



Planning, Design and Access Statement

Proposed 44 MW Solar PV Array, and Battery Storage Development, on land near Stratton Audley, Cherwell District, Oxfordshire, England (OX27 9AL)

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Contents

- 1 Executive Summary..... 5**
- 2 Introduction 6**
 - 2.1 Introduction 6
 - 2.2 Scope of the Planning Application 6
 - 2.3 This Document..... 8
- 3 Site and Surroundings 9**
 - 3.1 Site Location 9
 - 3.2 Alternative Site Appraisal & Sequential Test..... 10
- 4 The Proposed Development 12**
 - 4.1 Details of the Proposed Development 12
 - 4.2 ‘BESS’ Technology 13
 - 4.3 Landscape Mitigation Plan..... 13
 - 4.4 Biodiversity Net Gains..... 13
 - 4.5 Access and Traffic Management..... 14
 - 4.6 Public Rights of Way 14
 - 4.7 Operational Lifespan 14
 - 4.8 Designing out Crime 14
- 5 Pre-application Engagement..... 15**
 - 5.1 Pre-application Meeting and Advice..... 15
 - 5.2 EIA Screening Request 15
 - 5.3 Public Consultation Strategy 16
- 6 Planning History..... 17**
 - 6.1 Application Site 17
 - 6.2 Planning Appeals..... 17
- 7 The Development Plan Policy 20**
 - 7.1 Introduction 20
 - 7.2 Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1): Partial Review: Oxford’s Unmet Housing Need (September 2020)’ 20
 - 7.3 Saved Policies of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 24
 - 7.4 Stratton Audley Neighbourhood Plan 24
 - 7.5 Summary..... 25



8	Other Material Considerations	26
8.1	Introduction	26
8.2	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) July 2021.....	26
8.3	Planning Practice Guidance – Climate Change.....	28
8.4	Planning Practice Guidance – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy	29
8.5	The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019	29
8.6	British Energy Security Strategy.....	29
8.7	Summary.....	30
9	Principle of Development.....	31
9.1	The Principle of Development.....	31
9.2	Other Material Considerations	32
9.3	Conclusion	33
10	Design Development.....	34
10.1	Introduction	34
10.2	Proposed Layout Alterations	34
11	Other Environmental Considerations.....	35
11.1	Introduction	35
11.2	Landscape.....	35
11.3	Highways and Transportation.....	36
11.4	Ecology.....	36
11.5	Arboriculture.....	37
11.6	Noise.....	37
11.7	Archaeology	38
11.8	Built Heritage	38
11.9	Flood Risk and Drainage	39
11.10	Loss of Agricultural Land	39
11.11	Glint and Glare.....	40
11.12	Conclusion: Assessment of the Impacts.....	40
12	Planning Balance	41
12.1	Benefits vs Harm	41
12.2	Planning Balance	42
13	Summary and Conclusions.....	44
13.1	Summary.....	44

13.2 Conclusion 44



1 Executive Summary

- 1.1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared by ADAS Planning (Agent) on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 8 Ltd (Applicant).
- 1.1.2 JBM Solar is a UK-based specialist solar developer with extensive experience delivering large-scale ground-mounted solar and battery storage projects across the UK and Ireland. JBM has achieved consent for over 1GW of subsidy-free projects, and places a special focus on biodiversity enhancements, and community engagement on every scheme they develop, crediting this for their 98% success rate at planning.
- 1.1.3 This Statement is submitted in support of a Planning Application under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (hereafter 'TCPA') (as amended) for the installation of a 44 MW Solar PV Array, and Battery Storage Development, on land near Stratton Audley, Cherwell District, Oxfordshire, England (OX27 9AL).
- 1.1.4 It has grown increasingly imperative for the UK to identify an affordable and consistent energy supply, for the utilisation of both current and future populations. This Proposal is an opportunity to produce a significant amount of renewable, carbon-free electricity in the UK, whilst utilising innovative technology to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This project is expressly supported in both the Local Development Plan and at national level in the NPPF, PPG's and the Climate Change Act 2008.
- 1.1.5 The Site of the proposed development is located 4.2 km to the northeast of the Town and Civil Parish of Bicester and comprises a series of agricultural fields separated in part by hedgerow boundaries. It has been confirmed that the agricultural land on the Application Site is Grade 3b and therefore does not comprise Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land, as defined in the NPPF. The Site is situated outside of an identified settlement boundary and measures 59.4 hectares in size, or 67.9 hectares when including the proposed cable run.
- 1.1.6 Prior to the submission of this Planning Application, Pre-application advice was sought from Cherwell District Council. The LPA's response on the 12th of September 2022 has consequently been used to inform the Proposals on the Site. Full details of the Public Consultation are set out in Chapter 5 of this Statement and the accompanying Statement of Community Involvement.
- 1.1.7 This Planning, Design and Access Statement sets out the need for the development and provides a detailed assessment of the Proposal against the relevant policies in Cherwell's Development Plan and other material considerations, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendments).
- 1.1.8 This Statement and the submitted reports demonstrate that the Proposed Development accords with relevant planning policy and other material considerations, and that planning permission should be granted without delay.

2 Introduction

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared by ADAS Planning (henceforth 'ADAS') on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 8 Ltd (henceforth 'JBM').
- 2.1.2 JBM Solar is a UK-based specialist solar and battery storage developer, with extensive experience delivering large-scale projects in the UK and Ireland. To date, JBM has achieved consent for over 1GW of subsidy free solar and battery storage projects in the UK, with a 98% success rate at planning. JBM Solar always seeks to place a special focus on biodiversity enhancements across its sites, in addition to undertaking extensive community engagement prior to submitting Planning Applications.
- 2.1.3 The Proposal is for the construction of a 44 MW Solar PV Array, and Battery Storage Development, on land near Stratton Audley, Cherwell District, Oxfordshire, England (OX27 9BE).
- 2.1.4 The description of development is as follows:
- “Installation and operation of a renewable energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with a switchgear container, inverter/transformer units, Site access, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.”
- 2.1.5 The Proposal will generate enough electricity to meet the equivalent needs of over 16,680 UK homes per annum. Furthermore, the Proposal will save over 32,947 tonnes of CO₂ every year, resulting in an overall saving of 1,317,880 tonnes over its lifetime compared to energy generation from fossil fuels. That's the equivalent of taking over 283,963 cars off the road for a year or planting 21,791,259 trees.
- 2.1.6 The Proposal also incorporates Battery Storage facilities, utilising flexible, safe technology, to absorb surplus electricity at times of excess generation, and releasing this when needed. This offers the potential for a near-immediate response to demands, whilst also provide the ability to import and export energy for seconds, minutes or hours, dependant on demand, balancing the grid network. This is vital to success if we are to achieve the goal of decarbonizing our grid network, as more intermittent sources of renewable energy generation come online in the years to come.
- 2.1.7 In this respect, the Proposal represents an exciting project which will make a meaningful contribution to the renewable energy landscape in the UK, thus assisting to reduce our reliance on imported energy, fossil fuels and also to become self-sufficient in energy generation.

2.2 Scope of the Planning Application

- 2.2.1 This Statement is one of a number of documents submitted in support of the Proposed Development. The following documents are submitted in support of this Planning Application:

- 1) Planning Application Forms and Plans;

- 2) Planning, Design and Access Statement;
- 3) Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
- 4) Site Enhancement Strategy (SES);
- 5) Photomontages;
- 6) Landscape and Ecological Mitigation Plan (LEMP);
- 7) Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and subsequent Surveys;
- 8) Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report;
- 9) Acoustics Assessment;
- 10) Arboricultural Statement;
- 11) Highways Statement & Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP);
- 12) Flood Risk Assessment (FRA);
- 13) Archaeology Desk Based Assessment (DBA);
- 14) Geophysical Survey;
- 15) Built Heritage Assessment;
- 16) ALC Survey Report;
- 17) Glint and Glare Study;
- 18) Statement of Community Involvement (SCI); and
- 19) BESS Technical Statement (BESS TS).

2.2.2 The information contained within the reports outlined above provides a comprehensive assessment of the impacts of the Proposed Development and complies with Cherwell District Council's Validation Checklist.

2.2.3 In addition to the above documentation, the following Plans are submitted alongside the Planning Application:

- Site Location Plan A (Drawing No: 1120022-ADAS-XX-XX-DR-P-8001)
- Site Location Plan B (Drawing No: 1120022-ADAS-XX-XX-DR-P-8002)
- Proposed Layout - Overall (Drawing No: 1051745-ADAS-XX-XX-DR-PL-8000)
- Indicative Access Drawing (Drawing No: 111299-10-01)
- Comms and Weather Station Mast (Rev. A)
- Indicative Construction Compound (Rev. A)
- Battery Stations Ancillary Drawing (Rev. A)
- Cable Route Trench Section Details (Rev. A)
- Customer Switchgear (Rev. A)
- DNO Building Details (Rev. A)
- Fence, Track & CCTV (Rev. A)
- Access Gate (Rev. A)
- Battery Stations Ancillary Drawing 2 (Rev. A)
- Inverter Station Details (Rev. A)
- PV Table Details 3P (Rev. A)
- Spares Container Details (Rev. A)
- Trench Section Details (Rev. A)

2.2.4 The Plans outlined within the above list are those necessary to describe the nature of this Proposal, in line with the Council's Validation Checklist, as referred to in Paragraph 2.2.2.

2.3 This Document

2.3.1 The remainder of the Statement is structured as follows:

- Chapter 3 describes the Site and its surroundings;
- Chapter 4 describes the Proposed Development;
- Chapter 5 provides details of Pre-application engagement undertaken;
- Chapter 6 details the planning history of the Application Site;
- Chapter 7 details the relevant policies in the Development Plan;
- Chapter 8 details other material considerations;
- Chapter 9 confirms the principle of development;
- Chapter 10 details how the layout design has developed;
- Chapter 11 provides a full assessment of other environmental considerations;
- Chapter 12 assesses the planning balance; and
- Chapter 13 sets out the summary and conclusions.

3 Site and Surroundings

3.1 Site Location

- 3.1.1 The Site is located 4.2 km to the northeast of the Town and Civil Parish of Bicester and comprises a series of agricultural fields separated in part by hedgerow boundaries. The Site is situated outside of an identified settlement boundary and measures a total of 59.4 hectares, or 67.9 hectares inclusive of the cable run (which will run almost entirely below the Highway/Verge).
- 3.1.2 The location of the Site is indicated below in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Aerial view of the Application Site.

- 3.1.3 The Site forms a reversed 'L' shape and is comprised of 7 agricultural field parcels, in the open countryside, separated by boundary hedgerows and intermittent low-level fencing. Access to the Site is currently obtained via the existing agricultural access point off the unnamed single-track road, which runs along the entire southern flank of the Site. This track in turn links to Buckingham Road (A4421), which provides access in and out of Bicester to the southwest.
- 3.1.4 The character of the Site surroundings is mixed, with Pool Farm being directly adjacent to the northwest of the Site and accessed off the other unnamed track along the western flank of the Site. In the wider area, Stratton Audley (village) is located circa 0.7 km to the southwest of the Site and Fringford (village) is 1.5 km to the north west.
- 3.1.5 The topography of the Site is relatively flat, with the areas of highest ground comprising the central and northern sections of the Site. There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) on the Site itself. However, along a short section of the northern boundary, runs PRoW

Ref. '371 8b/10'. Furthermore, PRoW '225 6/10' (to the east) and PRoW '371 3/10' (to the south) are also in close proximity to the boundary of the Site.

- 3.1.6 Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land is defined as Grades 1, 2, and 3a and is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as the land, which is most flexible, productive, and efficient in response to inputs, and which can best deliver future crops. Following a full survey of the Site, it has been confirmed that it comprises entirely of Grade 3b and therefore does not constitute BMV Agricultural Land, and there will therefore be no loss of 'BMV' land as a result of the Proposal.
- 3.1.7 There are no national landscape or ecology designations within the perimeter of the Site. Within a 2 km radius, the only statutory designed Site, is Stratton Audley Quarries (SSSI) to the south. The area of trees directly northwest of the Site comprises an area of Ancient Woodland which supports a high botanical and insect diversity. This feature constitutes a non-statutory Nature Conservation Site.
- 3.1.8 The Site is located wholly within Flood Risk Zone 1, at the lowest risk of flooding from rivers and the sea. The Site is also at very low risk of flooding from surface water. Notwithstanding this, it is noted that Padbury Brook is located around 290m to the east/north-east of the Site, which will remain unaffected by the Proposal.
- 3.1.9 The Application Site is not located within a Conservation Area. Furthermore, there are no listed buildings located within or directly adjacent to the red line boundary. The nearest listed buildings are as follows:
- Moat Farmhouse – Grade II (List UID 1286457): 1.3 km east
 - Church of Holy Trinity – Grade II (List UID 1046448): 1.3 km east
 - Elm Farmhouse and Abutting Dairy/Stable Range – Grade II (List UID 1369801): 1 km southwest
 - Elm Farmhouse, Barn Approximately 50m North – Grade II (List UID 1286217): 1.1 km southwest
 - The Willows Farmhouse – Grade II (List UID 1046403): 1.1 km southwest

3.2 Alternative Site Appraisal & Sequential Test

- 3.2.1 A full review of the local area has been undertaken in order to compare potential locations for a development of this type. This review includes a Sequential Assessment, which considers factors such as grid connectivity, land area and sunlight when assessing the appropriateness of a Site for a Solar PV Array and battery storage development.
- 3.2.2 In regard to the available Site size, it is noted that following the removal of the Government's solar subsidy, larger scale Sites are required in order to allow for the development to reach economies of scale and therefore be financially viable.
- 3.2.3 It is noted that grid connectivity is one of the main restrictions when reviewing and assessing the suitability of a Site for solar development, with areas being limited due to available grid infrastructure and capacity, as well as the potential to secure a viable connection. It is confirmed that the Site is in a suitable location in respect of access to grid connections.
- 3.2.4 The Site for this Proposed Development is greenfield land. Whilst a development of this type on brownfield land would be preferable, a search of the LPA's brownfield land

register, revealed there to be no sites of suitable size in this area. The existing brownfield sites in close enough proximity to the grid connection were either already being used for alternative development (such as housing or industrial purposes), or not of a size large enough to develop an economically viable scheme. Additionally, it is noted that a brownfield Site would have to be available for a period of 40 years. It is considered that this is uncommon due to the wider development potential of such land for competing land uses such as residential and commercial. Further to this, the point would also be raised that the development of a Solar PV Array is often not an economically competitive development type on brownfield Sites due to this wider development potential.

- 3.2.5 The Site's open and rural location, and the fact that it is not shaded by any nearby features in the landscape make it highly suitable for this type of development. This provides a clear benefit to a scheme of this nature as it results in significantly more electricity generation than at other locations.
- 3.2.6 It is important to note that the site will also remain greenfield land, due to the low impact nature of the proposed development, should permission be granted, and would still constitute greenfield land once the temporary development was decommissioned after 40 years.
- 3.2.7 As a result of the above considerations, it is considered that following the alternative Site appraisal, the proposed Site is in the only viable location in the area and the proposed development will have the least amount of impact.

4 The Proposed Development

4.1 Details of the Proposed Development

- 4.1.1 The Proposal has been informed by the Site's opportunities and constraints, the Pre-application enquiry to Cherwell District Council and the Public Consultation exercise that was undertaken (see Chapter 5).
- 4.1.2 The Proposal is for the erection of a 44 MW Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Array, and Battery Storage Development. Other features included as part of the Proposed Layout include:
- Boundary Fencing (or 'Deer' Fencing)
 - Inverter Stations
 - Spares Containers
 - Battery Stations
 - CCTV Cameras
 - Landscaping Works
 - Internal Access Tracks
 - Communication Mast
 - Construction Compound
 - Other Associated Infrastructure
- 4.1.3 Access to the Site during both the Operational and Construction Phases will be gained via the existing agricultural access point off the unnamed single-track road, to the southern flank of the Site. The access point will be fitted with a gate and a turning area for the benefit of larger construction vehicles entering the Site.
- 4.1.4 In regard to the design of the Arrays, a fixed tilt system will be utilised, in east-west rows, facing in a southerly direction. The panels are covered by high transparency solar glass with an anti-reflective coating which minimises glint and glare, whilst also allowing the maximum absorption of the available sunlight. The panels are dark grey/blue in colour.
- 4.1.5 The inverter containers will be located at intervals throughout the Site and situated side-by-side in a linear fashion. Off-site cabling works are proposed, running southwest through the settlement of Stratton Audley towards Bicester, and then cutting southeast along Skimmingdish Lane (the 'A4421') to connect to the existing substation. The full extent of the cable route is shown in 'Site Location Plan B' which accompanies this Planning Application.
- 4.1.6 The Solar PV Panels will be erected on posts ensuring that the soil beneath them will still be available for the infiltration of rainwater, in addition to the planting of high-quality grassland, maintained by sheep grazing or infrequent mowing. In addition, the inverter station, customer switch gear, spare containers and battery stations will all be elevated above ground level.
- 4.1.7 The final layout for this development has been refined to ensure that there are no adverse impacts arising from the Proposal, whilst also incorporating enhancement measures into the scheme. Chapter 11 of this Statement provides a summary of all the assessed impacts of the Proposal.

4.2 'BESS' Technology

- 4.2.1 BESS facilities utilise flexible technology, absorbing surplus electricity at times of excess generation, releasing this when needed, offering the potential for a near-immediate response to demands, whilst also providing the ability to import and export energy for seconds, minutes or hours, dependent on demand.
- 4.2.2 Furthermore, BESS is compatible with renewable energy sources, allowing for the capture of energy generated from wind and solar, which can often be intermittent. Battery storage facilities allow for a degree of certainty that, in times of a surge, there will always be power reserves available to meet demand and to avoid power blackouts and improve overall energy security.
- 4.2.3 The UK is continuing its push towards a carbon neutral society, and in order to achieve this, battery storage facilities are essential for supporting renewable energy generation.

4.3 Landscape Mitigation Plan

- 4.3.1 The Proposed Layout incorporates a series of measures to mitigate the potential effects on the immediate and surrounding landscape. It also includes the retention of as many important landscape features as possible and the inclusion of an appropriate landscape scheme.
- 4.3.2 In addition to this, the following mitigation and enhancement Proposals respond to the findings in the LVIA:
- Retention of almost all existing hedgerow and trees along the boundaries.
 - Existing hedgerows will be allowed to grow to a height of 3-4 m, to assist in screening views of the site.
 - Creation of new tree-lined hedgerow just inside northern boundary to block views from Public Right of Way Ref. 371/8b/10.
 - Extensive tree planting along all site boundaries to filter views of the site.
 - Creation of a double staggered hedgerow along a section of the western boundary (closest to Pool Farm) to further filter views of the site from the grounds.
 - Species rich grassland within the site compound fenced area, beneath the solar panels.
 - The agricultural land beneath the solar panels would be converted to pasture.
- 4.3.3 Planting stock used in the landscape Proposals will be native and, where feasible, locally sourced. The palette of indicative species will take into consideration the native species present in the vicinity of the Site and the proposed trees will also be sized appropriately to their location. Full details on Landscape Mitigation are set out the accompanying Site Enhancement Strategy (SES).

4.4 Biodiversity Net Gains

- 4.4.1 The Proposed Development will minimise any potential impacts on the environment and, in addition, provide 215.29% biodiversity net gains throughout the Site. In particular, the Proposal will seek to enhance local habitats by implementing measures such as

dedicated spaces for wildflower meadows, new hedgerow planting and the installation of beehives. This will be explored fully in Chapter 11 of this Statement.

4.5 Access and Traffic Management

- 4.5.1 Access into the Proposed Development would be through the existing agricultural access point off the unnamed single-track road, which runs along the entire southern flank of the Site (see Paragraph 4.1.3). It is considered that the existing access point to the Site is suitable for construction vehicles of varying size. The duration of the construction period will be short owing to the nature of the development (estimation of 6 months).
- 4.5.2 There will be no construction works during the weekend, as outlined in the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP). This is explored fully, in Chapter 11 of this Statement.
- 4.5.3 Upon completion, operational access will be maintained at this same point, which will be fitted with a gate and include a turning area for the benefit of larger vehicles visiting the Site. Once the development becomes operational, the development will create very little additional traffic, as it requires low levels of on-Site maintenance.

4.6 Public Rights of Way

- 4.6.1 It is noted that PRoW Ref. '371 8b/10' runs along a short section of the northern boundary. Furthermore, PRoW '225 6/10' (to the east) and PRoW '371 3/10' (to the south) are also in close proximity to the boundary of the Site.
- 4.6.2 The Proposal will seek to retain all footpaths in their current location, providing a buffer of 15m to the footpath along the northern boundary of the site. Furthermore, in line with the PRoW Officer's feedback during the Pre-application Enquiry, the proposed layout would incorporate a permissive path along the eastern flank of the Site, linking the footpath network to the north of the site with the footpath network to the south of the site, allowing effective access through the Site and improving the overall footpath network's connectivity in the wider area.

4.7 Operational Lifespan

- 4.7.1 The development would have a lifespan of about 40 years. At the end of the useful life of the facility, it will be decommissioned, and all the associated equipment will be removed. It is considered that the land can then be quickly reverted to agricultural use, therefore the proposed development will not lead to the permanent loss of agricultural land, and it should also be noted that >95% of the Site can still be used for the grazing of agricultural livestock.

4.8 Designing out Crime

- 4.8.1 The proposed layout includes a gated access point and fencing along all boundaries at a height of 2m. Fencing will comprise of timber posts and wire material ('Deer' fencing) to form the main sections of the boundary treatment. 'Dome' CCTV and infrared illuminators will be fixed onto the external face of the boundary treatment at intervals to ensure effective coverage. All CCTV cameras would be inward facing, avoiding views onto any private property, and no permanent lighting would exist on site.

5 Pre-application Engagement

5.1 Pre-application Meeting and Advice

- 5.1.1 The Applicant has engaged positively with the Local Planning Authority (hereafter 'LPA') throughout the formal Pre-application Process with Cherwell District Council.
- 5.1.2 A Pre-application Enquiry was submitted to the LPA in June 2022, with a formal response being received on the 12th of September 2022. At the Pre-application virtual meeting, the Proposal was outlined in detail and further clarifications and additional information were sought by the Case Officer.
- 5.1.3 Following the meeting, the Case Officer drew the following conclusion with respect to the principle of development:
- 'The principle of the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable, and the provision of renewable energy at this location is broadly supported.'
- 5.1.4 It was observed by the Case Officer that the Site is 'relatively well screened from the public highway' but that there are some existing long-distance views into and from the Application Site. To robustly address the matter of landscape and visual impact, this Planning Application is accompanied by the following documents:
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
 - Landscape Masterplan/Planting Plan
 - Landscape and Environmental Management Plan (LEMP)
 - Photo Montages
- 5.1.5 This suite of documents demonstrates that the Proposal would conserve and enhance the landscape in line with Local Plan Policy ESD13 'Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement'. Furthermore, the landscape Proposals are in full accordance with relevant opportunities and guidelines set out at national level in the NCA and the NPPF. This is explored fully in Chapter 11 of this Statement.
- 5.1.6 With respect to the matter of Public Rights of Way, the Case Officer outlined an opportunity during the Virtual Pre-application Meeting, to make improvements to the local footpath network, by creating a new link between the footpaths to the north and south of the Site. The updated scheme submitted with this Planning Application includes a permissive route along the eastern flank of the Site, allowing effective access through the Site and improving the overall footpath network in the wider area in line with these comments.
- 5.1.7 This Statement, together with the comprehensive suite of technical reports submitted with the Planning Application, robustly addresses all other matters raised at the Pre-application Stage, and we will continue to work with the relevant statutory consultees including the Local Highway Authority throughout the determination of the Application.

5.2 EIA Screening Request

- 5.2.1 An EIA Screening Request was submitted to Cherwell District Council, with the LPA confirming that an EIA would not be required on the 18th of August 2022.

5.3 Public Consultation Strategy

- 5.3.1 At the Pre-application Stage, the Applicant has sought to carry out a comprehensive Public Consultation exercise. This has comprised of the following:
- Direct Neighbour Letters (incl. all residents within a 500m radius)
 - Public Leaflet Distribution (incl. all residents within 2km of the development)
 - Public Exhibition Event (in-person)
 - Direct Engagement with Immediate Neighbours
 - Newspaper Notices
 - Creation of a dedicated consultation website and virtual exhibition room
 - Attendance at a Parish Council Special Session
- 5.3.2 The Public Exhibition took place on the 28th of July 2022, at The Red Lion Pub in Stratton Audley. In total, 53 people attended the event, with 30 feedback forms returned, either in-person or online.
- 5.3.3 The accompanying Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) provides a full summary of the Public Consultation process, the comments received and our responses to them. All relevant matters are addressed within this Statement and the associated technical documents.
- 5.3.4 Overall, it is confirmed that the appropriate level of consultation for the type and size of development proposal has been undertaken, having regard to the strategy set out within the 'Cherwell District Council: Statement of Community Involvement (Adopted October 2021)'.

6 Planning History

6.1 Application Site

6.1.1 A search of the Council's Public Access System shows that there is not any relevant planning history for the Site, nor is there anywhere in the wider area.

6.2 Planning Appeals

6.2.1 This Section sets out recent comparable appeal decisions in similar circumstances that have considered the issue of local landscape designations. This provides a useful indication of whether a proposal such as this might be considered acceptable in principle.

Appeal Ref.	Decision
<p>Appeal Ref. APP/B3030/W/21/32 79533</p> <p>Sherwood District Council</p> <p>Solar Farm and Battery Stations</p> <p>Appeal Allowed</p>	<p>The main issues of this appeal were:</p> <p>(a) The landscape and visual impact of the scheme.</p> <p>(b) The effect on heritage assets.</p> <p>(c) Whether the Proposal would conflict with the development plan and if so whether there are any material considerations that would outweigh that conflict; the planning balance.</p> <p><i>'In this context, recognising the great weight that is required to be attached to the conservation of a HA, I consider the imperative to tackle climate change, as recognised in legislation and energy policy, and the very significant benefits of the scheme clearly and decisively outweigh the temporary and less than substantial harm to the HA's involved...</i></p> <p><i>...Drawing the above together, I conclude the proposal would make a material and early contribution to the objective of achieving the decarbonisation of energy production and that to allow the proposed solar would not conflict with the objective of the relevant development national planning policy when read as a whole.'</i></p>
<p>Appeal Ref. APP/E2205/W/15/30 03125</p> <p>Ashford Borough Council</p>	<p>The main issue is the effect of the proposed solar array on the visual amenity of the countryside.</p> <p><i>The balancing exercise that must be conducted requires planning judgement to be exercised. The significant weight that is afforded to the environmental benefit of the solar energy development outweighs the less than substantive harm that</i></p>

<p>Solar Farm and Associated Infrastructure</p> <p>Appeal Allowed</p>	<p><i>would be caused to the local environment through harm to the visual amenity of the area’.</i></p>
<p>Appeal Ref. APP/D0840/W/16/31 46349</p> <p>Cornwall Council</p> <p>Solar Farm and Associated Infrastructure</p> <p>Appeal Allowed</p>	<p>The main issues in this appeal were:</p> <p>(a) The effects of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.</p> <p>(b) The compatibility of the proposed development with policy in respect of the generation of energy from renewable sources.</p> <p>(c) Whether any harm that might be caused would be outweighed by the benefits of the scheme.</p> <p><i>‘The economic, social and environmental roles for the planning system, which derive from the three dimensions to sustainable development in the Framework, require in this case that a balancing exercise be performed to weigh the benefits of the proposed solar array against its disadvantages. The proposed development would make a significant contribution to renewable energy targets and towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It would contribute to the local economy and would have energy security and biodiversity benefits. These benefits should be given significant weight Against the benefits of the appeal scheme must be weighted the harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the area... In my judgement, the benefits of the proposed development would be sufficient to outweigh its disadvantages’.</i></p>
<p>Appeal Ref. APP/D0840/A/13/219 8088</p> <p>Cornwall Council</p> <p>Solar Farm and Associated Infrastructure</p> <p>Appeal Allowed</p>	<p>The main issue in this appeal was whether any harmful effects of the proposal, in terms of the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape, in particular, are outweighed by any benefits.</p> <p><i>‘The proposal would bring forward benefits in terms of the production of renewable energy and in terms of the ongoing viability of the rural enterprise. Against that, it would cause a limited degree of landscape harm that would be both temporary and reversible. The need for renewable energy does not automatically outweigh environmental considerations but in my judgement, the benefits of the proposal far outweigh the harm it would cause...’</i></p>

<p>Appeal. APP/C1435/A/14/222 6660</p> <p>Wealden District Council</p> <p>Solar Farm and Associated Infrastructure</p> <p>Appeal Allowed</p>	<p>The main issue is whether the benefits of the scheme, including the production of electricity from a renewable source, outweigh any harmful impacts, having particular regard to the effect upon the character and appearance of the area.</p> <p><i>'In this case the development would be well planned and well screened. There would be some conflict with CSLP Policy WCS13 and LP Policy EN8 in terms of impact to landscape character... Nevertheless, the scale of the impacts would not be significant from any of the viewpoints.'</i></p>
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Table 1: Appeal Decisions

- 6.2.2 Some landscape impacts are inevitable for a solar development of the scale proposed; however, the above planning appeal decisions provide clear examples of the 'significant weight' that should be applied to the environmental benefits of solar and battery storage development, with this, together with other planning benefits, clearly outweighing that harm. In applying the planning balance, factors such as the temporary and reversible impact of the proposal have been treated as a key consideration.

7 The Development Plan Policy

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Town and Country Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 places a statutory duty on LPA's to determine Planning Applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.
- 7.1.2 The Site falls within the District of Cherwell; therefore, the relevant Development Plan is comprised of the following:
- Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1): Partial Review: Oxford's Unmet Housing Need (September 2020)
 - Saved policies of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996
 - Minerals and Waste Core Strategy (September 2017)
 - 'Made' Neighbourhood Plans in Cherwell District
 - Saved Policies from Oxfordshire County Council's Minerals and Waste Local Plan 1996.
- 7.1.3 Cherwell District Council has begun the process of updating some of their existing Local Plan policies, in order to address the needs of Cherwell up to the year 2040. This will in time, result in the adoption of a new Local Plan: 'Cherwell Local Plan 2040'. Due to the limited progression of this updated Local Plan, and the lack of draft policies, it will not be a material consideration within the context of this Planning Application.
- 7.1.4 This Chapter provides a summary of the relevant policies in the adopted Development Plan. In terms of Local Plan Designations, there are no designations directly on the Site or immediately adjacent.

7.2 Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1): Partial Review: Oxford's Unmet Housing Need (September 2020)

- 7.2.1 The Adopted CLP 2011-2031 (Part 1) was formally adopted by Cherwell District Council on the 20th of July 2015 and provides the strategic planning policy framework for the District until 2031. This document replaced several 'saved' policies from the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 though many of its policies are retained and remain part of the Development Plan. On the 7th of September 2020, the Local Plan was partially updated and re-adopted, resulting in: 'Partial Review: Oxford's Unmet Housing Need'.
- 7.2.2 This Section sets out the most relevant policies to the Proposed Development. The Site is not designated/allocated as part of either the adopted or emerging local plan. The key Local Plan Policies for this Proposal are set out below in the following list:
- PSD1 - Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development
 - ESD1 - Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change
 - ESD2 - Energy Hierarchy and Allowable Solutions
 - ESD5 - Renewable Energy
 - ESD6 - Sustainable Flood Risk Management
 - ESD7 - Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
 - ESD10 - Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment

- ESD13 – Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement
- ESD15 – The Character of the Built and Historic Environment

7.2.3 Paragraph A.11 outlines the spatial strategy for Cherwell District. In summary, it sets out that most of the growth in the District will be directed to locations within or immediately adjoining the main towns of Banbury and Bicester. Away from the two towns, the major single location for growth will be at the former RAF Upper Heyford Base. Growth across the rest of the District will be much more limited and be directed towards the larger and more sustainable villages within the District. Development in the open countryside will be strictly controlled.

7.2.4 Policy PSD1: ‘Supporting Development’ sets out the Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development and states that ‘Proposals which accord with the Development Plan will be brought forward and approved unless material considerations’, such as the NPPF, ‘indicate otherwise’. It also confirms that the Council will play an active role with applicants to find solutions for development Proposals that help to improve the economic, social, and environmental conditions in Cherwell.

7.2.5 Policy ESD1: ‘Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change’ sets out that measures will be taken to mitigate the impact of development within the District on climate change. At a strategic level, this will include:

- Distributing growth to the most sustainable locations as defined in this Local Plan
- Delivering development that seeks to reduce the need to travel and which encourages sustainable travel options including walking, cycling and public transport to reduce dependence on private cars
- Designing developments to reduce carbon emissions and use resources more efficiently, including water (see Policy ESD 3 Sustainable Construction)
- Promoting the use of decentralised and renewable or low carbon energy where appropriate (see Policies ESD 4 Decentralised Energy Systems and ESD 5 Renewable Energy).

7.2.6 Policy ESD 2: ‘Energy Hierarchy and Allowable Solutions’ sets out that to achieve carbon emissions reductions, we will promote an ‘energy hierarchy’ as follows:

- Reducing energy use, in particular by the use of sustainable design and construction measures
- Supplying energy efficiently and giving priority to decentralised energy supply
- Making use of renewable energy
- Making use of allowable solutions.

7.2.7 Where feasibility assessments demonstrate that on Site renewable energy provision is deliverable and viable, this will be required as part of the development unless an alternative solution would deliver the same or increased benefit. This may include consideration of ‘allowable solutions’ as Government Policy evolves.

7.2.8 Policy ESD5: ‘Renewable Energy’ states that the Council supports renewable and low carbon energy provision wherever any adverse impacts can be addressed satisfactorily. The potential local environmental, economic and community benefits of renewable energy schemes will be a material consideration in determining Planning Applications.

7.2.9 Planning Applications involving renewable energy development will be encouraged provided that there is no unacceptable adverse impact, including cumulative impact, on the following issues, which are considered to be of particular local significance in Cherwell:

- Landscape and biodiversity including 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
- Aviation activities
- Highways and access issues, and
- Residential amenity.

7.2.10 Policy ESD 6: 'Sustainable Flood Risk Management' states that the Council will manage and reduce flood risk in the District through using a sequential approach to development; locating vulnerable developments in areas at lower risk of flooding. Development Proposals will be assessed according to the sequential approach and where necessary the exceptions test as set out in the NPPF and NPPG. Development will only be permitted in areas of flood risk when there are no reasonably available Sites in areas of lower flood risk and the benefits of the development outweigh the risks from flooding.

7.2.11 Site specific flood risk assessments will be required to accompany development Proposals in the following situations:

- All development Proposals located in flood zones 2 or 3
- Development Proposals of 1 hectare or more located in flood zone 1
- Development Sites located in an area known to have experienced flooding problems
- Development Sites located within 9m of any watercourses.

7.2.12 Development should be safe and remain operational (where necessary) and Proposals should demonstrate that surface water will be managed effectively on Site and that the development will not increase flood risk elsewhere, including sewer flooding.

7.2.13 Policy ESD 7: 'Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)' states that all development will be required to use sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) for the management of surface water run-off.

7.2.14 Where Site specific Flood Risk Assessments are required in association with development Proposals, they should be used to determine how SuDS can be used on particular Sites and to design appropriate systems. 98 Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) Section B: Policies for Development in Cherwell In considering SuDS solutions, the need to protect ground water quality must be taken into account, especially where infiltration techniques are proposed. Where possible, SuDS should seek to reduce flood risk, reduce pollution, and provide landscape and wildlife benefits. SuDS will require the approval of Oxfordshire County Council as LLFA and SuDS Approval Body, and Proposals must include an agreement on the future management, maintenance, and replacement of the SuDS features.

7.2.15 Policy ESD 10: 'Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment' states that this Policy will be achieved by:

- 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
- The reuse of soils will be sought
- 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.
- Development which would result in damage to or loss of a Site of international value will be subject to the Habitats Regulations Assessment process and will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no likely significant effects on the international Site or that effects can be mitigated
- Development which would result in damage to, or loss of a Site of biodiversity or geological value of national importance will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the harm it would cause to the Site and the wider national network of SSSIs, and the loss can be mitigated to achieve a net gain in biodiversity/geodiversity
- Development which would result in damage to or loss of a Site of biodiversity or geological value of regional or local importance including habitats of species of principal importance for biodiversity will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the harm it would cause to the Site, and the loss can be mitigated to achieve a net gain in biodiversity/geodiversity
- Development Proposals will be expected to incorporate features to encourage biodiversity and retain and where possible enhance existing features of nature conservation value within the Site. Existing ecological networks should be identified and maintained to avoid habitat fragmentation, and ecological corridors should form an essential component of green infrastructure provision in association with new development to ensure habitat connectivity
- Relevant habitat and species surveys and associated reports will be required to accompany Planning Applications which may affect a Site, habitat, or species of known or potential ecological value
- Air quality assessments will also be required for development Proposals that would be likely to have a significantly adverse impact on biodiversity by generating an increase in air pollution.
- Planning conditions/obligations will be used to secure net gains in biodiversity by helping to deliver Biodiversity Action Plan targets and/or meeting the aims of Conservation Target Areas. Developments for which these are the principal aims will be viewed favourably
- A monitoring and management plan will be required for biodiversity features on Site to ensure their long term suitable management.

- 7.2.16 Policy ESD 13: 'Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement' states that opportunities will be sought to secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape, particularly in urban fringe locations, 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.
- 7.2.17 Policy ESD 15: 'The Character of the Built and Historic Environment' sets out that successful design is founded upon an understanding and respect for an area's unique built, natural, and cultural context. New development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout, and high quality design. All new development will be required to meet high design standards. Where development is in the vicinity of any of the District's distinctive natural or historic assets, delivering high quality design that complements the asset will be essential.

7.3 Saved Policies of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996

7.3.1 The key Saved Policies for this Proposal are set out below in the following list:

- C8: 'Sporadic Development in the Open Countryside'
- C9: 'Scale of Development Compatible with a Rural Location'
- C28: 'Layout, Design and External Appearance of New Development'

7.3.2 Saved Policy C8: 'Sporadic Development in the Open Countryside' states that development in the countryside must be resisted if its attractive, open, rural character is to be maintained. This Policy applies to all new development Proposals beyond the built-up limits of settlements including areas in the vicinity of motorway or major road developments but will be reasonably applied to accommodate the needs of agriculture. There is increasing pressure for development in the open countryside particularly in the vicinity of motorway junctions. The Council will resist such pressures and will where practicable direct development to suitable Sites at Banbury or Bicester.

7.3.3 Saved Policy C9: 'Scale of Development Compatible with a Rural Location' interprets the general intentions of Structure Plan Policy G1 which seeks to direct development to the country towns and limit the level of development elsewhere in order to protect the environment, character, and agricultural resources of the rural areas.

7.3.4 Saved Policy C28: 'Layout, Design and External Appearance of New Development' states that control will be exercised over all new development, including conversions and extensions, to ensure that the standard of layout, design, and external appearance, including the choice of external finish materials, are sympathetic to the character of the urban or rural context of that development.

7.4 Stratton Audley Neighbourhood Plan

7.4.1 In June 2013, the Council District Executive designated an area as 'Stratton Audley Neighbourhood Area' for the purposes of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan by Stratton Audley Parish Council under section 61G (1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended. Since the confirmation of this Designation, there has been no further progress with this Neighbourhood Plan process, nor are there any initial policies drafted.

7.5 Summary

- 7.5.1 Whilst Cherwell District's Spatial Strategy (Paragraph A.11) seeks to 'strictly' control new development in the open countryside, there are no Policies in the Local Development Plan which specifically exclude the development of Solar or renewable energy development in this location.
- 7.5.2 Notwithstanding this, there is clear and explicit support for the construction of renewable energy infrastructure in Cherwell District Council's Local Development Plan. Policy ESD1 of the Local Plan promotes the use of decentralised and renewable/low carbon energy where appropriate. Furthermore, Policy ESD 5 supports renewable energy development where it can be demonstrated there is no unacceptable adverse impact, also taking into account cumulative impacts.
- 7.5.3 As outlined in Chapter 3 of this Statement, the Site is not located in a sensitive area, nor is it subject to any national or local designations for landscape or ecology. Furthermore, this Planning Application is supported by a comprehensive suite of technical reports and assessments, to ensure that any benefits are maximised, and any potential harm is appropriately mitigated, in full accordance with the Policies in the Local Plan. Chapter 11 of this Statement outlines the outcome of these reports.

8 Other Material Considerations

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 Material considerations to the Proposal include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and the emerging Local Plan Review.

8.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) July 2021

8.2.1 The NPPF is an important material consideration in the taking of planning decisions. The Framework confirms the statutory presumption in favour of the Development Plan and sets out the Government's national planning policies for the achievement of sustainable development.

8.2.2 The most relevant NPPF Paragraphs are as follows:

- NPPF P2 – Development Plan
- NPPF P8 – Sustainable Development
- NPPF P152 – Low Carbon Future
- NPPF P158 – Renewable Development
- NPPF P81 – Economics
- NPPF P84 – Rural Economy
- NPPF P111 – Highways
- NPPF P167 – Flood Risk
- NPPF P174 – Net Gains
- NPPF P180 – Biodiversity
- NPPF P194 – Heritage

8.2.3 NPPF Paragraph 2 'Development Plan' states that Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

8.2.4 NPPF Paragraph 8 'Sustainable Development' sets out three 'overarching objectives' to achieve sustainable development and notes that there are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways.

8.2.5 The three objectives are as follows:

- a. Economic Objective – to help build a strong, responsive, and competitive economy, by ensuring sufficient land of the right type in the right places, to support growth, innovation, and improved productivity.
- b. A Social Objective – to support strong, vibrant, and healthy communities, ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided.
- c. An Environmental Objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built, and historic environment, including making effective use of land.

8.2.6 NPPF Paragraph 152 'Low Carbon Future' states that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate. It states that the planning system should help to shape places in ways that contribute to a radical reduction to

greenhouse gas emissions, encouraging the reuse of existing resources, and supports renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

- 8.2.7 NPPF Paragraph 158 'Renewable Development' states that when determining Planning Applications for renewable development, LPA's should:
- a. not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
 - b. approve the Application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.
- 8.2.8 NPPF Paragraph 81 'Economics' states that planning decisions should help to create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand, and adapt. It states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, considering both local business needs and the wider opportunities for development. Significant weight, therefore, should be attached to the contribution of the Proposed Development towards supporting the growth and productivity of local businesses.
- 8.2.9 NPPF Paragraph 84 'Rural Economy' states that planning decisions should support a prosperous rural economy by enabling the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses.
- 8.2.10 NPPF Paragraph 111 'Highway' states that development should only be prevented on highways ground if there would be an unacceptable impact on highways safety, or the residential cumulative impact on the road network would be severe.
- 8.2.11 NPPF Paragraph 167 'Flood Risk' states that when determining any Planning Application, LPA's should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Where appropriate, Applications should be supported by a site-specific flood-risk assessment.
- 8.2.12 NPPF Paragraph 174 'Net Gains' states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- a. protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - b. recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - c. maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - d. minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - e. preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air

and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

- f. remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

8.2.13 NPPF Paragraph 180 'Biodiversity' states that when determining Planning Applications, LPA's should apply the following principles:

- a. if significant harm to biodiversity 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 planning permission should be refused;
- b. development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- c. development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- d. development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

8.2.14 NPPF Paragraph 194 'Heritage' states that in determining Planning Applications, LPA's should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

8.2.15 As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

8.3 Planning Practice Guidance – Climate Change

8.3.1 This Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) document addresses the role that the planning system can play in addressing climate change. Specifically, it refers to the importance of supporting the delivery of appropriately Sited green energy. Furthermore, it states that LPAs should ensure that protecting the local environment is properly considered when factoring in the broader issue of protecting the global environment.

- 8.3.2 It is noted that the PPG also reiterates that responding to climate change is central to the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development.
- 8.3.3 Additionally, within this document, reference is made to the Climate Change Act of 2008, stating that it is required that LPA's align with the goals set out within the Act, encouraging the adoption of proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

8.4 Planning Practice Guidance – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

- 8.4.1 This PPG states that planning has an important role in the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure, specifically stating that increasing the amount of energy from renewable sources is a key aspect in ensuring that the UK has a secure energy supply, as well as also slowing down the negative impacts of climate change and stimulating investment in new jobs and businesses.
- 8.4.2 It is further stated within this PPG that whilst all communities have the responsibility of helping to increase the use and supply of green energy, this responsibility does not override other considerations, such as environmental designations that may be affected as a result of a Proposed Development. Whilst noting this, the Climate Change PPG raises the point that the UK has legal commitments to cut greenhouse gases and meet increased energy demand from renewable sources.
- 8.4.3 Further to this, this Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) also specifically discusses larger scale ground-mounted Solar Photovoltaic farms. It notes the importance of assessing a Proposal's visual impact, the effect of the development on the landscape, and the impact of potential glint and glare.

8.5 The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019

- 8.5.1 There are a large number of international, national, and local drivers for renewable energy, all of which are considered to be material considerations when making decisions on Planning Applications. The Proposal is considered imperative to secure the carbon reductions which is a legislative requirement by the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019. This act introduced the UK's statutory target to reduce its' carbon dioxide emissions to below 80% of the country's 1990 levels by 2050.
- 8.5.2 The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 is a legislative requirement which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from at least 80% to 100%, this significant reduction will be assisted by allowing renewable energy projects such as this to be built out. This legal requirement needs to be taken into account during the decision-making process and indeed it needs to be given significant weight.
- 8.5.3 The UK is still dependent on coal, oil, and gas powered generation, therefore the need to comply with the legal requirement to become carbon neutral by 2050 places a statutory requirement on the planning system to deliver a greater number of renewable energy generation sources so these fossil fuel powered stations can be closed in a systematic way to make way the transition to a carbon neutral sustainable future.

8.6 British Energy Security Strategy

- 8.6.1 A Statement was issued on the 19th of April 2022 by Kwasi Kwarteng (former) *Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy* in relation to the British Energy

Security Strategy. As part of the Statement, it outlined the UK targets to increase the UK's electricity being produced by low-carbon means in 2030 to 95% and in 2035 to 100%. In meeting these targets, specific reference is made with respect to the importance of cheap renewables as the best defence against fluctuation in global gas prices. Furthermore, it is advised that solar capacity can grow in the UK by up to five times by 2035. Whilst the Prime Minister, and indeed the Cabinet, have since changed, these still remain the targets which the UK Government is seeking to achieve.

8.7 Summary

- 8.7.1 The strong support for renewable energy developments such as this proposal for a Solar PV and Battery Storage project is noted in both national and local planning policy. In particular, national planning policy specifies that local plans should include policies that 'take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change' (NPPF Paragraph 153).
- 8.7.2 Further to this, it is noted that national planning policy directly encourages LPA's to take a positive and proactive approach in regard to sustainable development, highlighting the three key aspects of economic, environmental, and social objects that form a sustainable development (NPPF Paragraph 8). As demonstrated above, the ability to generate renewable energy is given significant support in both the NPPF as well as PPG: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy and PPG: Climate Change.
- 8.7.3 The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 is a legislative requirement which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This legal requirement needs to be taken into account during the decision-making process and indeed it needs to be given significant weight.

9 Principle of Development

9.1 The Principle of Development

- 9.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Town and Country Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 places a statutory duty on LPA's to determine Planning Applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.
- 9.1.2 The Development Plan for Cherwell District Council comprises primarily of Cherwell Local Plan (2011-2031) and Saved Policies from the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan (1996).
- 9.1.3 The Application Site is located outside of a Settlement Boundary and is therefore situated within the open countryside, in line with Cherwell District's Spatial Strategy (Paragraph A.11). In terms of other immediate designations, the Site is situated directly adjacent to an area of 'Ancient Woodland' to the north and 'NERC Act S41 Habitats' to the west.
- 9.1.4 Paragraph A.11 of Cherwell's Local Plan (2011-2031) states that new development in the countryside will be strictly controlled by the Council. Notwithstanding this, it is noted that there are no specific policies in the Development Plan which preclude the development of Solar PV Arrays or renewable energy infrastructure in this location.
- 9.1.5 Local Plan Policy ESD5 'Renewable Energy' states that the Council supports renewable and low carbon energy provision wherever any adverse impacts can be addressed satisfactorily. Furthermore, it outlines that potential local environmental, economic and community benefits of renewable energy schemes are a material consideration in the determination of Planning Applications.
- 9.1.6 Local Plan Policy ESD1 'Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change' states that measures will be taken to mitigate the impact of development within the District on Climate Change. This includes (but is not limited to) designing developments to reduce carbon emissions and promoting the utilisation of decentralised and renewable/low carbon energy.
- 9.1.7 Local Plan Policy ESD2 'Energy Hierarchy and Allowable Solutions' states that the Council will reduce carbon emissions reductions, through the use of a 'energy hierarchy', supplying energy efficiently and giving priority to decentralised energy supply.
- 9.1.8 The Proposal is for the construction of a 44 MW Solar PV development, and Battery Storage Development. This Proposal will help to diversify the existing farm land, making efficient use of an underutilised area of agricultural land, whilst also having the beneficial factor of the land being capable of being returned to arable agricultural use following the lifespan of the proposed solar development. Furthermore, the Proposal will provide long and short-term job opportunities within the local area, whilst allowing the existing agricultural businesses to diversify its source of income.
- 9.1.9 Additionally, it is noted that a brownfield Site would have to be available for a period of 40 years in order to be suitable. A Site of this nature is uncommon due to the wider development potential and market demand of such land for competing uses such a residential and commercial. For further information, please see Section 3.3 of this Statement, which outlines the Full Alternative Site Appraisal and Sequential Test that was undertaken.

- 9.1.10 Whilst the Proposal is situated on agricultural land, it is confirmed from the submitted Agricultural Land Classification survey, that the land on which the proposal will be located on is Grade 3B and would therefore not constitute BMV agricultural land.
- 9.1.11 Keeping with the theme of agricultural land, it should be highlighted that climate change is one of biggest threats to food security in the UK. The utilisation of this small parcel of non-BMV land to generate clean solar energy will enable the existing farm business to remain economically sustainable, expanding the pastoral side of the business, with grazing sheep in the panelled areas, whilst creating a secure revenue stream which can then be reinvested into their remaining agricultural holdings in the area.
- 9.1.12 The Proposal will generate a significant amount of renewable energy, meeting the equivalent electricity demand of over 16,680 UK homes per annum, without giving rise to any unacceptable locational or other impacts, in full accordance with relevant Local Plan Policies. It will also result in substantial carbon savings, with 32,947 tonnes of CO₂ saved every year, or 1,317,880 tonnes over its lifetime (versus fossil fuel generation). The environmental impacts of the Proposal and the proposed mitigation strategy are set out in Chapter 11 of this Statement and in the accompanying technical reports.

9.2 Other Material Considerations

- 9.2.1 Material planning considerations include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and the emerging Local Plan Review. Any material planning benefits and/or harms are also material planning considerations – these are assessed in full in Chapter 11 of this Statement.
- 9.2.2 The NPPF is clearly supportive of Solar Development. NPPF Paragraph 148 states that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, whilst NPPF Paragraph 154 sets out a presumption in favour of approving such Applications, stating that LPA's should “approve the Application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.” Furthermore, NPPF Paragraph 83 states that planning decisions should support a prosperous rural economy by enabling the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses.
- 9.2.3 The PPG is strongly supportive of solar development; the PPG on Climate Change reiterates that responding to climate change is central to the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The PPG on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy PPG emphasises the importance of renewable energy in ensuring that the UK has a secure energy supply, as well as also slowing down the negative impacts of climate change and stimulating investment in new jobs and businesses. The PPG does note that the impacts, particularly landscape and visual, should be assessed. Chapter 11 of this Statement provides a full assessment of all environmental impacts of the Proposal, including landscape and visual.
- 9.2.4 The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 is strongly supportive of the Proposal and the Proposal is considered imperative to secure the significant carbon reductions and new renewable energy generation sources which is a legislative requirement of this Act to become net zero. It is considered that the proposal which is the subject of this planning application is an imperative carbon free electricity generation development which can only help to attain this target.

9.3 Conclusion

- 9.3.1 Overall, there is clear policy support in the Local Plan for a solar development in this location and there is no adopted planning policy precluding such development. Furthermore, the NPPF, PPG and The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 all provide strong and clear support for solar developments in rural locations such as this.
- 9.3.2 Notwithstanding that the Proposal is in accordance with the Development Plan, this is an additional material planning consideration that weighs in favour of the Proposal. Chapter 11 of this stamen provides a full assessment of all environmental impacts of the Proposal and confirms compliance with all relevant local and national policies.

10 Design Development

10.1 Introduction

10.1.1 The purpose of this Chapter is to outline how the design of the Proposal has developed and to consider how it complies with the relevant policies in the Local Plan and the NPPF.

10.2 Proposed Layout Alterations

10.2.1 The design of the Proposal has been informed by a full appreciation of the Site and its surroundings in context. The Application is supported by a comprehensive suite of technical reports which provide a full assessment of the Site, including in relation to landscape and visual appraisal and heritage.

10.2.2 The Application has also been informed by detailed Pre-application discussions with the LPA's. Full details of this are provided in the accompanying Statement of Community Engagement (SCE). This has provided a full understanding of the Site and the key opportunities and constraints for development. These are discussed in Chapter 11 of this Statement in relation to specific technical matters.

10.2.3 As outlined in Chapter 5 of this Statement, the Case Officer presented an opportunity to make improvements to the local footpath network, during the Virtual Pre-application Meeting on the 18th of August 2022. This resulted in a new layout which included a permissive route being introduced internally along the eastern flank of the Site, creating a new link between the footpath to the north (PRoW Ref. '371 8b/10') and to the south ('PRoW Ref. '371 3/10'). The referenced amendments to the proposed layout, will allow for effective and improved access through the Site itself, whilst improving the quality of the overall footpath network.

10.2.4 Overall, it is confirmed that the Proposed Development has been designed to achieve high standards of sustainability, in full accordance with Saved Policy C28 of the Local Plan and the relevant parts of the NPPF.

11 Other Environmental Considerations

11.1 Introduction

11.1.1 This purpose of Chapter 11 is to provide a full assessment of the Proposed Development in relation to the relevant policies in the Development Plan, and other material considerations, including the NPPF.

11.2 Landscape

11.2.1 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA') has been undertaken for this proposal. Also submitted in relation to Landscaping, are the following documents:

- Environmental Enhancement Strategy
- LEMP
- BNG Report

11.2.2 The LVIA found that there would be a slight effect on the Rolling Farmland LCT and the Estate Farmlands LCT and at most a large residual effect (at year 15) to the landscape character of the site and its surrounding area (within 500m of the site), predominantly due to the change in use and associated loss of openness.

11.2.3 Views of the site are generally restricted to within 500m of the site. Beyond that in all directions views are filtered or blocked by the intervening landform and vegetation (particularly in the summer months). All visual receptors would experience at most a slight residual level of effect as a result of the development with the exception of users along a short section of PRow Ref. 225/6/10 on the high ground to the east of the site which would remain large.

11.2.4 Proposed mitigation measures include the creation of boundary hedgerows around the site which will assist in reinforcing visual screening of the development from the users of the local roads, PRow, and residential properties. Also included within the layout are the following features:

- Retention of almost all existing hedgerow and trees along the boundaries.
- Existing hedgerows will be allowed to grow to a height of 3-4 m, to assist in screening views of the site.
- Creation of new tree-lined hedgerow just inside northern boundary to block views from Public Right of Way Ref. 371/8b/10.
- Extensive tree planting along all site boundaries to filter views of the site.
- Creation of a double staggered hedgerow along section of western boundary closest to Pool Farm to further filter views of the site from the grounds.
- Species rich grassland within the site compound fenced area, beneath the solar panels.

11.2.5 The proposed measures would assist in reinforcing visual screening of the development for the users of the local roads, PRow's, and inhabitants of residential properties, and assist in increasing the biodiversity value of the site.

- 11.2.6 In this respect, it has been demonstrated that the proposal would conserve and enhance the landscape in line with Policy ESD 13: 'Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement'. Furthermore, the landscape proposals are in accordance with relevant opportunities and guidelines set out at national level in the NCA and the NPPF.

11.3 Highways and Transportation

- 11.3.1 This Application is supported by a Highway Statement which describes the effects that the construction phase of the solar farm is likely to have on traffic flows in the local area. The resulting measures outlined in the Highway Statement are also supported by a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP).
- 11.3.2 Once operational, the site will encounter low levels of traffic with occasional visits for maintenance and inspection purposes only, therefore there will be no long-term operation changes occurring as a result of the development. The Highway Statement finds that the existing strategic road network has sufficient capacity to overcome any temporary minimal increases in HGV and non-HGV construction traffic movements during the construction period.
- 11.3.3 Overall, the Highway Statement and CTMP find that the proposal is acceptable from a highway's perspective and would pose no harm to the safety of the users of the public highway network. It is therefore in full accordance with Local Plan Policy SLE4 and NPPF Paragraph 111.

11.4 Ecology

- 11.4.1 The Planning Application is supported by an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) which reports on the findings of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and subsequent ecological surveys undertaken on Site.
- 11.4.2 The Proposed Development will have a positive impact on the environment through the provision of significant biodiversity net gains within the Site. In particular, the Proposal will seek to enhance local habitats by implementing measures such as creating and enhancing existing Site boundaries with native species, providing wildflower mix across the Site, creating a retained, undisturbed habitat, and taking the Site out of intensive crop production. Additionally, no harmful fertilisers or pesticides would be required on-site once built.
- 11.4.3 In order to comply with the relevant legislation, recommendations have been made to safeguard habitats and species present both during construction and post-development. These include retaining, protecting, and enhancing mature trees, woodlands and hedgerows and enhancing the Sites biodiversity post-development.
- 11.4.4 It also includes the enhancement of existing hedgerows with native planting of fruit/seed bearing species, creating areas for hibernaculum, and the installation of bird boxes, insect hotels and beehives across the site.
- 11.4.5 The proposed development is for a Solar PV and Battery Storage proposal, which when in operation creates no toxic emissions and certainly does not detract wildlife to use the surrounding land area. The proposed ecological enhancements and BNG improvements will only further increase the diversity of ecology.

11.4.6 The overall impact on ecology of the development will be a positive one and therefore the Proposal is in accordance with Local Plan Policy ESD10 and Paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

11.5 Arboriculture

11.5.1 An ADAS Arboricultural Consultant carried out a full arboricultural survey of the Site in July 2022. The tree survey identified a total of 63 arboricultural features, comprising 25 individual trees, 10 groups of trees, 27 hedgerows and one woodland, all of which have the potential to be impacted by the development proposals.

11.5.2 The Proposed Development will retain all trees, groups of trees and woodland, and only requires the removal of a small area of category B hedgerow (H13, H49 and H60). It is not considered that the vegetation removal necessary to implement the Proposed Development will have a significant landscape impact.

11.5.3 The scheme has been designed with tree protection and biodiversity enhancement as a priority and this is demonstrated in the lack of proposed vegetation removal, and no encroachment on any root protection areas.

11.5.4 The current layout allows the retention of all high value trees on site. Furthermore, all construction operations will be completed outside the RPA's of retained trees across the entire site, and all retained trees can be adequately protected during construction works.

11.5.5 The deer fencing shown on the Proposed Layout Plan must be erected prior to any commencement of construction works due to its important role in acting as tree protection fencing.

11.5.6 In order to ensure the successful integration of retained trees into the Proposed Development, various tree protection measures are incorporated into the design which are intended to maintain the trees in a safe and healthy condition. In summary, the assessment concludes that the development is in accordance with the relevant standards and guidance for arboriculture (Paragraph 170 of the NPPF).

11.6 Noise

11.6.1 A full Noise Assessment for the Proposed Development has been completed by RSK Acoustics as part of the planning application. The assessment is based on an unlikely, worst-case scenario, whereby all equipment is running at its maximum rated level, at the same time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (with the exception of the solar inverters at night).

11.6.2 The following conclusions were reached from the assessment:

- When assessing against WHO guidelines for environmental noise, the predicted levels are shown to be at or below the threshold laid out in WHO guidelines for external amenity spaces, and internal amenity spaces, both at night-time and during the day.
- Furthermore, a number of assumptions have been made with respect to the typical operational capacity of the development that are considered to over-estimate the noise emissions and, subsequently, the degree of impact.

- Accounting for the points raised above, it is considered that the likelihood of significant adverse impact upon the amenity of nearby NSRs is low.

11.6.3 Construction mitigation measures and best practicable means (BPM) will be implemented to reduce the likely noise and vibration emissions during the construction phases. Measures would likely include the selection of less intrusive (lower noise and vibration emitting) plant items, temporary hoardings to screen construction activities from existing dwellings and noise management measures aimed to minimise the exposure time to likely noisy activities. The noise during construction will be a temporary occurrence and will cease once the development is built out.

11.6.4 In the context of the Site and surrounding area, and taking account of conservatism within the assessment, it is concluded that the principle of development is considered acceptable. The Proposal is therefore in line with the relevant Local Plan policies and with Paragraph 170 of the NPPF.

11.7 Archaeology

11.7.1 An Archaeology Desk Based Assessment (DBA) was undertaken to consider the likely impact that future development would have on potential below-ground archaeological remains with this, and the setting of heritage assets within the Study Area, in accordance with planning policy and guidance.

11.7.2 The assessment located crop marks of a former headland, a possible enclosure, degraded ridge and furrow, possibly important hedgerows and a stone spread of burnt flint. The likely development impacts are not considered sufficiently significant to warrant the refusal of a Planning Application to develop the Site. The likely development impacts are considered to be of a level of significance that they could be adequately mitigated for through a staged programme of archaeological investigation. The need for, scope and scale of such works will be further discussed with agreement from the LPA.

11.7.3 The DBA confirms that the proposed development will not harm any buried archaeology which may be of a high significance, subject to an appropriate written scheme of investigation which can be conditioned should the proposed development be approved, there the Proposal is therefore in line with ESD15 of the Local Plan (Part 1) and Paragraph 194 of the NPPF.

11.8 Built Heritage

11.8.1 This Application is supported by a Built Heritage Setting Assessment. This provides an assessment of the heritage resource within the Site and an assessment of the contribution that the Site makes to the significance of surrounding heritage assets and identifies any harm or benefit to them which may result from the development Proposal.

11.8.2 The assessment concludes that all assets within a minimum 1 km radius of the Site have undergone an appropriate level of setting assessment in accordance with the methodology advocated by Historic England. Furthermore, it was determined that the Site makes no contribution to the setting or the significance of Stratton Audley Conservation Area or to any Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, proposed Local Heritage Asset, or non-designated heritage asset.

- 11.8.3 Overall, the Proposal will result in no negative impact to the significance of the identified Listed Buildings. With reference to the levels of harm in the NPPF, the Proposals will result in 'no harm' to any of the Listed Buildings. Furthermore, the Proposals are compliant with the statutory duty of the section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990; and the heritage strategy and policies contained in the Cherwell Districts' Local Plan.
- 11.8.4 The Proposal with regard to Built Heritage is therefore in line with ESD15 of the Local Plan (Part 1) and Paragraph 194 of the NPPF.

11.9 Flood Risk and Drainage

- 11.9.1 The Site is largely designated by the EA as Flood Zone 1, outlined to have a chance of flooding of 1 in 1000 or less ($\leq 0.1\%$) in any year.
- 11.9.2 NPPF sets out a Sequential Test, which states that preference should be given to development located within Flood Zone 1. This flood risk assessment demonstrates that the requirements of the Sequential Test have been met, with the Site area located within Flood Zone 1 and 'Essential Infrastructure' classification of the development.
- 11.9.3 The Site is currently a greenfield site and is existing agricultural land. The Proposed Development will only alter the impermeable area on site by a diminutive amount, resulting in a negligible increase in surface water runoff. The solar panels will not increase the impermeable area on-site, and therefore will not increase the volume of surface water runoff.
- 11.9.4 The FRA concludes that the Proposal would not involve the construction of inappropriate development in an area of high risk, nor would the Proposal result in increased flood risk elsewhere. The development of the Site should therefore not be precluded on flood risk grounds, in accordance with Local Plan Policies ESD6 and ESD7, and Paragraph 167 of the NPPF.

11.10 Loss of Agricultural Land

- 11.10.1 This Application is supported by an Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Report as has been mentioned above, in order to establish the actual grade of the Agricultural Land.
- 11.10.2 The ALC report confirms that the proposed Site area comprises of Grade 3b Agricultural Land and therefore would not result in the use or loss of Best and Most Versatile Land and that >95% of the site area will still be available for sheep grazing and continued agricultural use. Therefore in essence, the proposal will not significantly reduce the amount of land which is readily available for agricultural activities within the district.
- 11.10.3 Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that the Proposal has an expected lifespan of 40 years. At the end of the useful life of the facility, it will be decommissioned, and all the associated equipment will be removed. It is considered that the land can then be quickly reverted to agricultural use.
- 11.10.4 It is also important to note, that solar PV development in the UK only uses a very small percentage of the overall land mass, as even a fivefold increase in solar farms in the UK would only utilise 0.29% of the UK's land resource, less than what is used by golf courses.

11.10.5 Therefore, with due consideration of the above, the Proposed Development is in line full accordance with Paragraph 174 of the NPPF, as it would not involve development on BMV Agricultural Land.

11.11 Glint and Glare

- 11.11.1 This Application is supported by a Glint and Glare Study, to assess the possible effects of glint and glare from the mount photovoltaic solar Arrays which are being proposed.
- 11.11.2 Solar reflections are geometrically possible along the assessed 3.1 km section of Main Street. Screening in the form of existing, and proposed vegetation per the accompanying planting plan is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels. As such, no impacts are predicted on road safety, and no mitigation is required.
- 11.11.3 Solar reflections are geometrically possible for all identified dwelling receptors. However, screening in the form of existing vegetation, and proposed vegetation per the landscape mitigation plan, is predicted to fully obstruct views of reflecting panels for 23 out of the 23 identified dwelling receptors, for which no impact is predicted.
- 11.11.4 Any solar reflections towards Pear Tree Farm Airfield and Finmere Airfield are predicted to be acceptable in accordance with the associated guidance. Factors determining this are either due to solar reflections occurring outside a pilot's field-of-view (50 degrees either side of the approach bearing) or predicted low glare intensities. Therefore, further detailed modelling of these airfields is not recommended, as the Proposed Development will not harm the safety of the users of the nearby airfields.

11.12 Conclusion: Assessment of the Impacts

- 11.12.1 This Statement and the accompanying suite of reports demonstrates that the Proposed Development would maximise opportunities on the Site, while minimising any impacts. Furthermore, the Proposal would result in significant beneficial effects to the landscape features on the Site, create significant biodiversity net gains whilst resulting in no loss of BMV agricultural land, not increasing flood risk, not impacting on local residential amenity, and resulting in no harm to the setting of any heritage assets.
- 11.12.2 In light of the assessment and consideration of impacts, we consider that the Proposal is therefore in full accordance with all relevant policies in the Local Plan and the Framework.

12 Planning Balance

12.1 Benefits vs Harm

- 12.1.1 This Chapter discusses the significant and substantial planning benefits of the Proposal and assesses the Proposal's limited and temporary impacts on the landscape and the loss of agricultural land. The benefits are substantial and have been set out in Table 2 below.

Benefits	Potential Harm
<p>Landscape – 27.34% net gain in tree and hedgerow planting – major beneficial long term effect on Landscape Character.</p> <p><i>Substantial Weight</i></p>	<p>Landscape – There would be a slight and temporary effect on the 'Rolling Farmland' LCT and the 'Estate Farmlands' LCT and at most a large residual effect (at year 15) to the landscape character of the site and its surrounding area.</p> <p><i>Limited Weight</i></p>
<p>Climate Change – Renewable energy generation helps to alleviate climate change and the social issues associated with this (e.g. residential displacement).</p> <p><i>Substantial Weight</i></p>	
<p>Clean Renewable Energy – The Proposal has the potential to offset the average annual UK electricity consumption of approximately 16,680 houses per annum. Furthermore, the Proposal will save 32,947 tonnes of CO₂ every year, resulting in an overall saving of 1,317,880 tonnes over its lifetime compared to energy generation from fossil fuels.</p> <p><i>Substantial Weight</i></p>	
<p>Energy Security – Will contribute towards an independent, secure energy supply in the UK (which is particularly necessary in the current geopolitical climate). The Proposal will also incorporate flexible BESS technology, which absorb surplus energy at times of excess generation, and ensures there is now wastage.</p> <p><i>Substantial Weight</i></p>	
<p>Employment Creation – The creation of long and short-term jobs opportunities within the local area, in the form of construction and maintenance roles, among others.</p> <p><i>Substantial Weight</i></p>	

Benefits	Potential Harm
<p>Bio-Diversity Net Gains – Creation of extensive biodiversity net gains within the Application Site (215.29%) as a result of the Proposal.</p> <p><i>Substantial Weight</i></p>	
<p>Economic – Creation of 70-80 construction jobs and supply chain jobs to develop the site, £40m+ capital expenditure in renewable energy infrastructure, £190,000 per annum in business rates (£7.6m total).</p> <p><i>Substantial Weight</i></p>	
<p>Soil Resource – Continued agricultural use on site during the 40 year operational period, no permanent loss of agricultural land, and cessation of intensive arable cropping, preventing top-soil erosion and the extraction minerals/nutrients out of the soil allowing the soil strata to improve, with the planting of grassland in its place.</p> <p><i>Moderate Weight</i></p>	
<p>Diversification of Farm Business – The Proposal would allow for more effective utilisation of agricultural land which is rated at Grade 3b and ensure the landowner has a secure supply of income to reinvest in their agricultural business.</p> <p><i>Moderate Weight</i></p>	
<p>Generation of Carbon Free Electricity – The proposal will ensure that the UK builds up a grid of clean carbon free electricity generation which will assist the country to become self-sufficient and also to ensure that we adhere to the legal requirement of becoming the first major economy in the world to become net zero by 2050.</p> <p><i>Moderate Weight</i></p>	

Table 3: Benefits vs Harms

12.2 Planning Balance

- 12.2.1 It is demonstrated above that the limited (and temporary) landscape harm resulting from the Proposal to the Site is clearly outweighed by the substantial benefits of bringing forward a Solar PV Array and Battery Storage Development in this location.

- 12.2.2 The public benefits of the Proposal would be significant and wide-ranging; namely through the generation of clean renewable energy, which will help to alleviate the impacts of climate change and contribute towards a secure source of energy in the UK. Additional benefits also include the incorporation of BESS technology, job creation (short and long-term), the creation of net biodiversity gain of 215.29% and the effective utilisation of Grade 3b agricultural land.
- 12.2.3 The Proposed Development would not result in significant harm to the natural or physical environment, nor would it result in a loss of amenity to those residents living adjacent to the Site. It should also be noted that the development is a temporary installation, which can be quickly decommissioned, and the land restored to its former agricultural use.
- 12.2.4 In summary, the proposed development is considered not to cause any significant harm and that the significant public benefits of the Proposal outweigh any limited harm, and in accordance with the NPPF, planning permission should be granted without delay.

13 Summary and Conclusions

13.1 Summary

- 13.1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement is submitted in support of a Planning Application for the construction of a 44 MW Solar PV Array, and Battery Storage Development.
- 13.1.2 The Proposal will deliver significant benefits, generating enough renewable energy to meet the equivalent demand of over 16,680 UK homes per annum. The Proposal would also save over 32,947 tonnes of CO₂ every year, or 1,317,880 tonnes over its lifetime, compared to fossil fuel generation. This is the equivalent of planting over 21,791,259 trees or taking 283,963 cars off the road for an entire year, and as such will make a significant contribution to reducing carbon emissions in the district.
- 13.1.3 The Proposal also incorporates Battery Storage facilities, utilising safe, flexible technology, as detailed in the accompanying BESS TS, to absorb surplus electricity at times of excess generation (for example during windy days in the spring/summer when both wind generation and solar generation are high), and releasing this to meet demand when it is there (for example at night). In this respect, the Proposed Development represents an exciting project which will make a significant contribution to promoting renewable energy use, and moving to a low carbon economy, in support of national and local planning policy and all other material considerations.
- 13.1.4 Section 38 (6) of the Town and Country Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 places a statutory duty on LPA's to determine Planning Applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan for Cherwell District Council comprises primarily of Cherwell Local Plan (2011-2031) and Saved Policies from the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan (1996).
- 13.1.5 The principle of development is clearly confirmed in the Local Plan. Whilst the Site is located outside of the development boundary, Local Plan Policy ESD1 promotes the use of decentralised and renewable/low carbon energy where appropriate. Furthermore, Policy ESD 5 supports renewable energy development where it can be demonstrated there is no unacceptable adverse impact, also taking into account cumulative impacts. This Statement, with the support of the accompanying technical reports, has demonstrated that these requirements have been met and the principle of development is therefore acceptable.
- 13.1.6 This Statement demonstrated that the Proposed Development can be delivered without giving rise to any unacceptable impacts to the environment or the local community, in full accordance with the Local Plan, the NPPF and all other material considerations.

13.2 Conclusion

- 13.2.1 Section 38 (6) of the Town and Country Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that development Proposals should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 13.2.2 The Proposal accords with the Local Plan and with all the relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 13.2.3 In these circumstances, the Framework sets out that Applications should only be refused where the harms significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 13.2.4 This Statement, together with the suite of reports submitted with the Planning Application, demonstrate that the Development Proposal will deliver significant benefits of national importance and will not result in any unacceptable impacts.
- 13.2.5 In accordance with planning law and the National Planning Policy Framework, we therefore respectfully request that the Proposal is approved without delay.