Intelligent Alternatives

A Carbon Neutral Company

PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

SOLAR FARM AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT
LAND WEST OF THE A46, SHERBOURNE

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Appendix A - Joint Green Belt Study (2015) Green Belt Review Criteria

1. Introduction

1.1. This Planning, Design and Access Statement (PDAS) has been prepared by Intelligent Alternatives Limited (IA / the Agent), on behalf of PD412WAR Ltd (the Applicant), to accompany the submission of a detailed Planning Application to Warwick District Council (the Local Planning Authority / LPA / Council) for a 'solar farm and associated development' (the Proposals) at 'land west of the A46, Sherbourne' (the Site).

1.2. The Proposals will deliver a solar farm of c. 20MW, which would power the equivalent of c. 6,600 local homes annually[1] for 40 years. This equates to powering the equivalent of approximately one tenth of the dwellings in the district per year with electricity from a local, renewable source[2].

1.3. The Proposals have been assessed against the policies within the development plan, and within national policy, and are considered to comply with them overall. It is understood that the development plan currently consists of the Warwick Local Plan (adopted September 2017, henceforth referred to as the Local Plan) but it is noted that Stratford-on-Avon and the Council are working together with the Council to prepare a new local plan for South Warwickshire. At present, the new local plan has not yet been drafted but a 'Scoping and Call for Sites' consultation has taken place which affected site availability.

1.4. The Proposals will make a significant contribution to the decarbonisation of the nearby portion of the UK's energy power system[3], as part of the UK targeting Net Zero by 2050 and the full decarbonisation of the energy system by 2035. They will make a valuable contribution to meeting the UK's and international climate change targets, contribute towards addressing the climate emergency (as also declared by the Council and the UK Government in 2019) and contribute to the country's energy security and independence.

1.5. Further benefits include the economic contribution that the Proposals will make to the diversification of the local farm business, local economic opportunities and opportunities for substantial biodiversity net gain (BNG) on and around the Site.

1.6. The following documents have also been submitted to support the planning application:

Document / Drawing Title	Author	Date
Location Plan (1:10,000)	IA	7 March 2022
Existing Site Plan (1:5,000)	IA	7 March 2022
Planning Site Design Rev C2	IA	28 March 2022

[1] Based on Ofgem's Typical Domestic Consumption Value of 2,900kWh per annum and the Applicant's estimated annual yield of the Proposals

[2] Based on Valuation Office Agency statistics - Council Tax: Stock of Properties: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/valuation-office-agency-council-tax-statistics

[3] Noting that the Proposals will connect to the nearby 33kV network, so the electricity generated will be used locally and not exported into the transmission grid and used elsewhere

Racking Detail Rev A1	IA	13 January 2022
Fence Detail Rev A1	IA	13 January 2022
Inverter/Transformer Detail Rev A1	IA	18 January 2022
Substation Housing Rev A1	IA	13 January 2022
Switchgear Housing Rev A1	IA	13 January 2022
Storage / Comms / Switch Room Rev A1	IA	13 January 2022
15m SLP2 Tower, Rev A	FLI Structures	11 October 2012
CCTV Detail Rev A1	IA	13 January 2022
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	Amalgam Landscape	February 2022
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal	Midland Ecology	February 2022
Flood Risk Assessment	Nijhuis Industries	9 February 2022
Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment	Armour Heritage	February 2022
Agricultural Land Grade Classification	Soil Environment Services	December 2021
Indicative Traffic Management Plan	IA	March 2022

Table 1 – Application Documents, Drawings and Plans

2. Site and Surroundings

2.1. The Site is approximately 29.8 hectares in size and is located south of Warwick, approximately 300m north-west of Sherbourne, and to the west of Stratford Road (the A46).

2.2. The Site comprises two portions of land (identified within the Location Plan and henceforth referred to as the Northern Portion and the Southern Portion), which are approximately 14.2 hectares and 14.3 hectares in size respectively.

2.3. The Site is in agricultural use and located within the West Midlands Green Belt (the WMGB).

2.4. The Northern Portion is located between the B4463 to the south and west, the M40 to the north, and the Warwick Bypass to the east. The Southern Portion is located to the west of

the A46, and is bound by the A46 to the south-east, the Sherbourne Brook to the north of the Southern Portion of the Site, and agricultural land to the west.

2.5. A number of barns are located to the west of the Site at 'New Barn Farm' on Sherbourne Farm Road, including the Swallows Nest Barn venue, and the Silo Studios Film and Photography studio hire.

2.6. The Site is mostly flat to gently-undulating in topography, with only the western part of the Northern Portion rising eastwards to an elevated position where a telephone mast and a mature woodland is currently located towards the western fringes.

2.7. The Site is predominantly located in Flood Zone (FZ) 1, however parts of the Northern Portion lie within FZ 2 and FZ 3 based on the Government's Flood Map for Planning[4].

2.8. The Northern Portion is well screened from the B4463 slip-road onto the M40 due to the thick mature vegetation lining the B4463. The northern boundary of the Northern Portion, along the M40, is intermittently lined with vegetation along the post and rail fence-line.

2.9. The northern and western boundaries of the Southern Portion of the Site are lined by mature vegetation. The south-eastern boundary with the A46 is also lined with intermittent vegetation, and post and rail fencing, with two large agricultural buildings located to the south of the Site.

2.10. Two Public Rights of Way (PROW) are noted around the Southern Portion of the Site, comprising a footpath that runs along the Sherbourne Brook to the north and footpath that runs approximately 215m to the west of the Site. Both PROW link the A46 into the Shakespeare's Avon Way (a national trail) to the west, and form part of the wider PROW network.

3. The Proposals

3.1. The Proposals comprise a 'solar farm and associated development'. The 'Solar Farm Layout Rev C1' drawing sets out the design of the scheme and the different elements of the Proposals.

3.2. The accompanying plans, drawings and visualisations which further accompany this submission are detailed in Table 1 of this PDAS, and the key elements are also set out below.

Solar Panels

3.3. The proposed solar panels are to be installed on rows of 'tables', as detailed on the 'Racking Detail Rev A1' drawing. The panels will sit a maximum of three meters Above Ground Level (AGL) and will be black or dark blue in colour, facing due south.

3.4. There will be at least 800mm between the bottom of the panels and the ground, and 3.2m inter-row spacing, to facilitate sheep grazing in and around the panels for the duration of the solar farm, and to allow for maintenance and associated farming activity during operation.

3.5. The final row spacing is subject to ground conditions and detailed engineering design, however 3.2m row spacing is considered suitable for planning assessment purposes.

[4] Flood Map for Planning (https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/)

Substation Unit

3.6. A moss green or light grey metal / fibreglass 33kV substation housing unit, as shown in drawing 'Substation Housing Rev A1' will be required to manage the generation, transmission, and distribution of energy. The unit will be approximately 3.5m in height, 5.7m long and 3.9m wide, and located near the entrance point to the Northern Portion of the Site.

Switchgear Unit

3.7. A moss green or light grey metal / fibreglass switchgear housing unit also forms part of the Proposals, the dimensions of which will be approximately 3.7m in height, 12.7m long and 4m wide (refer to 'Switchgear Housing Rev A1' drawing). The switchgear housing will be located near the substation to control and to regulate power.

Inverter / Transformer Cabin

3.8. Eight inverter / transformer cabins are proposed which comprise of moss green or light grey metal / fibreglass structures, approximately 3.2m in height, 12.2m in length, and 3.1m wide (refer to 'Inverter / Transformer Detail Rev A1' drawing) which converts the Direct Current (DC) electricity generated by the solar panels into Alternating Current (AC), which is the flow of electricity required for the grid.

Storage / Communication / Switch Room

3.9. Two moss green or light grey, metal / fibreglass cabins are proposed which would be approximately 2.3m in height, 6.9m in length, and 1.9m tall (refer to drawing 'Storage/Comms/Switch Room Rev A1') for further solar operations.

Access

3.10. A permeable crushed stone access track, approximately 4m in width, will provide suitable vehicle access for construction, maintenance and decommissioning.

CCTV, Security and Mast

3.11. The Site will be enclosed by a 2m tall post and metal wire deer fence with occasional metal gates (refer to drawing 'Fence Detail Rev A1'). Static CCTV cameras will be located along the fence line, at approximately 50m intervals, on metal poles up to 3m in height. A 15m tall feeder tower / mast is proposed to be located near the entrance of the Site.

Further development

3.12. Landscaping measures form part of the Proposals, and are set out in the Indicative Landscape Masterplan (Figure 10 of the submitted LVIA). These include, most notably, a species rich hedgerow with trees along the northern boundary of the Northern Portion with the M40 and to the east of the Northern Portion, and to along the northern and south-eastern boundary of the Southern Portion of the Site. These measures will deliver a substantial Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

3.13. Drainage swales are proposed and form the Proposals' SuDS.

Decommissioning

3.14. The proposed lifespan of the Proposals is 40 years from the first date of export, to allow for the production of solar energy beyond the 2050 Net Zero target. The design of the solar farm is such that when it comes to the end of its permitted life, it can be dismantled with

ease and the restoration of the Site can be carried out without delay. The Proposals are entirely reversible and the Site would be restored to its pre-development condition after the operation phase. This can be secured through a condition if the LPA are minded to approve this application.

4. Planning History

4.1. Use of the LPA's online search facility indicates no planning history on the Site.

4.2. 'The A46 Trunk Road (A46/M40 Junction 15 (Longbridge) Bypass) Order 2007' is noted to the east of the Site, the archaeological findings of which informed the Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment which accompanies this planning submission.

5. EIA Regulations

5.1. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion was adopted on 15 October 2021 (Ref. SCR/21/0007). This concluded that the Proposals on the Site would not constitute EIA development, and the matrix concludes that the impacts of the Proposals would not be significant.

5.2. The Site boundary has been extended for the planning submission. Therefore, it is requested that the Council adopt an EIA Screening Opinion based on the final Site layout for completeness, although it is considered that an EIA of the Proposals is not required based on the similar nature and location of the Proposals as those previously screened.

6. Pre-application Discussions and Community Engagement

Pre-application Discussions

6.1. Pre-application advice was sought alongside the submission of an EIA Screening Opinion from the LPA (Ref. PRE21/0199). The advice received concluded that:

> "In the event that a formal planning application were to be submitted, for the reasons outlined above, <u>it is likely that the LPA would be able to support the proposed development if the solar panels are suitably positioned</u>" (emphasis added).

6.2. The key issues raised by the LPA related to minimising the visual impact from the M40 and the A46, demonstrating very special circumstances (VSCs) with regards to Green Belt policy, and further clarification on the Site Selection process to justify the location of the Proposals.

6.3. It is considered that these issues have been robustly responded to, and the Proposals can now be supported when assessed against the relevant planning policy and guidance when considered as a whole.

6.4. In the first instance, the LPA advised seeking further advice from the Warwickshire County Council's (the County Council) independent Landscape architecture services, which was sought and the feedback addressed within the LVIA (please refer to Section 9 for more

details). Consequently, pre-application advice was sought from the Warwickshire Landscape Architecture Service (21 December 2021) who provided input on the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The LVIA was updated to address any concerns, and the revised LVIA accompanies this planning submission.

6.5. Section 7 addresses the site selection process, demonstrating an absence of reasonable alternatives at the time of submission.

6.6. Section 10 sets out reasons by which it is considered VSCs exist.

6.7. Therefore and overall, it is considered the key concerns raised by the LPA have been addressed, VSCs have been demonstrated, the panels have been suitably positioned to minimise impacts, and therefore, overall, the Proposals should be approved.

Community Engagement

6.8. Following the submission of the EIA Screening Opinion request on the 9 September 2021, a courtesy email was sent to the Clerk at the Barford, Sherbourne & Wasperton Joint Parish Council (BSWJ Parish Council) and to the Budbrooke Parish Council on the 2 September to inform them of the EIA, and provide them with an opportunity to engage and make contact. No response was received from the BSWJ Parish Council.

6.9. The Clerk at Budbrooke Parish Council responded stating the following:

> "Budbrooke PC responds with comments that the proposed location does flood so will cause road issues with mud etc. with lorries in and out & also request the condition be added that the land reverts to agricultural land if use as solar farm ceases."

6.10. The comments have been taken into consideration and addressed within Section 14 and 15 of this PDAS below.

6.11. It is understood the Applicant has also liaised informally with the Parish to raise awareness of the scheme.

6.12. In absence of formal communication with the BSWJ Parish Council, the Agent, on behalf of the Applicant, would be happy to attend a Parish meeting during the determination of this planning application to address any questions.

7. Site Selection

7.1. In response to the LPA's pre-application advice, a comprehensive assessment of alternative potential locations for the Proposals has been set out in the Site Selection Document (SSD) which accompanies the application.

7.2. The information in the SSD supports the planning assessment conclusions that the need to develop on agricultural land has been demonstrated, the flooding sequential test is passed and that there are no alternatives to a Green Belt location for the Proposals (a key part of the VSCs around the Proposals).

8. Purpose, Benefits and Planning Principle

8.1. There is a host of national and international climate change and environmental law and policy (including the Climate Change Act 2008, which "is the basis for the UK's approach to tackling and responding to climate change"[5]), which is not repeated here for brevity. In the pre-application response, the LPA note that:

> "At present, Warwick District has a net carbon footprint of around 1m tonnes of CO2e. The generation of renewable energy within the district will help to reduce the net carbon footprint in line with the ambitions set out in the Council's Climate Emergency Action Programme – to help the district to become a close to net zero carbon as possible by 2030. The proposals are of a scale to make a significant contribution to renewable energy production within the district".

8.2. The general 'direction of travel' on these issues over recent time is reflected by Paragraph 153 of the National Planning Policy Framework (20 July 2021) (the NPPF) which states that "the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate".

8.3. An 'energy supply strategy' is likely to be adopted in the short term. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy have indicated that this will likely stress the importance of further renewable energy deployment to address economic and security issues[6].

8.4. Paragraph 158 states that when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development local planning authorities should "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". Paragraph 158 also states that applications should be approved if the impacts are acceptable.

8.5. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (paragraph 003) states that "the UK has legal commitments to cut greenhouse gases and meet increased energy demand from renewable sources".

8.6. The purpose of the Proposals is to generate electricity from sunlight, which is a renewable source of power. The photovoltaic (PV) panels on the Site will convert sunlight into electricity, which will feed into the local electricity network.

8.7. Renewable energy developments are needed as they play a valuable role in the country's drive to address climate change by generating electricity from sustainable, clean and renewable sources.

8.8. A recent Court Ruling[7] concluded that mitigation of climate change is a "legitimate planning consideration" and that solar panels "make a contribution to the reduction in reliance on non-renewable energy".

National Policy

[5] https://www.theccc.org.uk/the-need-to-act/a-legal-duty-to-act/
[6] https://www.edie.net/news/6/When-will-Boris-Johnson-s-new-energy-strategy-be-published--and-what-will-it-include-/
[7] McLennan, R (on the application of) v Medway Council & Anor [2019] EWHC 1738 (Admin) (10 July 2019) https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2019/1738.html

8.9. The 'Paris Agreement' was adopted in December 2015 and entered into force for the UK in December 2016:

> "The Paris Agreement's aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius".[8]

8.10. The Government's Clean Growth Strategy[9] (October 2017) reflects these agreements and strongly supports the further deployment of solar farms to tackle climate change and improve the environment, at the same time as creating economic growth and increased prosperity. These targets and agreements are reflected in the NPPF and the development plan.

8.11. In May 2019 the Climate Change Committee (the CCC) published the 'Net Zero Report'[10] (May 2019) which stated that "delivery must progress with far greater urgency" in terms of renewable energy developments, placing great emphasis on solar and wind power to help achieve the delivery of ambitious carbon emission targets by 2050. The Report also recommends quadrupling the supply of electricity from renewable sources by 2050 with established technologies such as solar doing the 'heavy lifting'[11].

8.12. In June 2019, the UK Government approved a change to the Climate Change Act's target of an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050, to the country being "net zero" in 2050. This is supported by the Council's decision to declare a climate emergency.

8.13. In November 2020, the UK Government released a blueprint of the PM's "Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution". The plan outlines how clean energy, transport solutions and innovative technologies predominantly from renewable energy will create jobs and support the UK's target of reaching carbon net zero by 2050.

8.14. The latest Budget Report published by the CCC (December 2020) recommended the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 78% from 1990 to 2035, including the UK's share of international aviation and shipping emissions for the first time. The report demonstrates that under their proposed 'Balanced Net Zero Pathway (2020-50)' increasing variable renewables to 80% of generation by 2050 is required to achieve this legally binding target. Specifically, the CCC predicts the solar generation increases required to meet Net Zero will need to go from 10 TWh in 2019 to 60 TWh in 2035 and 85 TWh in 2050. On average, 3 GW per year will need to be installed to reach this level of solar generation.

8.15. The Energy White Paper published in December 2020 by the government expects the demand for electricity to double overall by 2050, on account of the electrification of cars and vans and the increased use of clean electricity replacing gas for heating. Therefore, it is anticipated that a "four-fold increase" in clean electricity generation will be required to continue to meet the Net Zero target, with the "decarbonisation of electricity increasingly underpinning the delivery".

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[8] http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php
[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-growth-strategy
[10] Climate Change Committee, 2019. *Net Zero: The UK's contribution to stopping global warming.* Source:https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Net-Zero-The-UKs-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming.pdf
[11] https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/net_zero_report_calls_for_quadrupling_of_low_carbon_power_by_2050

8.16. In April 2021, and following the publication of the CCC's Sixth Carbon Budget, the government enshrined the "world's most ambitious climate change targets"[12] into law; seeking to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels.

8.17. These targets are echoed within Ofgem's 'Transitioning to a net zero energy system' report (published July 2021), in which the ministerial forward stresses the need for significant effort across all sectors of the economy to capitalise on low carbon technologies to achieve net zero by 2050 and decarbonise the grid by 2035.

8.18. The NPPF (updated in 2021) states that the "purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development" (Paragraph 7). In terms of the three overarching objectives of sustainability (Paragraph 8), the Proposals have an environmental focus as they will help the country adapt to climate change by contributing to moving to a low carbon economy. They also contribute to the economic role through investment and employment generation. They will protect social wellbeing and could be argued to enhance this through effective land use and the wider benefits of tackling climate change.

8.19. Paragraph 10 states that "At the heart of the framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development"

8.20. It is considered overall that the Proposals represent sustainable development, so should be approved without delay (Paragraph 11).

8.21. Paragraph 152 provides clear and specific support for the Proposals, stating that the planning system will "Support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate … and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure".

8.22. Paragraph 158 also states that applications should be approved if the impacts are acceptable.

8.23. The National Policy Statements can be a material consideration for the assessment of planning applications (in addition to their main role in the consideration of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects). The draft Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (September 2021) states that "a secure, reliable, affordable, net zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar" and that "sustained growth in the capacity of onshore wind and solar in the next decade" is required to meet the 2050 target. More pressingly, the draft EN-1 states that "There is an urgent need for new electricity generating capacity to meet our energy objectives".[13]

8.24. The draft National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy (EN-3) (September 2021) states that "Solar farms are one of the most established renewable electricity technologies in the UK and the cheapest form of electricity generation worldwide". It echoes the sentiment of the Net Zero Strategy and the draft EN-1 and states that:

> "The government has committed to sustained growth in solar capacity to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions. As such solar is a key part of the government's strategy for low-cost decarbonisation of the energy sector".

[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-enshrines-new-target-in-law-to-slash-emissions-by-78-by-2035
[13] Paragraph 3.3.20 of the draft Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1)

8.25. In the lead up to the UK hosting the United Nation's Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, the IPCC published the first part of their Sixth report[14], demonstrating how human influence has warmed the climate at an unprecedented rate, and stated that urgent action and cooperation is required to slow down the rate of global warming, including a global cumulative effort to reach carbon net zero.

8.26. The 'Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener' (published October 2021, henceforth referred to as the NZS) sets out the Government's most up-to-date strategy which emphasises the need to reach carbon net zero by 2050 and be powered entirely by clean electricity by 2035, with the Prime Minister stating that this strategy will make "historic transitions to remove carbon from our power". The NZS recognises that fundamentally "A low-cost, net zero consistent electricity system is most likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar generation, whether in 2035 or 2050"" and will assist where possible to accelerate the deployment of low-cost renewable generation.

8.27. The most recent IPCC publication (February 2022) from the second Working Group quantifies the extent to which climate change is damaging ecosystems and human systems worldwide, and states that "Global warming, reaching 1.5°C in the near-term, would cause unavoidable increases in multiple climate hazards and present multiple risks to ecosystems and humans". Therefore, the Proposals support the bold requirements to decarbonise the grid by 2035, and contribute towards ensuring global warming does not reach 1.5 degrees.

Local Planning Policy

8.28. The Warwick District Council Low Carbon Action Plan (published February 2012) recognised the need to encourage the use of low and zero carbon technologies to generate clean energy locally. The report recognised the need to invest in renewable energy to increase the resilience and security of supply by generating energy locally, and in turn ensures energy is cheaper over time for residents and businesses in Warwick.

8.29. Within the development plan, Policy CC2 Planning for Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Generation is considered the key policy by which the Proposals are compliant with, and are assessed against. Policy CC2 states that proposals for new low carbon and renewable energy technologies (including associated infrastructure) will be supported in principle subject to meeting specified criteria. The pre-add advice stated the following:

> "Criterion d) of CC2 suggests that schemes should be able to link with proposals being brought forward through the Council's climate change strategy. At present the Council does not have specific proposals for renewable energy generation. However, the proposal is consistent with the Climate Emergency Action Programme which seeks to increase renewable and low carbon energy generation in the District, thus meeting this criterion".

8.30. Policy DS5 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development states that the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development, and will commit to working proactively with applicants to find solutions that mean proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area".

[14] International Panel on Climate Change, AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, Working Group 1 contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC

8.31. Policy CC1 Planning for Climate Change Adaptation requires all development to be designed to be resilient to, and adapt to the future impacts of, climate change through the inclusion of the following adaptation measures where appropriate.

8.32. It should be noted that the Council declared a climate emergency in June 2019, following the advice provided by the IPCC in their recent report stating we have until 2030 to take urgent action on climate change in order to keep the earth's rising temperature below 1.5 degree Celsius. The motion approved by Warwick Councillors recognised that the current global target to cut carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 is unlikely to be enough to avoid a catastrophic change in our climate, and that "business as usual is no longer an option".

8.33. Policy NZC1 Achieving Net Zero Carbon Development of the Net Zero Carbon DPD encourages new development to achieve net zero carbon emissions by incorporating and utilising zero or low carbon energy sources, taking account of the availability and/or potential for large scale, low carbon energy sources. The Proposals are in themselves a solar energy generating scheme, and will support the delivery of Net Zero by 2030.

Solar Farm Specific Guidance and Other Material Considerations

8.34. The PPG sets out specific guidance for the assessment of proposed solar farms and is the most up to date formal government planning guidance on solar farms. It draws on a range of previous guidance, which is only referred to as need be to avoid repetition. The following observations are based on the more detailed analysis in the relevant sections below, as well as the assessments which accompany the application.

8.35. The PPG notes that solar farms can have negative effects particularly in undulating landscapes. In this case, the LVIA which accompanies the Application notes that as the landscape around the Site is broadly flat, and the Proposals are well contained by existing and proposed screening including native planting, there is no noteworthy visibility of the Site. Therefore, the LVIA demonstrates that the landscape has a high capacity for solar farm development and that the Proposals will have barely perceptible impacts on the landscape.

- **Focus solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land:** It has been demonstrated that the Proposals must be located on agricultural land (refer to SSD).
- **Demonstrate use of agricultural land is necessary and poorer quality land should be used in preference to higher quality land, allow for continued agricultural use and encourage biodiversity:** the site comprises Grade 3b land (poorer quality) and the SSD demonstrates that the Proposals must be located on agricultural land. Agriculture will continue on the Site and there are substantial biodiversity enhancements.
- **Temporary nature of solar farm:** The Proposals are temporary and a condition can be used to secure its removal from the Site at the end of operation.
- **Visual impact, glint and glare:** Visual impacts including glint and glare have been taken into account (Paragraph 17.6). The Proposals will be set back from the boundary of the Site, and is well obscured by existing and proposed screening from the surrounding fields, as demonstrated by the LVIA (see Figure 10 of LVIA and the Photomontages).

- **Security measures and fencing:** There are proposed CCTV cameras and wooden post and wire deer fence, which will provide site security. These have been taken into account in impact assessments. Overall, it is considered the impacts of the Proposals are outweighed by the substantial benefits.
- **Heritage considerations:** Heritage impacts have been taken into consideration. It is considered that no individually designated heritage assets are considered to be at risk of harm to their significance or setting as a result of the Proposals, and that impacts on archaeology will be minimal on account of the shallow depths of the Proposals. Moreover, it is recognised that the Proposals reflecting a continuation of the need for farms to adapt to changing economic conditions.
- **Mitigation of landscape and visual impacts:** Landscape and visual impacts have been carefully considered and mitigation proposed. This is in the form of the retention of existing well-vegetated hedgerows and linear tree belts around the boundaries of the Site, as well as the additional landscape planting shown on the accompanying landscape masterplan (Figure 10 of the LVIA).
- **Energy generating potential:** The Proposals will be c. 20MW in scale and will generate sufficient energy to power the equivalent of approximately 6,600 homes annually, c. 10% of the District's dwellings.

8.36. Prior to, and contributing to, the PPG the UK Government published a two-part solar strategy in October 2013 then in April 2014. The various statements referred to in above relate to interpretation of these, as well as the PPG.

8.37. The guiding principles (Paragraph 28) in the first part of the strategy, "Roadmap to a Brighter Future" (October 2013), recognise the importance of carefully sited projects to maintain public support for solar, making it clear that landscape and visual, heritage and amenity issues should be given proper weight and land use as well as land grade issues should be carefully considered.

8.38. The guidance noted above reflects the content of Gregory Barker's speech in April 2013 and his letter of November 2013 clarifies the content further, noting the adoption of the PPG which was published in July 2013 (see assessment at the start of this section). Nick Boles' speech in the Houses of Commons on 29 January 2014 draws attention to the requirements of the PPG in terms of assessing solar farms, especially in terms of visual impacts and land use issues.

8.39. The second part of the strategy "Delivering a Brighter Future" (April 2014), built on the principles in the first part in terms of planning guidance. The guidance reflects the Solar Trade Association's (now Solar Energy UK) 'Ten Commitments' and acknowledges the potential for substantial biodiversity benefits. The potential impacts of solar farms are carefully considered at the site-search, selection, design, planning and construction phases.

Conclusion

8.40. All of the above provides strong support in principle for solar farms at all levels of national legislation, guidance, planning policy and planning guidance. Therefore, it is evident based on adopted policy and guidance, as well as the national and international targets which underpin the relevant policy and associated guidance, that the Proposals are supported in principle.

9. Landscape and Visual Impacts

9.1. A detailed and independent Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) accompanies the application and should be referred to for its full assessment and methodology. The key points and conclusions from the LVIA are summarised below and considered against the relevant national and local policy and guidance.

9.2. The LVIA was updated following pre-application feedback from the County Council's landscaping architecture service to include viewpoints from the PROW to the south-west near Snow Hill, and also along the PROW running north towards Hampton-on-the-Hill.

9.3. Overall, the landscape around the site consists of flat to gently sloping farmland of medium to large regular fields separated by well-vegetated hedgerows, linear tree belts and woodlands. Major roads and their associated infrastructure, including the M40 and A46 dominate the landscape and views. However, within the wider landscape, the woodlands, linear tree belts and hedgerows, provide enclosure and restrict the majority views from nearby visual amenity receptors.

9.4. The LVIA considers that the site and its immediate landscape setting are not 'valued' with reference to Paragraph 174 of the NPPF.

9.5. Mitigation measures during the site selection and design stages have ensured that the Proposals will have limited direct effects on landscape elements and limited landscape vegetation such as hedgerows will be lost. The design and location of the solar panels (including the line of the cable route) have also avoided sensitive locations and have been positioned to avoid exposed sensitive locations and 'set-back' from the boundaries to minimise the influence on the adjacent roads and PROW network. This also allows opportunities for additional hedgerow and linear tree planting and rough grassland habitat creation for nature conservation benefits.

9.6. The Site's context also minimises the wider impacts on landscape character, landscape relevant designations and nearby visual amenity receptors. In addition, existing boundary vegetation will be protected and enhanced with infill planting in any gaps, to retain and improve the landscape pattern and increase screening for nearby visual amenity receptors.

9.7. The containment and enclosure provided by the well-vegetated wider landscape will also ensure that the Proposals will only have only minimal effects on both landscape character and visual amenity receptors and their views during construction and de-commissioning.

9.8. During the operation period, the Proposals will influence the immediate landscape and views, particularly from the major and minor roads that border the site. However, the majority of wider effects on landscape character, landscape relevant designations and visual amenity receptors and their views will be neutral largely because of the enclosure provided around the Proposals as well as by the wider surrounding dense hedgerows and woodland within the sloping landform.

9.9. With regard to the landscape character areas, the Proposals will change and influence the immediate landscape but will not dramatically change the characteristics of the wider landscape or affect the integrity of the landscape relevant designations. The agricultural landscape is already influenced and bisected by major road development and the proposals will fit within the existing contained field pattern. The maturing and reinforcement of the existing vegetation, selected 'infill' planting and extensive new planting will help to further

integrate the proposals into the landscape pattern and follow and promote the strategy and guidelines associated with the landscape character. The protection and enhancement of existing boundary vegetation as well as the growth of the proposed hedgerow and linear tree belts will also help to contain the proposals with minimal influence on the overall 'openness' of the Green Belt.

9.10. Although the Proposals will be initially perceived in close proximity, particularly from the network of major and minor roads which border the site, wider exposed views of the proposals from visual amenity receptors will be restricted by boundary vegetation and mature vegetation in the wider landscape. The proposed mitigation measures, as shown in the Landscape Masterplan (refer to Figure 10 of the LVIA) will help to restrict even further any potential views of the proposals, particularly for those receptors, including users of the surrounding road network in close proximity, over time.

9.11. In summary, the LVIA concludes that the Proposals:

- Are set within the regular landscape pattern within and contained by mature and well vegetated field boundaries, including mature woodlands;
- Are within the Green Belt, but through sensitive siting as well as the management and strengthening of existing field boundaries and the growth of extensive landscape mitigation measures, including hedgerows and linear tree belts will restrict any influence on the overall openness of the Green Belt over time;
- Will add a built element to the landscape, which will initially influence the immediate character;
- Will be initially perceived in close proximity, particularly from open and/or elevated locations along the network of major and minor roads which border the site;
- Will largely not influence the wider landscape or views, including the setting of landscape relevant designations, away from the immediate boundary of the site;
- Will not create 'additional' cumulative effects or contribute to a 'solar' landscape or to views influenced by numerous solar schemes; and
- Overall, will influence the immediate landscape and views in close proximity but will have minimal (if any) wider impacts on landscape relevant designations, landscape character and visual amenity receptors and their views.

9.12. It is considered that the minor impact on the wider landscape and visual receptors is outweighed by the benefits of the Proposals.

Planning Assessment

9.13. As noted in the LVIA, the design and mitigation measures have been informed through following, and with reference to, relevant policies within the Local Plan and national planning policy and guidance.

9.14. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment through protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

9.15. Policy CC2 Planning for Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Generation is complied with as the Proposals have been designed appropriately, taking into consideration its location, scale and any adjacent land uses, and has sought to minimise visual and landscape impacts through sensitive mitigation.

9.16. Objective B of the Local Plan seeks to provide "well-designed new developments that are in the right location and address climate change". The Proposals support this objective as they are located appropriately, ensuring landscape features on the Site are retained and enhanced, resulting in the Proposals overall having very limited impacts on the surrounding landscape. The Proposals are considered appropriately located (also noting there are no reasonable alternatives at the time of submission, as set out within the SSD), are well designed and also contribute towards, and deal with the effects of, tackling climate change.

9.17. Policy SC0 Sustainable Communities is complied with as the Proposals protect the natural features of the Site and the area, and contribute to the features of the area through the proposed landscaping. The enhancement of the natural environment, including natural features and areas of biodiversity, and the minimal (if any) impacts on the wider landscapes and landscape designations, means the Proposals are further compliant.

9.18. Policy BE1 Layout and Design is complied with as the design of the solar farm is considered to relate well to the local topography and landscape features, and the scale, height, form and massing is considered appropriate due to the containment and enclosure provided by the generally well-vegetated wider landscape.

9.19. Policy NE4 Landscape is complied with as the Proposals will positively contribute to landscape character, and have demonstrated how the landscape and the wider context has influenced the design and layout of the Site. This included identifying likely visual impacts on the landscape (predominantly from the road network, albeit fleetingly) and mitigation has been proposed to reduce these impacts.

9.20. Policy NE1 Green Infrastructure is complied with owing to the improvements to landscape character, and strengthening of landscape features such as corridors of trees and hedgerow as part of the indicative Landscape Masterplan.

9.21. The Proposals will protect and enhance the natural environment through: their benefits (tackling climate change) as well as careful site selection and design; mitigation measures including the retention of existing trees and hedges; and enhancement through proposed native species planting.

9.22. To conclude, the Proposals will influence the immediate landscape and views in close proximity but will have minimal (if any) wider impacts on landscape relevant designations, landscape character and visual amenity receptors and their views when taking into consideration existing and proposed screening. The overall minimal level of harm on the landscape and visual receptors will be temporary, and is considered to be outweighed by the substantial benefits of the Proposals. The Proposals comply with the development plan, particularly with reference to Policies CC2, BE1 and NE4.

10. Green Belt

10.1. The Site is located within the WMGB. The SSD sets out the alternative sites considered and should be read in conjunction with this section. The document demonstrates that due to the grid constraints within the district, and taking into consideration planning constraints and landowner aspirations, alternative sites to provide renewable energy schemes outside the WMGB are not reasonably available at the time of submission.

10.2. The LPA have declared a climate emergency, and are aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030. This will require a substantial increase in renewable energy developments within the district to meet this target.

10.3. The Proposals will generate enough energy to power the equivalent of approximately 6,600 homes per year in the district. This equates to powering approximately 10% of the homes in Warwick[15], making a significant contribution to supporting the Council's target of being carbon neutral by 2030. The SSD demonstrates that taking into consideration the contribution of the existing and proposed renewable energy schemes in the district, including the contribution of the Proposals and the proposed solar farm in the green belt (Ref. W/21/2080), there is still a significant shortfall in the ability of the district to meet this target. Therefore, it is considered that on account of the absence of available land outside the WMGB, and noting the renewable energy shortfall in the district, there is a demonstrable need for the Proposals, and that this demand, combined with the other benefits of the scheme, outweighs the harm to the WMGB by reason of inappropriateness.

10.4. Policy DS18 Green Belt of the Local Plan states that "the Council will apply national planning policy to proposals within the green belt". Therefore, it appears that the NPPF will be applied in terms of Green Belt policy.

10.5. Paragraph 147 of the NPPF states that "inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances".

10.6. Paragraph 148 states the LPA should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering an application. "'Very Special Circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations".

10.7. Paragraph 149 sets out exceptions to what is considered inappropriate development in relation to buildings. Paragraph 150 also states other forms of development which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt "provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it". 'Engineering operations' are included within Paragraph 150 as an exception. The Proposals are considered to relate more closely to engineering operations than to buildings overall (albeit a small number of structures will be required as part of the solar farm, but for engineering operations), and therefore elements of the Proposals are considered appropriate in the Green Belt.

10.8. Paragraph 151 goes on to set out specific policy for renewable energy projects in the Green Belt:

[15] Refer to Figure 3 of the SSD

> "When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources".

10.9. Therefore, certain elements of the Proposals will also comprise inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and therefore VSCs need to be demonstrated to exist which are sufficient to outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the Proposals.

10.10. VSCs can only exist if the harm to the Green Belt as a result of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed. A planning judgement is exercised to determine this.

10.11. As stated under Paragraph 151, VSCs may include (but are not limited to) "the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources".

10.12. The following section will assess the contribution of the Site to the overall designation of the Green Belt. Consequently, the potential harm to the Green Belt as a consequence of the Proposals will be assessed and the benefits of the Proposal will be set out.

10.13. The conclusion sets out the planning balance which demonstrates that the benefits of the scheme, including the demonstrable need for the Proposals, outweighs the harm as required by Paragraph 148 of the NPPF, and concludes that VSC exist.

The Role of the Site within the Green Belt

10.14. Paragraph 137 of Section 13: Protecting Green Belt Land of the NPPF states that the:

> "The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence". (Paragraph 137).

10.15. Paragraph 138 sets out the five key purposes of the Green Belt, which are as follows:

a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

10.16. An independent Joint Green Belt Study (JGBS) was undertaken in June 2015 by LUC on behalf of the six West Midland Councils within which the WMGB is located. It assessed the relative performance of Green Belt parcels against their contribution to the purpose of the designation (as set out in Paragraph 138 of the NPPF), to inform decision making by the six Councils to release or include land within the designation, predominantly for housing.

10.17. Within the JGBS the Site falls within 'Broad Area 4' of the Green Belt, as shown in Figure 1 below. The JGBS states that the Site falls within an area of the WMGB which provides a "less significant contribution to preventing neighbouring towns merging".

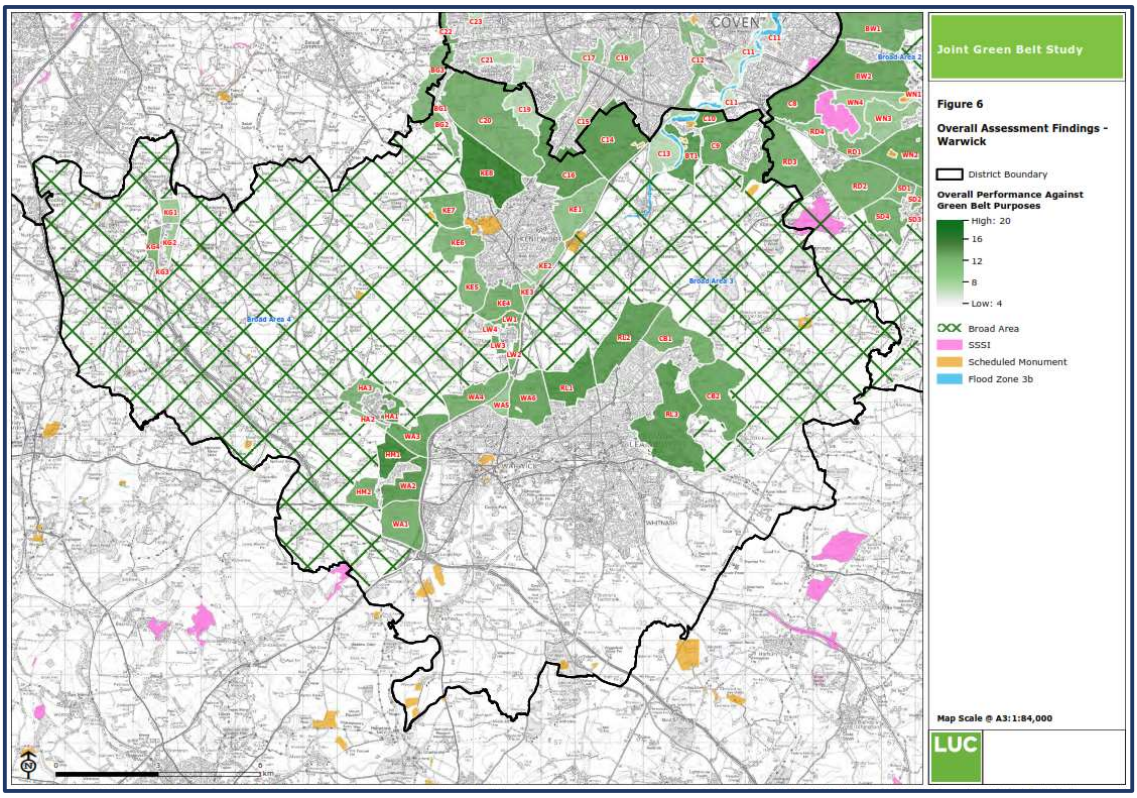

Figure 1 – Joint Green Belt Study (June 2015): LUC

10.18. The 'Broad Areas' are understood to make up the main body of the Green Belt in the district, however were subject to a more generic, descriptive assessment within the study to establish their contribution value to the aims of the Green Belt.

10.19. Paragraph 4.14 of the study states that the contribution of Broad Area 4 is 'considerable to all the purposes of Green Belt' for the following reasons:

- Checking the sprawl of Warwick to the south east and Kenilworth and Coventry to the north east.
- Preventing the merging of these neighbouring towns in the long term, particularly Warwick, Kenilworth and Coventry to the east. <u>However, the south western half of the broad area makes a less significant contribution to preventing neighbouring towns merging due to there being no towns immediately to the west and south west</u> (emphasis added).
- Safeguarding the countryside, including a number of large woodlands, such as Hay Wood.
- Preserving the setting and special character of the historic towns of Warwick, Kenilworth and Coventry. The broad area has excellent views in to the historic core of Kenilworth, and Warwick; however, there are limited views in to the historic core of Coventry to the north.
- Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land across the West Midlands.

10.20. There is no further in-depth appraisal of the specific contribution of the Site to the WMGB. As such, and for the purposes of supporting the balancing exercise, a proportionate assessment of the contribution of the Site to the WMGB is set out below against the five

criteria detailed in Paragraph 138 of the NPPF. The review criteria set out in Table 3.2 within the JGBS (and also in Appendix A of this PDAS) is also utilised to assess the value of the Site against the Green Belt purposes in the NPPF below.

a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

10.21. The Site does not lie adjacent to, or in in proximity to large built-up areas, or smaller towns or settlements, as recognised within the assessment set out above in paragraph 7.1.6. The A46 and M40 provide physical infrastructural barriers to the merging of developments, and act to contain development to the east and north of them respectively.

10.22. As such, and in answer to criteria 1a of the review criteria, it is concluded that the Site does not play a role in preventing ribbon development and has not already been compromised by ribbon development.

10.23. Criteria 1b has two considerations. The first is in relation to the siting of existing development on Site, to which the Site is mostly free from development aside from two agricultural barns located on the eastern boundary of the Southern Portion of the Site. The second consideration questions whether the site has a 'sense of openness'.

10.24. The concept of 'openness' is contested as it is not defined in planning law or legislation. Within the NPPF, the concept is referred to in relation to its contribution to the fundamental aim of the Green Belt: "preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open".

10.25. 'Openness' is understood to be open-textured, and a number of qualifiable and quantifiable factors can be applicable when assessing a specific area. Within planning case law, openness has been argued to be the "counterpart of urban sprawl and is also linked to the purposes to be served by the Green Belt. It is not necessarily a statement about the visual qualities of the land, though in some cases this may be an aspect of the planning judgement involved in applying this broad policy concept. Nor does it imply freedom from any form of development; some forms of development are appropriate and as such as compatible with the concept of openness".[16]

10.26. The Site comprises 0.012% of the size of the overall WMGB, and 0.133% of the Green Belt in the Warwick district[17]. Therefore, the volume of land in comparison to the total designation is minimal and not noteworthy, especially when compared to the substantial benefits that the Proposals will deliver.

10.27. It is considered that the elements set out in Section 3 'Existing Conditions' of the LVIA, which also assess some of the key criteria which would warrant the Site comprising a valued landscape, are useful and transferable when setting out the Site's contribution to the 'openness' of the Green Belt. The LVIA considers the Site does not reside within a landscape which:

[16] R: on the application of Samuel Smith Old Brewery (Tadcaster) and others v North Yorkshire County Council
[17] It is understood the WMGB is approximately 231,291 hectares, of which 20,545 are in Warwick district

- is connected with notable people, events and the arts;
- has a strong sense of identity;
- offers recreational opportunities where the experience of the landscape is important;
- appeals to the sense, primarily the visual sense;
- has a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies; or
- performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function in the landscape.[18]

10.28. Whilst openness relates in part to the visibility from landscape designations or receptors, the LVIA notes that the views into the Site can only be appreciated for fleeting moments from the M40 and the A46. The views from the A46 are somewhat obscured and impacted by the two agricultural barns which are located within the Site.

10.29. Moreover, views from PROW are treated as 'glimpses' within the LVIA due to the enclosure provided by mature vegetation enclosing the Site and along the PROW.

10.30. Therefore, and in conclusion, it is considered that the Site does not provide a noteworthy contribution to regulating the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, and does not provide a noteworthy contribution to the overall feeling of openness in the Green Belt.

b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

10.31. As aforementioned, it is recognised within the JGBS study that "the south western half of the broad area [4] makes a less significant contribution to preventing neighbouring towns merging due to there being no towns immediately to the west and south west".

10.32. The Site is located approximately 300m from the outskirts of Sherbourne, which, according to the scoring system within the Green Belt review criteria, would mean the Site scores more highly on its potential to impact the merging or blurring of settlement boundaries. However, the location of the A46 and the M40 acting as a physical barrier to expansion means the site is not valuable in terms of contributing towards towns / settlements merging into one another.

10.33. Overall, it is considered that the Site does not make a significant contribution to this purpose of the Green Belt.

c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

10.34. Under criteria 3a, the Site can be considered to contain characteristics of countryside as it is a farmed landscape which, in the case of the Southern Portion, adjoins further countryside land. The Northern Portion has been somewhat affected previously by the construction of Junction 15 and the Warwick Bypass and is isolated from the countryside and the remainder of the Green Belt. The Southern Portion also has two agricultural units on the land which prevent uninterrupted views of the Site from the A46. The development of the Junction and the underpass, with the associated paved access track which the PROW follows and connects the two portions is considered an urban influence which somewhat detracts from the characteristics of the Green Belt.

[18] Taken from paragraph 3.12 of the LVIA

10.35. Moreover, it was concluded under purpose a) above that the Site's openness is somewhat compromised by its containment through mature screening, and its lack of visual contribution to a sense of vast open countryside from PROW or roads.

10.36. Therefore, it is considered that the Site does not play a significant role in this purpose of the Green Belt.

d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

10.37. As stated within Section 13, designated heritage assets within 2km of the Site were largely scoped out of further assessment since they were found to have no capacity for impacts on their setting or significance as a result of the Proposals at the Site.

10.38. In response to the criteria within the table set out in Appendix A, the Site has no intervisibility between the historic core of Sherbourne and Warwick, the nearest settlements to the Site.

10.39. The DBA and the LVIA also draw similar conclusions, whereby it is noted that the A46 very effectively separates the landscape to the north of Sherbourne (including the Site) from the Conservation Area and any significant elements of its wider landscape setting. Therefore, the Site does not contribute to the preservation of the setting and special character of the Sherbourne Conservation Area, and does not play a significant role in this purpose of the Green Belt.

e) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

10.40. It is considered that this purpose is not relevant to the Site as it is not derelict or other urban land, and it is not designated for an alternative use within the Local Plan.

10.41. **Overall, and in conclusion, it is considered that the Site does not contribute a noteworthy value in terms of achieving the aims of the Green Belt.** Therefore, as there is a need to utilise Green Belt land to deliver clean energy, for the reasons set out within the SSD and in Section 8 of the PDAS, it is considered that the use of the Site to do so is considered appropriate.

Degree of Harm resulting from the Proposals

10.42. Paragraph 147 states that "inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances".

10.43. Paragraph 148 requires the LPA to attribute "substantial weight" to any harm to the Green Belt, and explains that any "other considerations" must outweigh the "potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal".

10.44. The degree of harm to the Green Belt resulting from the Proposals is also set out in this Section. The harm comprises, but is not limited to, the impact of the Proposals against the fundamental aim of the Green Belt as set out in Paragraph 137 of the NPPF, to "prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open". 'Keeping land permanently open' requires the consideration of the essential characteristics of the Green Belt: its openness and its permanence. This will be discussed below.

Openness

10.45. As noted above, the definition of openness is somewhat open to interpretation, and a number of factors affect the degree of harm on the openness of the Green Belt as a result of the Proposals.

10.46. The PPG attempts to answer the following question:

> *"**What factors can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt**?"*
>
> Assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgment based on the circumstances of the case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:
>
> openness is capable of having <u>both spatial and visual aspects</u> – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
>
> the <u>duration of the development</u>, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and
>
> the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation".[19]

10.47. With regards to addressing the visual aspects of the concept of openness, the PPG also states the following:

> "The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively".[20]

10.48. Therefore, as before, it is considered appropriate to revert to the conclusion of the LVIA with regards to visual impacts on the openness of the Green Belt, noting the Site's generally flat topography. The LVIA concludes the following:

> "*The siting, including the existing strong enclosure by mature vegetation, very carefully considered the influence on the 'openness' of the Green Belt as a result of the proposals. As illustrated in Viewpoints 1-7* [of the LVIA], *any potential perception of the proposals will be limited to very close proximity, largely only from selected open locations along the boundaries of the proposals or from selected open and elevated locations on the adjacent busy road network.*
>
> *The growth of the extensive proposed landscape mitigation measures will also further restrict the influence of the proposals, including on the overall 'openness' of the Green Belt.*
>
> *Any residual influence on the openness of the Green Belt will be, at worst, fleeting when perceived from the elevated adjacent road network over time with associated negligible adverse effects. For the majority of the Green Belt, the proposals will not influence its openness".*

[19] PPG - Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722 published 22 07 2019
[20] PPG Paragraph 013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327

10.49. Moreover, the LVIA concludes that despite the Site's location in the Green Belt, "through sensitive siting as well as the management and strengthening of existing field boundaries and the growth of extensive landscape mitigation measures, including hedgerows and linear tree belts will restrict any influence on the overall openness of the Green Belt over time".

10.50. With regards to the spatial elements of the Green Belt, it is considered that the Proposals do not conflict with the five purposes of the Green Belt, and therefore do not result in harm to this element of openness.

10.51. However, overall, the Proposals add a built element to the Green Belt, and therefore result in some minor harm to the openness of the Green Belt; the harm is considered to relate to the visual aspect of the openness, particularly relating to the views from the M40 and the PROW, but these are considered fleeting and minor. Therefore, the Proposals conflict with the fundamental aim of the Green Belt which is to keep land open. This harm can be minimised, and is considered to be outweighed by the benefits of the Proposals which amount to VSC.

Permanence

10.52. With regard to the Proposal's impact on 'permanence' of the Green Belt, planning permission is sought for a 40 year consent. The Proposals are temporary, fully reversible, and the land will be maintained in agricultural use for the duration of the Proposals and the land will be fully restored to its present condition following decommissioning.

10.53. In this manner, with regards to duration, the Proposals safeguards the quality of the agricultural land, facilitating its continued agricultural use beyond the 40 years, and preventing urban encroachment.

10.54. Within the John Turner V Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government[21] case, the notion of 'Greenness' is raised; whereby "part of the idea of the Green Belt is that the eye and the spirit should be relieved from the prospect of unrelenting urban sprawl". Whilst not commonly discussed, the quasi-agricultural nature of the Proposals is considered to reduce the impact on openness and break up the built element, as the underlying 'greenness' is not affected, and can still be seen fleetingly between the panels from the PROW and the roads.

10.55. Solar Farms in the Green Belt are increasingly being approved[22] due to the recognised need for renewable energy across the UK to meet national climate change targets, and in recognition of the temporary and reversible nature of solar farms, safeguarding the land for the duration of the proposed developments. The flexibility and low-impact nature of the Proposals means that, should the need and demand for renewable energy change, the panels can be removed swiftly and the land can revert back to its former condition.

10.56. In conclusion, the Proposals are in contention with the aims of the Green Belt, which are to keep the land permanently open. However, whilst 40 year operation is a considerable period of time, the land will remain in agricultural use for the duration of the Proposals,

[21] John Turner VS Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (East Dorset District Council) [2015] EWHC 2728

[22] https://lichfields.uk/blog/2016/october/27/tipping-the-balance-for-green-energy-in-the-green-belt/
https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1734438/members-unanimously-approve-green-belt-solar-farm-against-officer-advice
https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/27-acre-solar-farm-set-18735850

safeguarding the land for future, and the land can be restored to its former condition following decommissioning. Therefore, this harm is considered to be minor at most.

Other Harm

10.57. Other harm to the Green Belt, or indeed any other harm anticipated as a consequence of the Proposals, can be considered in the overall harm within the balancing act. However, overall, harm is considered to be limited as set out in the summary below. These sections should be read in conjunction with the relevant sections of the PDAS, and the independent reports which accompany this planning submission.

Landscape and Visual Impacts

10.58. The Proposals will result in fleeting views of the Site from the A46 and M40 and the nearby PROW along Sherbourne Brook, but this will be significantly reduced in the form of mitigation and landscaping. Refer to the LVIA and Section 9 for more details. The Proposals are temporary and reversible, and therefore the harm is considered to be temporary and minor.

Heritage and Archaeology

10.59. The DBA concludes that there is no harm to the historic landscape of the region or nearby designated heritage assets including the Sherbourne Conservation Area. Refer to Section 13 for more details.

10.60. The Proposals have the potential to disturb buried archaeological features and deposits if/where present. However, it is considered that due to the shallow nature of the Proposals, and the potential for non-intrusive measures to be deployed to manage archaeology, the harm will be less than substantial with regards to archaeology.

Ecology

10.61. The Proposals result in minor harm to ecology during construction / decommissioning, largely due to disruption on Site. However, avoidance measures will be adhered to, and the Proposals have been designed to ensure they result in minimal harm to ecology, and any loss will be compensated for, and outweighed by, the proposed biodiversity improvements in and around the Site for the duration of the Proposals.

Traffic and Transport

10.62. It is considered that the temporary and short-term nature of the construction process, combined with the above existing and proposed mitigation measures, would ensure minimum disruption within the surrounding area, and result in negligible harm.

Noise and Light Pollution

10.63. There is no noise, moving parts, glare or electrical disturbance from solar panels, and therefore, no harm.

Conclusion

10.64. Overall, it is concluded that limited weight should be applied with regards to the temporary 'other harm' when undertaking the planning balance, in accordance with Paragraph 148 of the NPPF.

Benefits of the Proposals

10.65. There is substantial policy support at an international, national and local level to support the deployment of solar farms to tackle climate change. Section 8 sets out the national and local policy support for renewable energy and low-carbon energy schemes, and should be read in conjunction with this Section.

10.66. Within the SSD, the demonstrable need for the Proposals, resulting from the shortfall in renewable energy generation in the district when taking into consideration the existing and proposed renewable energy developments in the district, which cannot be accommodated outside the WMGB, amount to VSC sufficient to outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness to the Green Belt.

10.67. The recent approval of the Thurrock DCO[23] within the Green Belt, a non-renewable gas peaking energy scheme with battery storage, is noted as it demonstrates that overall demand for UK generated energy schemes can outweigh the harm to the openness to the Green Belt. In this case, the Proposals result in minor harm to the openness to the Green Belt, and otherwise do not conflict with the fundamental aims of the Green Belt. The Proposals comprise of a temporary and renewable energy scheme, which will also make a significant and necessary contribution to meeting the Council's renewable energy targets and aims of being carbon neutral by 2030. Therefore, it is considered that the minimal harm to the openness would be outweighed by the VSC resulting from the demonstrable need for the Proposals, and the other combined benefits which will be discussed.

10.68. Within the Bristol Airport Appeal[24], which assessed the Bristol Airport expansion, including the need for the carpark to reside within the Green Belt and within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), it was recognised that "there is a demonstrable need to provide the Proposals which cannot fully be accommodated outside of the Green Belt." Similarly, the SSD has demonstrated that there is an absence of reasonable alternatives outside the Green Belt, and that notwithstanding the contribution of the existing and proposed renewable energy schemes in planning within the district, including the Proposals, there is still a significant shortfall of energy which is required to be powered by clean energy.

10.69. Furthermore, the additional benefits of the Proposals are set out below.

Climate Emergency

10.70. The Council declared a climate emergency in June 2019, following the advice provided by IPCC advise in their report that we have until 2030 to take urgent action on climate change in order to keep the earth's rising temperature below 1.5 degree Celsius. At the time, Warwick Councillors recognised that the current global target to cut carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 is unlikely to be enough to avoid a catastrophic change in our climate, and that "business as usual is no longer an option".

10.71. Furthermore, it is noted that the Council is a member of the UK100 pledge to ensure 100% renewable energy across the Council by 2050. This means the Council has pledged to maximise the generation of renewable energy from installations located within their district.

10.72. In October 2021 the UK Government released a press statement which promises to reduce carbon emissions by 78% by 2035, compared to 1990 levels. This is the world's most ambitious climate change target, and will incorporate the UK's share of international

23 Ref: EN010092 Application for the Thurrock Flexible Generation Plant Development Consent Order
24 Appeal Reference APP/D0121/W/20/3259234

aviation and shipping emissions25. A substantial increase in the proportion of electricity being generated from renewable energy sources, including solar power, is required to achieve this legally binding target.

10.73. This was reflected in their publication of the 'Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener' (October 2021) which sets out the Government's strategy to reach carbon net zero by 2050, and recognises that a "clean, reliable power system is the foundation of a productive net zero economy", and therefore seeks to decarbonise the UK's power system by 2035. The Net Zero Strategy draws together the aforementioned published energy strategies and papers which have made the case for needing the case for tackling climate change, including the most recent IPCC report.

10.74. During COP26 this year in Glasgow countries "stressed the urgency of action "in this critical decade," when carbon dioxide emissions must be reduced by 45 per cent to reach net zero around mid-century"[26].

10.75. The first and second Working Group reports informing the overall IPCC Sixth Budget reports also demonstrate with high confidence that climate change is threatening human well-being. At the time of submission, Hoesung Lee, Chair of the IPCC, stated "This report is a dire warning about the consequences of inaction. It shows that climate change is a grave and mounting threat to our wellbeing and a healthy planet. Our actions today will shape how people adapt and nature responds to increasing climate risks".

10.76. The Proposals will generate enough electricity to power the equivalent of approximately 6,600 homes annually, based on the predicted irradiation on the Site and the current average household electricity usage[27], powering approximately 10% of the LPA's homes (refer to Figure 3 within the SSD).

10.77. As aforementioned in Section 8 of this PDAS, a recent Court Ruling concluded that mitigation of climate change is a "legitimate planning consideration" and that solar panels "make a contribution to the reduction in reliance on non-renewable energy".

10.78. Therefore, the urgent need to tackle the climate emergency, recognised locally and nationally, is considered a VSC in and of itself and should be attributed substantial weight in the planning balance. Policies set out within Section 8 also support the need for the Proposals in tackling climate change.

Generating Renewable Energy

10.79. When supporting plan making, Paragraph 155 of the NPPF encourages plans to "help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy".

10.80. The PPG also provides an answer to the following:

> **"Why is planning for renewable and low carbon energy important?**
>
> Increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses. Planning has an important role in the delivery of new

[25] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-enshrines-new-target-in-law-to-slash-emissions-by-78-by-2035

[26] https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop26

[27] Based on Ofgem's Typical Domestic Consumption Value of 2,900kWh per annum and the estimated annual yield of the Proposals

> renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure in locations where the local environmental impact is acceptable."[28]

10.81. Throughout the country, operational solar farms already make a valuable contribution to generating electricity. Solar farms are a well understood and popular form of renewable energy generation, as a result of their unobtrusive, low-level nature and the subsequent low-level of impacts compared to other forms of energy generation such as wind turbines. There is no noise, moving parts, glare or electrical disturbance from solar panels, and solar is the most popular form of renewable energy generation technology; in the March 2021 Public Attitudes Tracker published by the Department for Business (May 2021), 84% of people supported solar, while opposition to solar energy reached a low of 2%[29].

10.82. Solar has contributed to the recent reduction of the reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation (especially coal) as the country aims to fulfil its legal obligations and meet targets under various national and international agreements, reflected by the Council's decision to declare a climate emergency (and as further detailed below in Section 8).

10.83. The former Warwick District Council Low Carbon Action Plan (10 February 2012) sought to encourage local energy generation in the district to provide resilience and security of supply, and ensure energy is cheaper over time for residence and businesses.

10.84. The Energy White Paper stressed that "clean electricity will become the predominant form of energy, entailing a potential doubling of electricity demand and consequently a fourfold increase in low-carbon electricity generation".

10.85. The Net Zero strategy sets out the need for "40GW of offshore wind by 2030, with more onshore, solar, and other renewables".

10.86. Therefore, urgent need to deliver further generation of renewable energy to meet climate targets should be afforded weight in the planning balance.

Decarbonising the Grid

10.87. The UK government's Ten Point Plan in November 2020 stated that "Our vision is for the UK to be a global leader in the technologies needed to decarbonise our economies and transition to net zero".

10.88. The National Infrastructure Strategy (November 2020) stated that "bold action is needed to transform the UK's infrastructure to meet net zero and climate change commitments. The government will continue to decarbonise the UK's power, heat and transport networks – which together account for over two-thirds of UK emissions - and take steps to adapt to the risks posed by climate change"

10.89. Ofgem's Smart Systems and Flexibility Plan (published July 2021) states that:

> "due to the threat of catastrophic climate change, we need to rapidly shift away from fossil fuels to cleaner forms of energy. For the energy sector, this means generating energy from low carbon sources such as solar and wind power and hydrogen, and electrifying much of our energy demand, for example shifting to electric transport and heat".

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[28] Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 5-001-20140306

[29] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985092/BEIS_PAT_W37_-_Key_Findings.pdf

10.90. Lastly, the Government have unveiled plans to decarbonise the UK power system by 2035 which is fully set out in the Government's Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, published in October 2021. A key focus of the report is to build a secure, 'home-grown' energy sector that reduces reliance on fossil fuels and exposure to volatile global wholesale energy prices.

Biodiversity Net Gain and Ecology

10.91. As set out within Section 11 of this document, substantial mitigation and landscaping measures are being deployed which will provide a substantial biodiversity net gain.

10.92. Ecology will be protected during construction and decommissioning by adopting the measures set out in the PEA, and the provision of generous landscaping will result in the delivery of an overall biodiversity net gain.

10.93. Solar farms present a unique opportunity for biodiversity net gain (BNG), as during the long-term operation of projects, there is limited disturbance from people the generation of electricity or from the occasional maintenance activity.

10.94. This opportunity has been recognised by solar farm developers and operators who have been working to promote advanced land stewardship and biodiversity through the design, construction and operation of their projects, in conjunction with landowners and other stakeholders.

10.95. The Proposals deliver a substantial BNG, and the land will be actively managed for 40 years, surpassing this desired timescale set out in the Environment Bill.

10.96. The Proposals support the Government's actions to ensure biodiversity net gain is a key consideration within every planning application going forward to "deliver improvements that last for the duration of a development or be established on a permanent basis".

10.97. Therefore, there is no harm anticipated and improvements are considered to weigh in favour of the Proposals in the planning balance. The biodiversity and ecology benefits of the Proposals should be afforded significant weight.

Land Grade

10.98. The Site is Grade 3b land, and therefore not BMV. There is understood to be a generous supply of BMV within the district, and therefore avoiding the best quality land is considered a benefit. The land will be retained in agricultural use for the duration of the Proposals, and will be reinstated to its former condition following decommissioning.

10.99. Solar farms help farmers and land owners diversify, strengthening the local economy and supporting local services and businesses. Farmland stays in agricultural production, typically through sheep grazing. As stated within Section 14, the Proposals support local policy EC2 to support farming diversification as they will provide a steady income to the landowner for the duration of the Proposals.

10.100. Therefore, there is no harm anticipated, and the safeguarding of the agricultural land and the dual use on Site is considered to weigh in favour of the Proposals in the balance.

Flooding and Drainage

10.101. All essential infrastructure is to be situated within FZ 1 and the solar panels are set at a minimum height of 0.8m AGL.

10.102. Overall, the Proposals do not result in harm with relation to flooding and drainage risk, as they have been designed to be safe for the lifetime of development, taking into consideration the impact of climate change, and overall improve drainage on the Site, ensuring the Proposals do not result in adverse flooding impact elsewhere in the vicinity.

The Proposals also contribute towards tackling climate change overall, which will assist in reducing the risk of flooding.

Local Benefits and Community Fund

10.103. A community benefit payment will be made by the Applicant to the BSWJ Parish Council, comprising of a one-off payment to compensate for any inconvenience caused as a result of construction, or to fund local projects in the area. This could include the improvement of the potential Local Wildlife Site along the Sherbourne Brook. The offer of a community benefit payment applies irrespective of whether or not the Parish Councils support the Application.

10.104. There will also be local economic opportunities for construction and maintenance companies and the Applicant welcomes the opportunity to discuss contract opportunities with local companies. The importance of this should not be underestimated, as reflected by appeal decision 2206258 which states that solar farms:

> "Would provide some support for the construction industry and local contractors/suppliers could be engaged during the construction and eventual decommissioning stages. Some construction workers may also use some local services. Furthermore, the scheme would generate additional income for the landowners, enhancing farm incomes and possibly diversifying some farm businesses. This would accord with the Government's objective of promoting a strong rural economy. In addition, the development would assist in increasing the security and diversity of electricity supply. These economic benefits are important considerations that can be given much weight" (Paragraph 17, emphasis added).

10.105. Furthermore, it is considered that the Proposals present an opportunity to learn about the environment, climate change and the generation of electricity from clean sources.

10.106. Therefore, this should be afforded much weight in the planning balance.

Lack of Reasonable Alternatives

10.107. Lastly, the SSD demonstrates the absence of appropriate and available sites outside of the WMGB at the time of submission. Therefore, the Site is the only available location for the Proposals at the time of submission.

The Balancing Exercise

10.108. Significant weight is attributed to the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and other minor harm to the openness and permanence of the Green Belt. Moreover, it is noted the Proposals result in other temporary, minor material harm to landscape and visual amenity, potential archaeology, ecology during construction / decommissioning, and temporarily to the highway network.

10.109. However, the combined harm is considered to be outweighed by the demonstrable need for the Proposals in the district to generate renewable energy and assist the district in

meeting their net zero target by 2030, as well as other benefits, which collectively amount to VSCs.

10.110. The main SSD demonstrates that taking into consideration the energy generated from all the existing renewable energy schemes in the district, including those presently in planning and therefore in the WMGB, there is still a shortfall in the quantity of renewable energy generated to meet the districts energy needs. Moreover, the absence of reasonable alternatives outside the WMGB requires land within the Green Belt to be utilised to meet this energy target, and therefore it is considered there is a demonstrable need for the Proposals in the GB, which in and of itself is considered to amount to VSC sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

10.111. The Proposals will power the equivalent of approximately 6,600 homes per year, the equivalent of 10% of homes in the district, with locally generated energy which will support the UK wide effort to tackle climate change, and decarbonise the grid by 2035, noting we are facing a climate emergency.

10.112. In addition, there are also significant other benefits provided by the Proposals, including a generous biodiversity uplift through the provision of landscaping and new trees and hedgerow, the preservation of agricultural land, the improvement in drainage on the Site, as well as socio-economic benefits of facilitating farming diversification, providing a community benefit fund, and the possibility to support local construction and engineering companies.

10.113. The Proposals comply with the development plan as a whole, and also supports local, national and international efforts to tackle climate change.

10.114. Overall, it is considered that the demonstrable need for, as well as the combined benefits of, the Proposals outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt, and it therefore that VSCs exist. The Proposals comply with Policy DS18 Green Belt, and comply with the policies set out in the NPPF as the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and other harm, has been outweighed by the VSCs and other benefits.

11. Ecology and Biodiversity

11.1. The application is accompanied by a detailed Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA).

11.2. The PEA concludes that the Site is not subject to any international or national statutory nature conservation designations, nor any non-statutory nature conservation designation such as Local Wildlife Sites. There are no habitats or species recorded on Site considered likely to be of Metropolitan importance. However, a potential Local Wildlife Site is noted along the Sherbourne Brook.

11.3. The PEA concludes that the Site's hedgerows (and the adjacent tributary) are likely to serve a landscape scale role in connecting the nearby habitats to the wider landscape, and so are ecologically valuable green infrastructure when evaluated at the district scale.

11.4. The Site's hedgerows and trees are known support protected species (breeding birds) and have the potential to support other protected species (bats, great crested newt and hedgehog). The adjacent tributary also has potential to support otter and water vole. As such, these features are considered to be of importance locally.

11.5. With the exception of the boundary habitats described above, all habitats within the survey area are considered to be of value within the vicinity of the Site only.

11.6. The PEA notes that all of the hedgerows had at least 80% cover of native species and as such qualify as UK BAP Priority Habitats. There is no hedgerow removal proposed as part of the Proposals; all of the hedgerows are to be retained and existing entranceways utilised as best as possible (i.e. there will be no major severance of hedgerows). Therefore, the PEA concludes that provided that this remains the case, no further assessment of the hedgerows is considered necessary.

11.7. Management practices for both new and existing hedgerows will be adopted in line with the PEA, including laying the hedgerows to encourage bushy growth low down, trimming only every three years (or less if possible), and maintaining them at a height of at least three, and preferably four, metres. About one third of the hedgerows on site would be left to grow for seven to ten years and only one third should be cut in any one year so that at least some heavily fruiting hedgerows are always present.

11.8. Mature trees within the hedgerows and the mature oak within the arable field noted in the PEA require protection, and the pollarded willows should be kept and continue to be pollarded to maintain their value to the landscape.

11.9. The Sherbourne Brook is adjacent to the site, to the east and north of the southern site. During the construction phase of the project or any on-going maintenance works, on no account should any chemicals, including vehicle fuels or lubricants be left on site at night where they might be accessed by accident or deliberately (e.g. vandals) resulting in spillage to the river either directly or as run off. Any contractors engaged in works on the site should have in place secure storage facilities and an agreed pollution prevention plan. Appropriate pollution control equipment should be available at the site to control spillages if they do occur.

11.10. Evidence for badger commuting trails and foraging activity in the fields of the Northern Portion and an outlier sett was found on Site. As such, a suitable Reasonable Avoidance Measures Statement (RAMS) will need to be undertaken and implemented to ensure works are carried out in accordance with it. This can be secured through condition should the planning application be approved, and would include the working methods outlined in the PEA.

11.11. With regards to bats, further surveys for bats are not considered to be necessary, provided avoidance measures are followed, including protecting all veteran trees and lengths of hedgerow during construction works, and ensure the use of light follows the protocols as set out in the PEA to minimise disturbance and sky-glow across the site.

11.12. Further surveys for breeding birds within the hedgerows and trees are not considered necessary, owing to the fact hedgerow and trees will not be impacted during construction. If any hedgerow is to be severed, causing a gap of 10 meters or more, then further survey work on nesting birds would be required.

11.13. Nesting birds may be present during the bird breeding season, notably within the trees, hedgerows, bramble banks, long grass, and brash piles. If the afore mentioned habitat types are to be removed during the active bird breeding season, then a prior check (within a 24-hour period preceding works) for nesting birds should be undertaken. The open fields should also be checked by an ecological clerk of works for ground nesting birds such as

Skylark and meadow pipits and work should be timed to avoid the skylark and meadow pipit breeding.

11.14. Although no great crested newts were observed on the site at the time of the survey, RAMS will be implemented and adhered to, and a method statement can be provided to detail the precautionary methods of working, RAMS, as well as any proposed enhancements to the site such as hedge planting or field margin establishment. Agreement of this method statement should be made a condition of any planning consent granted. RAMs would also need to be undertaken to protect any potential hedgehogs and reptiles which may be found during construction on Site during hibernation periods.

11.15. It is reasonable to assume that otters are within the local vicinity, and potentially water voles. The disturbance of water voles occupying a place of shelter or protection can constitute an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. In order to ensure minimal potential disturbance to these species therefore, no works within 5m of the watercourse will be permitted. The five-meter buffer is to be implemented from the top of the bank of the tributary into the adjacent land. All works will take place outside of this buffer zone. A precautionary method of working is to be implemented to ensure the above mitigation methods are implemented, details of which are set out in the PEA.

11.16. Finally, although no barn owls were observed on the site at the time of the survey, the site would provide good foraging habitat for them. Should any evidence of barn owl presence be found at any stage during works, then all works must cease, and the advice of a suitably qualified Ecologist sought.

Planning Assessment

11.17. In terms of Paragraph 174 of the NPPF, the Proposals recognise the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, and seek to minimise the impacts on biodiversity, by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures. There will be a positive contribution to tackling the overall decline in biodiversity and the Proposals provide a biodiversity net gain overall as a result.

11.18. There will be no loss or inappropriate deterioration of irreplaceable habitats including trees, and any minor harm is clearly outweighed by the substantial benefits of the Proposals.

11.19. With regards to Paragraph 180 of the NPPF, the Proposals conserve and enhance biodiversity overall. The Proposals will safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the trees and hedgerow which act as wildlife corridors, and strengthen them where possible.

11.20. PPG Paragraph 013, Renewable and Low Carbon Energy is complied with in terms of biodiversity as the Proposals encourage biodiversity improvements around the arrays and elsewhere in and around the Site.

11.21. In terms of the PPG Section “Natural Environment”, the following paragraphs are complied with:

> 018: Ecological Appraisal and associated assessment and mitigation accompanies the application; and
>
> 019: biodiversity enhancement is proposed through habitat expansion, improved links, buffering of habitats and species, new biodiversity features and long-term management is proposed.

11.22. Policy NE2 Protecting Designated Biodiversity and Geodiversity Assets has been complied with as the Proposals protect designated areas and species of national and local importance for biodiversity and geodiversity.

11.23. The Proposals do not impact areas of high ecological sensitivity, which predominantly include the margins of the Site, and especially noting the vegetation near the Sherbourne Brook, and will provide a biodiversity uplift as a consequence of the proposals.

11.24. Policy NE3 Biodiversity is complied with as the proposals protect and enhance biodiversity on site. Moreover, there will be no adverse impacts on wildlife as a result of noise or lighting.

11.25. Policy CC2 Planning for Renewable Energy is also complied with as the Proposals have been designed to minimise the impact on the natural environment in terms of ecology impact.

11.26. Policies NE4 Landscape, BE1 Layout and Design, and SC0 Sustainable Communities are also complied with as there will be no significant harm and the substantial biodiversity enhancements associated with the Proposals enhance and ands support habitats and wildlife corridors linking the Site to the wider habitats.

11.27. There is a substantial weight of evidence that demonstrates that solar farms can greatly enhance the biodiversity of the location and surroundings. Case studies indicate that biodiversity is greatly enhanced by solar farms in contrast to the control (agricultural use) by increasing plant, bumblebee and breeding bird species on sites. The case study showed that the amount of plant, bumblebee and breeding bird species were significantly higher in the solar farm than the control (an arable field).

11.28. Furthermore, a detailed report by the Solar Trade Association (now Solar Energy UK) entitled “The Natural Capital Value of Solar” (2019) also provides evidence that solar farms have a positive impact on ecosystems and ultimately result in BNG through management actions such as the maintenance of habitats and biodiversity, water and soil quality regulation.

11.29. The idea of enhancing biodiversity in and around solar farms goes beyond the principle of environmental protection. In November 2020, the UK Government published their Ten Point Plan to drive forward a ‘Green Industrial Revolution’, including Point 9 ‘Protecting our Natural Environment’. The document seeks to ‘safeguard cherished landscapes, restore habitats for wildlife to combat biodiversity loss and adapt to climate change’.

11.30. In 2018 the Government published their 25 Year Environment Plan setting out tangible actions to help the natural world regain and retain good health, including their aspiration to embed environmental ‘net gain’ principles into all new developments.

11.31. One of the Government’s actions to ensure environmental net gain includes strengthening existing national policy requirements for biodiversity net gain. Biodiversity net gain “should deliver improvements that last for the duration of a development or be established on a permanent basis”. The new Environment Bill aims to secure biodiversity enhancements on new development for 30 years. Solar farms will be actively managed for 40 years, surpassing this desired timescale.

11.32. To conclude, the Proposals result in minimal, temporary harm to ecology (primarily during construction / decommissioning), however any harm will be compensated for, and outweighed by, the proposed biodiversity improvements around the Site. RAMS will also

be implemented to minimise harm to ecology as best practicable. Therefore, the Proposals comply with the policies within the development plan, particularly NE2, NE3 and CC2.

12. Flooding and Drainage

12.1. An FRA accompanies the application. The FRA notes that the Site is partially located in FZ 2 and 3. As such, to comply with the NPPF and Policy FW1 and FW2 of the Local Plan, a sequential approach to site selection (and design) is set out, and the exception test is also applied.

12.2. Flood mitigation and protection measures are set out, alongside details of how the Proposals have been designed to be safe and take into account climate change through the use of SuDS. The swale system shown in Appendix B of the FRA is proposed to allow the interception, redistribution and infiltration of the flows from across the Site.

Sequential Test, Vulnerability Classification and Exception Test

12.3. Based on the findings of the site-selection exercise set out in the SSD, as well as the following observations, it is considered that there are no sites at a lower risk of flooding which are also readily available to the applicant. As such, there are no 'reasonable alternatives' to the Site in terms of the PPG (Flood risk and coastal change, Paragraph 033).

12.4. Owing to the absence of reasonable alternatives, it is considered that the sequential test is passed so vulnerability classifications and the exception test are turned to in line with the development plan policies, the PPG and the NPPF.

12.5. The NPPF (2021) classes solar farms as essential infrastructure. The exception test is required and has been conducted in accordance with Paragraphs 163 and 164 of the NPPF.

12.6. It is considered that the wider sustainability benefits to the community outweigh the limited flood risk. This is principally in terms of the climate change benefits of the Proposals, which will make a substantial contribution to generating electricity from a renewable source. The equivalent of approximately 6,600 homes will be powered annually. Further benefits include the substantial biodiversity enhancements proposed and the economic benefits of the development, construction and operation of the Proposals. These benefits are fully explored in Sections 8 and 10 of this PDAS, and under the community benefit subsection under Section 17.

12.7. Furthermore, the Proposals will be safe during their lifetime, taking account of the vulnerability of its users (noting that the Proposals are unmanned), as maintenance will not be undertaken during flood events or if flood events have been forecasted.

12.8. The Proposals will not increase flood risk elsewhere as a result of their nature and the proposed mitigation measures including SuDS, as well as their contribution towards renewable energy which is part of tackling climate change, which results in more extreme flood events.

12.9. The FRA also considers the Site to be appropriate and that the Proposals would pass the exception test, as they provide wider sustainability benefits and can be developed safely. A number of mitigation measures to reduce the risk of flooding on the Site have been set out in the FRA and include:

- Panels set above the maximum flood depth

- Essential infrastructure will be set outside the flood risk zone
- Sufficient spacing between the piles supporting the panels to minimise flow disruption during a flood event
- The security fencing mesh sizing should be made as large as reasonably practicable to reduce the chance of blockage and obstruction of flow routes
- The access tracks comprise of permeable crushed stone.

12.10. The FRA investigated the impact that the proposed impermeable area will have on surface water runoff rates from the Proposals, and concluded that as the impermeable area is very small relative to the Site's area, and a SuDS scheme has been proposed, an overall reduction in the surface water discharge is anticipated on account of the improvements in storage and infiltration on the Site.

12.11. The proposed SuDS scheme will effectively promote infiltration and create storage across the Site through the installation of swales running parallel to the Site's contours with downslope areas of the Site. The proposed swale system will intercept and distribute flows, create storage, attenuate runoff and promote infiltration across the Site. In order to ensure interception of flows and a maintainable system, an oversized system has been implemented to reduce the run off rate to less than the pre-developed rates, thus reducing the potential flood risk created by the Site.

12.12. The SuDS scheme would ensure that flood risk is not increased to downstream properties and land by providing enough storage for any increased runoff and compensatory floodplain storage, whilst appropriate design should ensure that the infrastructure on Site is made suitably flood resilient.

Planning Policy Assessment and Conclusions

12.13. The FRA concludes, taking into account mitigation measures, that the Proposals are entirely appropriate in this area in terms of flood risk and drainage issues.

12.14. Paragraph 152 of the NPPF requires the planning system to support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk. The Proposals provide a substantial contribution to the generation of low-carbon energy, and the proposed SuDS ensures the Proposals are adaptable to the impact of climate change, and improve the drainage on Site.

12.15. Paragraph 167 of the NPPF is complied with as flooding will not be increased elsewhere as a consequence of the Proposals, and it has been demonstrated that the Proposals pass the exception and sequential test.

12.16. Paragraph 169 is complied with as the Proposals incorporate a SuDS scheme which is suitable for the operation of the proposals.

12.17. Policy CC2 of the Local Plan is complied with as the proposed SuDS scheme, which forms part of the Proposals, is being brought forwards to ensure the Proposals are future proof when taking into consideration the impact on climate change, and contribute towards overall mitigating against climate change. The SuDS scheme also ensures any adverse impacts on neighbouring amenity is mitigated as they will not increase flooding risk elsewhere in the vicinity.

12.18. Policy FW1 Reducing Flood Risk of the Local Plan has also been adhered to as the sequential and exception tests are passed.

12.19. FW2 Sustainable Drainage is also complied with as the Proposals incorporate SuDS that provide water quality benefits, and all essential infrastructure is located outside the floodplain. In addition, the Proposals will not have a detrimental impact on the function or setting of the watercourse or its biodiversity, or the detrimental impact can be appropriately mitigated. The Proposals will also not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere in the locality.

12.20. Objectives B and C of the Local Plan are complied with as the Proposals are designed to deal with the expected effects of climate change, including flooding, and seek to reduce the risk of flooding in their provision of an oversized SuDS scheme.

12.21. Moreover, Policy SC0 Sustainable Communities and BE1 Layout and Design are complied with as the layout and design addresses the need to be resilient to climate change, in line with policy CC1 Planning for Climate Change.

12.22. The National Infrastructure Strategy (November 2020) states that the government is committed to harnessing the opportunities of rural landscapes to increase the resilience of rural communities to flooding, and this supports the measures taken by the Proposals to reduce the flood levels to those already existing on the Site.

12.23. Overall, the Proposals do not result in harm with relation to flooding and drainage risk, as they have been designed to be safe for the lifetime of development, taking into consideration the impact of climate change, and overall improve drainage on the Site, ensuring the Proposals do not result in adverse flooding impact elsewhere in the vicinity. The Proposals also contribute towards tackling climate change overall, which will assist in reducing the risk of flooding.

12.24. Based on all of the above, it is considered that the Proposals comply with the development plan, the NPPF and the PPG in terms of flooding and drainage.

13. Cultural Heritage and Archaeology

13.1. The application is accompanied by a Desk Based Assessment (DBA) and report on a geophysical survey.

13.2. The DBA concludes, following a scoping exercise, that designated heritage assets within 2km of the Site were largely scoped out of further assessment since they were found to have no capacity for impacts on their setting or significance as a result of the Proposals at the Site.

13.3. In respect of the setting of the Sherbourne Conservation Area, it is concluded that the intrusive nature of the A46, which lies between the Conservation Area and Area B, very effectively separates the landscape to the north of Sherbourne from the Conservation Area and any significant elements of its wider landscape setting. It is considered that the Proposals at the Site will not adversely impact on the setting of the Conservation Area, given the proximity of the A46 and, to a lesser degree, the M40.

13.4. In relation to the potential for buried archaeology at the Site, there are known buried remains within the Northern Portion, comprising an Iron Age D-shaped enclosure which was preserved in-situ following excavations for borrow pits associated with the

construction of J15 of the M40. The potential for as yet undiscovered remains of all periods has been assessed to be at least moderate, and high in the case of the prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval periods. The potential for finds, features or sites of greater than local significance is recognised.

13.5. The Proposals have the potential to disturb buried archaeological features and deposits if/where present, and further consultation with the LPA's archaeologist or archaeological advisor responsible for this area is recommended.

13.6. The Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) records the two areas of the Site as part of larger HLC blocks describing relatively recent amalgamation of fields. The HLC of both areas of the Site is considered to be of minor significance. Whilst the Proposals will visually alter the nature of the landscape in this small, localised area and in terms of its land use, the fundamental elements of the HLC, i.e. the shape of the existing field and its boundaries, will remain unaffected. A conclusion of no harm in terms of the historic landscape of the region is concluded within the DBA.

13.7. The UK Government is committed to the country becoming carbon neutral by 2050. The provision of renewable energy in all its forms is integral to meeting this target. The development of a solar PV array at the Site therefore can be regarded as beneficial in respect of the UK Government's targets.

Planning Assessment

13.8. Based on the above, it is considered that the Proposals comply with the policy tests under Paragraphs 199 and 200 of the NPPF as there would be no noteworthy impact on the setting of designated heritage assets, nor would there be any direct or indirect harm on non-designated heritage assets.

13.9. Policy CC2 is complied with as the Proposals do not result in harm to nearby heritage assets, including local areas of historical and architectural distinctiveness.

13.10. Policy HE1 Designated Heritage Assets and their Settings is complied with as there is no substantial harm to or total loss of the significance of a designated heritage asset as a result of the Proposals.

13.11. Policy HE4 Archaeology is complied with as the Proposals will not harm scheduled monuments, and are unlikely to result in harm to archaeology. The nature of the proposals is shallow, and not likely to significantly affect remaining underground assets. Any further requirements with regards to archaeology can be secured through condition.

13.12. Furthermore, the Proposals are also considered to support Objective B of the Local Plan, as well as policy SC0 Sustainable Communities as the design of the Proposals ensures that any heritage assets, including local areas of historical and architectural distinctiveness are not harmed as a result of the Proposals.

13.13. Overall, the Proposals will likely result in less than substantial harm, if negligible harm, to archaeology and no harm to designated heritage assets including the Sherbourne Conservation Area. The Proposals may result in minor harm to buried archaeological features and deposits if/where present; however, this can be minimised, and any harm will be outweighed by the substantial benefits of the Proposals with relation to their contribution to generating electricity, and meeting Net Zero by 2050.

14. Land Use and Land Grade

14.1. The Site is located on agricultural land, and as such an independent and detailed ALC report has been undertaken. This accompanies the application and concludes that the Site comprises entirely of Grade 3b land (poorer quality) land, and therefore not Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land.

Planning Assessment

14.2. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF states that decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment including the recognition of the "the economic and other benefits" of BMV land. The Site is not located on BMV land.

14.3. The PPG advises (Paragraph 013) that:

> "Particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider include:
>
> encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;
>
> where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays".

14.4. In terms of the PPG, the Proposals allow for continued agricultural use and incorporate substantial biodiversity enhancements.

14.5. Gregory Barker's speech in April 2013 states that "Where solar farms are not on brownfield land, you must be looking at low grade agricultural land which works with farmers to allow grazing in parallel with generation".

14.6. Policy CC2 is complied with as the Proposals have demonstrated the use of agricultural land is necessary for the nature of the scheme (refer to the SSD, which demonstrates that there are no readily available alternative options on land of a suitable size) and the Proposals allow for dual use on the land: *sui generis* solar energy generation and agricultural use through sheep grazing. The Proposals are also fully reversible.

14.7. Policy NE5 Protection of Natural Resources is complied with as the Proposals avoid BMV agricultural land, and ensure the quality of the land does not deteriorate as the land can be kept in agricultural use through sheep grazing for the duration of the operation of the Proposals.

14.8. In conclusion, the Proposals are located on Grade 3b land (poorer quality), which will remain in agricultural use for the temporary duration of the Proposals. The Proposals are fully reversible, and will also deliver a BNG. The Proposals are considered appropriately located in terms of land use and land grade issues.

15. Traffic and Transport

15.1. The Proposals will generate traffic movements during the construction (and any eventual decommissioning) process. Once they are operational, traffic movements will be low.

15.2. An Indicative Traffic Management Plan (ITMP) has been prepared, accompanies the application and should be read in conjunction with this Section.

15.3. The Site would be accessed from the A46 and the B4463, as shown in Figure 2 below. A paved access track also connects the Southern Portion of the Site to the B4463, which appears to have been made suitable following the improvements of Junction 15 and the Warwick Bypass, and would provide access between the two portions.

Figure 2 – Proposed access to the Site from the A46 and M40

15.4. The Site connects directly into the main / strategic / A road network, and therefore avoids deliveries and construction vehicles passing through any nearby settlements including Sherbourne or Warwick, and minimises the potential for traffic congestion. There is suitable room to allow articulated lorries to enter and exit in a forward gear at the two access points.

15.5. It is anticipated that any potential additional congestion will be negligible as the access points are wide enough to accommodate transport vehicles without impacting the traffic on the A46 or the B4463. As traffic bypasses settlements, there will be no noteworthy additional issues for the residents in nearby settlements.

15.6. Noise and vibration impacts are unlikely to be adverse due to the temporary and short-term nature of the construction phase, as well as the nature of the roads. In addition, advance warning signs can advise traffic of any likely disruption.

15.7. Once the Proposals have been constructed, it is considered that the use of the road by vehicles would be not materially more intensive than at present. This is due to the fact that vehicle movements associated with the operational period of the Proposals are anticipated to be approximately two per month (likely via van for maintenance).

15.8. There will be no removal of hedgerow or trees to facilitate access as entrances are already wide enough and suitable. Nonetheless, care would be taken during the construction phase on the Site to minimise impacts on ecology in line with the recommendations of the ecology advice which accompanies this planning application (refer to the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal).

15.9. At present there are two undetermined planning applications for solar farms within the district (Refs. W/21/2080 and W/21/1801). These are located more than 5km away from the Site, and will utilise different access points and routes to the Proposals, meaning the cumulative traffic impacts are likely to be negligible. Moreover, it is unlikely the construction times of the developments will overlap, reducing the likelihood for noteworthy cumulative traffic impacts, and, at worst, the impacts will only be temporary in nature.

15.10. Electrical component suppliers provide detailed instructions for the safe sequencing and carrying out of the installation and commissioning works. All works would comply with the relevant UK and EU regulations to ensure a safe working and post-installation environment would be achieved.

15.11. IA will discuss the traffic management process with Warwickshire County Council's Highways Department during the planning process to comply with an appropriate condition that ensures safe working procedures during the construction process.

15.12. Overall, it is considered that the temporary and short-term nature of the construction process, combined with the above existing and proposed mitigation measures, would ensure minimum disruption within the surrounding area, and result in negligible harm.

Planning Assessment

15.13. Paragraph 104 of the NPPF has been complied with as the Proposals have taken transport and traffic issues into account, and it is considered that they do not result in noteworthy impacts on the network due to the direct links into the Site from the strategic road network (the A46 and the B4463). PROW users will also be prioritised at all times during construction / decommissioning.

15.14. Policy TR1 Access and Choice is complied with as the Proposals provide safe and suitable access for vehicles, which will in no way be detrimental to highway safety. They also ensure PROW and PROW users are not negatively impacted by the construction / decommissioning.

15.15. Policy TR2 Traffic Generation of the Local Plan requires a transport assessment where traffic movements are likely to be significant. This is complied with as an ITMP has been produced which demonstrates traffic movements are not significant, and the EIA Screening Opinion concludes the impacts are not likely to be significant.

15.16. Policy CC2 is complied with as the location of the Site ensures the impacts on the highway network will be minimal, and will not result in cumulative traffic impacts, taking into consideration solar farms presently in planning.

15.17. The Proposals will not result in significant negative impacts on air quality as the construction does not create noteworthy levels of dust.

15.18. The Proposals will result in negligible harm with regards to Traffic and Transport impacts, and any temporary disruption resulting from the short-term period of construction / decommissioning will be outweighed by the substantial benefits of the scheme with

regards to the contribution towards tackling climate change, and meeting the district's net zero targets.

15.19. Therefore, it is considered the Proposals are acceptable and compliant with the NPPF and the development plan with regards to traffic, transport and access.

16. Further Material Considerations

Amenity Impacts

16.1. The Site is not located near dwellings, and the LVIA considers that visual amenity receptors consist of scattered residential properties and farms and towns, villages and hamlets connected by a network of transport corridors including major and minor roads, railway lines and PROW.

16.2. The LVIA concludes that the Proposals will have minimal (if any) wider impacts on visual amenity receptors and their views. In addition, the LVIA states that the reinforcement of existing hedgerow boundaries will also help to restrict views from the surrounding visual amenity receptors.

16.3. Any impacts from construction and decommissioning on amenity are likely to be short-term, reversible and temporary nature of the construction and decommissioning activities on both landscape character and visual amenity receptors and their views.

16.4. Small fans on the inverters will produce limited noise, however the Proposals will not generate any power during the night when noise issues are most sensitive. Decommissioning activity will be similar in nature to construction in terms of traffic effects, however this will only take place during standard working hours.

16.5. All packing and non-installed materials that are brought to Site within the construction phase of a project are separately segregated within the construction compound and taken for recycling during and at the end of the construction phase. No waste is left on site post-construction, and the construction compound is reinstated back to its pre-construction condition (arable land in this case).

16.6. Dust, air quality and pollution will be negligible during construction / decommissioning, and dust mitigation can be incorporated and set out in a construction management plan which would be secured through condition in due course if required.

16.7. Lastly, the solar panels are designed to absorb more than 90% of the sun that falls on them, and create less glare than lakes or watercourses. A number of solar farms have been developed across the UK near airfields and along train routes, as well as near highways, and it is considered that glint and glare is therefore not a noteworthy issue for the Proposals.

16.8. Policy BE3 Amenity and Policy CC2 are complied with as the Proposals do not result in unacceptable adverse impact on the amenity of nearby uses, and do not do not impact the standard of amenity for future users and occupiers of nearby development.

16.9. The Proposals therefore comply with planning policy with regards to impact on local amenity.

Farming Diversification

16.10. Paragraph 84 of the NPPF supports the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. This is further supported by Policy EC2 Farm Diversification which permits development for farm diversification providing it protects BMV agricultural land, and that its scale and nature is appropriate to their rural location.

16.11. The Proposals are therefore considered to comply with, and indeed support, the aims of the NPPF and the Local Plan through the diversification of farmland as the land is Grade 3b (poorer quality), and the Site is considered otherwise appropriate for the Proposals.

Tourism

16.12. There is research with regards to the general effects on tourism of renewable energy projects, generally focussed on wind farms[30]. This indicates that such projects do not have a noteworthy negative impact on tourism.

16.13. From a planning point of view, IA consider that this is because tourism assets (especially in rural areas) are protected by planning policy and guidance. Badly sited schemes, which would have an inappropriate impact on attractive/protected landscapes, key views, cultural heritage assets, PROW and tourism routes etc are unlikely to be granted planning permission.

16.14. There are no PROWs within, or adjacent to, the Site which are likely to be used for tourism. Nonetheless, the LVIA concludes the impacts on nearby PROW are minimal, and will therefore not result in noteworthy impacts on tourism.

16.15. Heritage assets can play a role in tourism; however, it has been established that there will be no noteworthy impact on designated assets in the vicinity of the Site, and therefore no impact on non-designated asset including the historic landscape. Cumulative impacts have also been considered in drawing this conclusion.

17. Summary and Conclusions

17.1. To conclude, it is considered that the Proposals comply with the development plan as a whole, as well as national planning policy and guidance. The Proposals will power the equivalent of approximately 6,600 homes annually for 40 years, the equivalent of approximately 10% of the homes in Warwick.

17.2. The harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and other harm including the minor harm to the openness of the Green Belt has been assessed, and it is considered that the VSC exist to outweigh the harm by reason of demonstrable and pressing need for the Proposals, and other benefits.

17.3. The Proposals will make a substantial contribution to renewable energy generation levels, in turn making a valuable contribution to tackling climate change, noting the urgent need to tackle climate change recognised by the UN, the IPCC, the UK Government and the Council in their declaration of a climate emergency.

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[30] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EconomyEnergyandTourismCommittee/Reports/eeR-12-07w-r.pdf
http://powys.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Planning,%20Taxi%20Licensing%20&%20Rights%20of%20Way%20Committee/20140501/Agenda/xExecutive%20summary%20WG%20report.pdf
http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/214910/0057316.pdf
https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/policies/visitscotland-position-statement---wind-farms---oct-2014.pdf

17.4. The SSD demonstrates that noting the collective input of all the existing and proposed renewable energy schemes in the district, the Council still face a shortfall in meeting their carbon net zero target. An absence of suitable and available alternatives outside the WMGB have also been demonstrated, and therefore the Proposals are located in the only available location at the time of submission.

17.5. The findings of the LVIA indicates that there will be limited if any visual impact on openness of the Green Belt, and that will result in, at worst, fleeting glimpses from the A46 and M40, and no impact on settlements in the wider area. It is considered that the Site and its surroundings are not a 'valued landscape' under Paragraph 174 of the NPPF.

17.6. The Proposals are expected to generate significant socio-economic benefits with electricity generated from a renewable source being sold in a competitive market alongside other sources of electricity.

17.7. Furthermore, there are substantial biodiversity and socio-economic benefits including local economic opportunities during construction and operation.

17.8. Negative impacts on biodiversity and habitats will also be avoided through mitigation measures, as set out in the PEA which accompanies this application. Substantial enhancements are being made to the site from an ecology perspective with new hedges and trees, particularly within the Northern Portion of the Site, which will result in a biodiversity net gain in biodiversity.

17.9. In addition, the Proposals will make effective use of agricultural land (which is poorer quality, Grade 3b land and therefore not BMV) through diversification.

17.10. There will be no unacceptable increased risk of flooding on the Site or elsewhere as a result of the Proposals. The sequential and exception tests have been passed. The Proposals will be safe and will also make a positive contribution in tackling flooding by addressing climate change and drainage has been carefully considered.

17.11. The Proposals will not result in inappropriate harm to designated heritage assets nearby nor will they have a negative impact on tourism. Potential impacts on archaeology can be mitigated and resolved through discussions with the County Archaeologist, and secured through condition.

17.12. In addition, the Proposals would contribute to the Government's aim of the country having "net zero" carbon emissions by 2050 and having a fully decarbonised power system by 2035.

17.13. **Based on all of the above, the assessments in this PDAS and the associated reports and assessments which accompany the application, it is considered that the Proposals comply with the development plan when read as a whole, as well as local and national planning policy and guidance and should be approved.**

Table 3.2 Green Belt review criteria

NPPF Green Belt Purposes		Criteria		Score /Value	Assessment method notes
1	To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	a	Does the parcel play a role in preventing ribbon development and/or has the Green Belt within the parcel already been compromised by ribbon development?	If strong role (parcel inhibiting development along two or more sides of a road corridor), 2 If some role (parcel inhibiting development along one side of a road corridor), 1 If no role (parcel not inhibiting development along a road corridor), 0	Ribbon development is linear development along any route ways where direct access from a development to the road would be possible. Sprawl is the spread of urban areas into the neighbouring countryside, i.e. the outward expansion of settlements into the neighbouring countryside.
		b	Is the parcel free from development? Does the parcel have a sense of openness?	If land parcel contains no development and has a strong sense of openness, 2 If land parcel contains limited development and has a relatively strong sense of openness, 1 If land parcel already contains development compromising the sense of openness, 0	Development means any built structure.
2	To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.	a	Is the parcel located within an existing settlement? If no, what is the width of the gap between the settlements at the point that the parcel is intersected?	If the parcel is within an existing settlement or more than 5 km away from a neighbouring settlement, 0 If <1 km away from a neighbouring settlement, 4 If between 1 km and 5 km away from a neighbouring settlement, 2	Merging is the joining or blurring of boundaries between two settlements. A straight line is measured at the narrowest point between settlements. The line must pass through the parcel being assessed.
3	To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.	a	Does the parcel have the characteristics of countryside and/or connect to land with the characteristics of countryside? Has the parcel already been affected by encroachment of urbanised built development?	If land parcel contains the characteristics of countryside, has no urbanising development, and is open, 2 If land parcel contains the characteristics of countryside, has limited urbanising development, and is relatively open, 1 If land parcel does not contain the characteristics and/or is not connected to land with the characteristics of countryside, or contains urbanising development that compromises openness, 0	Encroachment from urbanising influences is the intrusion / gradual advance of buildings and urbanised land beyond an acceptable or established limit. Urbanising influences include features such as roads lined with street lighting and pavements, large areas of hardstanding, floodlit sports fields, etc. Urbanising built development does not include development which is in keeping with the countryside, e.g. agricultural or forestry related development, isolated dwellings, historic schools and churches. Countryside is land/scenery which is rural in character, i.e. a relatively open natural, semi-natural or farmed landscape.
		b	Are there existing natural or man-made features / boundaries that would prevent encroachment of the countryside within or	If no significant boundary, 2 If less significant boundary, 1	Readily recognisable and permanent features are used to define the borders of Green Belt parcels. The presence of features which contain development and prevent encroachment can, in certain locations, diminish the role of a Green Belt

NPPF Green Belt Purposes		Criteria		Score /Value	Assessment method notes
			beyond the parcel in the long term? (These could be outside the parcel).	If significant boundary, 0	parcel in performing this purpose. The significance of a boundary in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment is judged based on its relative proximity to the existing urban edge of a settlement and its nature. Boundaries are assumed to play a stronger role (and the Green Belt parcel, therefore, a weaker role) in inhibiting encroachment of the countryside when they are located relatively close to the existing urban edge of a settlement because if the Green Belt parcel were released they would represent a barrier to further encroachment of the wider countryside. Where boundaries border the existing urban edge of a settlement, any further expansion of the settlement would breach that boundary and it would play no further role in preventing encroachment of the wider countryside. In these cases, the Green Belt parcel is judged to play a stronger role in preventing encroachment. Boundaries that are more permanent in nature or more difficult to cross are assumed to play a stronger role in inhibiting encroachment of the countryside. Examples include railway lines, rivers, and motorways/dual carriageways. Examples of boundary types that are assumed to play a weaker role include streams, canals, and topographic features, such as ridges.[11] Footpaths and minor roads play an even weaker role.
4	To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	a	Is the parcel partially or wholly within or adjacent to a Conservation Area within an historic town? Does the parcel have good intervisibility with the historic core[12] of an historic town?	If parcel is partially or wholly within or adjacent to a Conservation Area within an historic town **and** has good intervisibility with the historic core of the town, 4 If parcel is partially or wholly within or adjacent to a Conservation Area within an historic town **or** has good intervisibility with the historic core of the town, 2 If parcel has none of these features, 0	The following historic towns are considered in the assessment: • Coventry • Rugby • Bedworth • Nuneaton • Warwick • Hinckley • Kenilworth • Royal Leamington Spa Site visits and topographic mapping are used to inform judgements as to whether land parcels have good intervisibility with the historic core of an historic town.
5	To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging	a	The Local Authorities involved in this review are covered by the Coventry and Warwickshire Housing Market Area (HMA)[13]. Defining the area as an HMA reflects the key functional linkages that operate between where people live and work and the household demand and preferences that define the area. As the whole Housing Market Area functions as one unit, this makes it		

[11] The relative permanence of a boundary, although relevant to the assessment of parcels of land against Purpose 3, is not, in itself, directly linked to the significance of its role in inhibiting encroachment of the countryside, e.g. streams, canals and topographic features are permanent but development can relatively easily be accessed from the corridor in which the feature lies.

[12] The historic cores of the historic towns identified by the Steering Group have been defined using the Conservation Areas which sit close to the centre of each historic town.

[13] Coventry and Warwickshire Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment, 2014

NPPF Green Belt Purposes	Criteria	Score /Value	Assessment method notes
	the recycling of derelict and other urban land.		difficult to accurately assess whether one individual parcel considered in isolation makes a more significant contribution than another to incentivising development on previously developed land. What can be said is that all parcels make an equally significant contribution to this purpose and are each given a score of 4.

[redacted]

Joint Green Belt Study

Figure 6

Overall Assessment Findings - Warwick

District Boundary

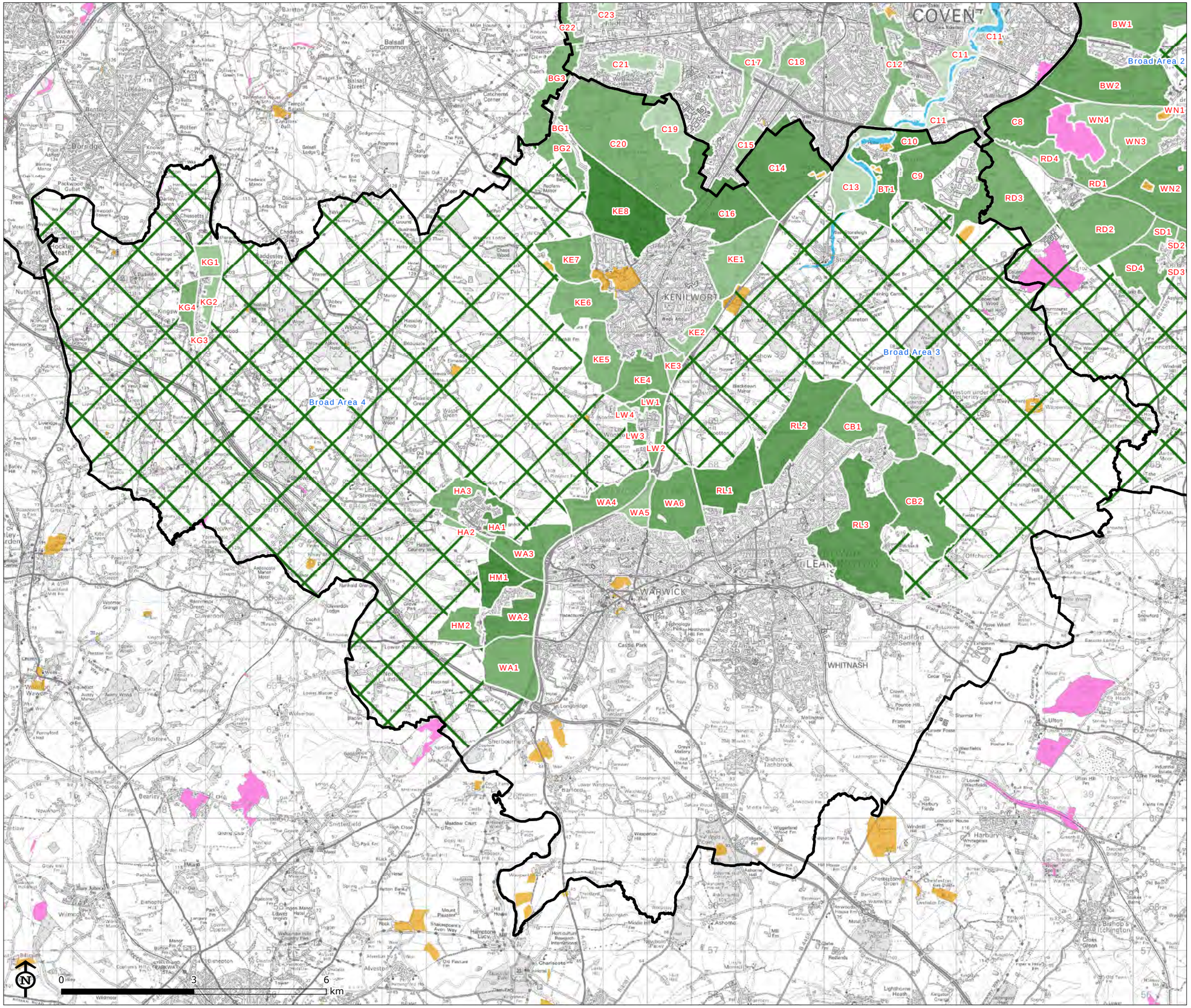
Overall Performance Against Green Belt Purposes

High: 20
16
12
8
Low: 4

Broad Area
SSSI
Scheduled Monument
Flood Zone 3b

Map Scale @ A3:1:84,000

LUC



CB:Green_C EB:Green_C LUCLON 6252-01_020_All_Scores 11/06/2015

Source: Natural England, English Heritage, Environment Agency

Appendix A

Joint Green Belt Study 2015 – Green Belt Review Criteria