
VP16: View looking north from Oxford Greenbelt Way east of Woodeaton Wood. This viewpoint is representative of long-distance views from users of the Oxford	Very high	From this location, there are no views towards the site due to the rising landform away from the viewpoint location before falling towards the site and intervening mature vegetation. Due to distance and intervening vegetation, from this location there are unlikely to be views of the proposed development.	Magnitude: **Nil** Significance of effect: **Nil**	Magnitude: **Nil** Significance of effect: **Nil**

Greenbelt Way recreational route north of Elsfield.				

Overview of visual effects

7.7 The following section provides an overview of visual effects.

Short-distance views from the public right of way network

7.8 Direct views of the site from the local PRoW network are generally confined to short-distance views, including those which pass through and immediately adjacent to the site (refer to **Viewpoints 1, 2 and 3, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs and Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 1 Photomontage View.**). These views demonstrate the flat nature of the landscape of the site and therefore the localised screening and containment achieved by internal and boundary vegetation networks, albeit fragmented in places. The views in some instances also display urbanising infrastructure features including views to existing built form and the electricity pylons and overhead wires which extend across the site.

7.9 There are no views towards the site from the PRoW network within the settlement of Noke due to intervening mature vegetation and built form (refer to **Viewpoint 4, Figure 7**). As the Oxfordshire Way extends west from the settlement, the landform is relatively higher than the site and therefore there are views of the western part of the site and filtered views of the eastern part (refer to **Viewpoint 5, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs and Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 5 Photomontage View**). Views of the construction access track are visible from this route in close proximity, which is temporary in nature and similar in character to the surrounding context of agricultural farm tracks.

7.10 Any views of the proposed development will be heavily screened on the low-lying landform due to proposed high-quality, native mature planting along internal field boundaries and edges of the development. This includes alongside either side of the public footpath through the site which will maintain the character of the route from the south and have ecological benefits. Filtered views of the upper extents of solar panels and associated infrastructure are likely from relatively higher receptors, including from the Oxfordshire Way west

of Noke, which are within the context of existing built form.

7.11 The proposed solar farm development is physically and visually separated from the wider Otmoor landscape to the east by a proposed ecological enhancement area. The landscape buffer on the south-western edge of the development will be set back enough to retain the existing view corridor to the Church of St Nicholas in Islip (refer to **Viewpoint 1, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs and Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 1 Photomontage View**).

Middle to long-distance views from the public right of way network

7.12 Filtered views of the site are available from the middle-distance from the Oxfordshire Way as it continues north-west towards Islip (refer to **Viewpoint 6, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs**). As the landform falls in this direction views of the site are somewhat filtered by intervening vegetation, albeit fragmented in places. Any filtered views of the proposed development will be further screened by proposed landscape planting along the southern and eastern edges of the development.

7.13 Views from the remaining PRoW network at the middle to long-distance tend to be heavily screened by mature intervening vegetation and existing built form, including that along the River Ray immediately north of the site and various other watercourses in the local landscape. This includes from Islip to the west and from the wider Otmoor landscape to the east (refer to **Viewpoints 11 and 12, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs**).

7.14 The majority of the surrounding landscape to the north and east lie at a similar topographical level to the site and so intervening existing and proposed vegetation reduces intervisibility (refer to **Viewpoint 10, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs**). Partial views of the eastern part of the site are available from the relatively more open landscape to the south-east (refer to **Viewpoint 14, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs**). Views of the proposed development will be further filtered by proposed planting along the southern and eastern edges.

Long-distance views from the elevated land to the south-east

7.15 Long-distance views from the elevated landform to the south-east of the site near to Beckley are generally filtered by intervening mature vegetation on the sloping landform and existing built form within Beckley (refer to **Viewpoint 16, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs**). As the Oxfordshire Way extends north from Beckley and along the local road network on the approach to Beckley, there are vantage points where the eastern part of the site is visible (refer to **Viewpoints 13 and 15, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs and Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 13 Photomontage View**). Such views will be somewhat filtered by proposed native mature planting alongside the southern and western edges of the development.

7.16 Over time this proposed landscape planting will become more established and further screen views of the proposed solar farm.

Views from the local road network

7.17 Views of the site from the local road network are confined to the low-lying surrounding landscape to the north, south and west as the wider Otmoor landscape to the east is devoid of road access. Similarly to the surrounding PRoW network, views are largely filtered by existing built form and intervening vegetation alongside field boundaries and watercourses (refer to **Viewpoints 7 and 8, Figure 7: Viewpoint Photographs**).

7.18 There are partial middle-distance views of the western part of the site from Middle Street to the north of the site where existing intervening vegetation is less along the River Ray corridor (refer to **Viewpoint 9, Figure 7 and Appendix C Photomontages: Viewpoint 13 Photomontage View**). There may be views of the construction access track on higher ground in the distance, again which is temporary in nature and similar in character to the surrounding context of agricultural farm tracks.

7.19 Any filtered views of the proposed development from the local road network will be reduced by proposed native planting alongside the edges of the