SOLAR PV ARRAY
On land south of
PETERSFINGER
SALISBURY

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Prepared by:
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For:

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared by ACLA Ltd on behalf of Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy to accompany a planning application for the construction of a 1.5 megawatt solar photovoltaic array on land south of Petesfinger, Salisbury, Wiltshire. The application Site is part of a single rectilinear pastoral field located on the River Avon valley floor and just beyond the south-eastern settlement boundary of Salisbury, Wiltshire. The proposals cover an area of just under 2.25 hectares and will be accessed via a farm track from the north, running from the A36 through the recently redeveloped and converted Petersfinger Farm.

1.2 The site and surrounding rural landscape comprise flat pastoral flood meadows in a wide river valley to the south with belts of linear riparian vegetation, small woodland blocks and scattered settlements. Infrastructure and other elements of built form associated with the urban edges of Salisbury are also readily present around the application site, with a sewage works adjoining the proposals to the south-west and the busy road corridor of the A36 at around 250m to the north.

1.3 The land beyond a linear field to the north-west of the A36 near the site is occupied by the large-scale Southampton Road Retail Park with modern superstores, a hotel, a park and ride and numerous other modern commercials, shopping and residential areas associated with the south-eastern edges of Salisbury.

1.4 The River Avon is located at just 250m to the south-east of the application site in a semi-enclosed rural landscape with numerous side streams, floor meadows and drainage ditches throughout the valley floor. The low-density and dispersed rural village of Britford is located just south of the River Avon linked by narrow single-track rural lanes running across the valley floor from the A338 to the south.

1.5 The historic city centre of Salisbury is located at approximately 2km to the north-west and Salisbury District Hospital is located on a ridge beyond the valley floor at approximately 2km to the south-west. In the Wiltshire Core Strategy development plan, the site itself is within a Special Landscape Area and the Salisbury Conservation Area covers the River Avon and land to the south and west of the application site. The River Avon corridor and major side streams are also designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation

(SAC). A newly extended County Wildlife Site is located immediately north-east of the site.

1.6 There are a number of Listed Buildings associated with Britford, several of which are located close to the southern banks of the River Avon, south of the application site. These include the Grade I St Peter Church and the attached Radnor Mausoleum, the nearby grade II Old Vicarage and the Grade II* Rectory Farmhouse, together with several monuments in the church yard.

1.7 This application Site is centred on Ordnance Survey grid reference SU 16188 28826 and the application site and surrounding areas are administrated by Wiltshire Council. The closest postcode SP5 3DB relates to Petersfinger Farm, centred at 180m to the north of the application site boundary.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 LVIA is a tool used to identify and assess the significance and effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity. This LVIA considers the potential effects of the proposed development upon:

- Landscape elements and features such as vegetation and topography;
- Landscape character;
- Planning policies and landscape designations; and
- Visual amenity.

2.2 The main objectives of the LVIA are as follows:

- To identify, evaluate and describe the current landscape character of the application site and its surroundings and also any notable individual landscape elements and features within the study area;
- To determine the sensitivity of the landscape to the type of development proposed;
- To identify and describe any effects of the development in so far as they affect the landscape and/or views of it, and to evaluate the magnitude of change due to these effects; and
- To identify potential visual receptors (i.e. people who would be able to see the development) and evaluate their sensitivity to the type of changes proposed.

2.3 This LVIA also outlines a mitigation strategy to reduce any potential adverse effects on the landscape or on views of the proposed development and put forward initiatives for landscape and visual enhancement. Mitigation and enhancement measures will be incorporated into the proposed layout at the design stage and provide a broad framework for the development. An illustrative Site layout and landscape mitigation is included within the appendices of this report.

2.4 In order to seek consensus and to minimise subjectivity in the assessment of the existing landscape, wherever possible, this report makes reference to published landscape character assessments and other publications.

2.5 The LVIA has been undertaken in accordance with best practice and encompasses the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) – Third edition April 2013' - published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. A detailed LVIA methodology is outlined in Appendix 3.

2.6 These proposals have been assessed in isolation and the cumulative impacts of other similar developments in the area has not been assessed.

3. BASELINE CONDITIONS

General Description of the Existing Site & Surroundings

3.1 The application site is located in the northern sections of a flat linear pastoral field with the proposals taking up just under half of the total field area. At the time of the site visit, the southern parts of the site was being managed by grazing with sheep with areas of short grassland and wetland scrub. The northern sections had been fenced off but recently grazed, with a small agricultural storage structure in the north-western corner. There is evidence of remnant drainage ditches across and near the site, draining towards boundary ditches leading into the River Avon.

3.2 Many of the field boundaries in the valley floor, including the application site, are demarcated by water-filled drainage ditches often controlled by sluices running towards the River Avon and often lined by belts of riparian vegetation, including shrubs, willow, alder and scrub.

3.3 The western boundary of the application site, adjoining the sewage works, is lined by a tall hedge with individual trees over a ditch. The eastern boundary is more open with sporadic trees and scrubby vegetation in a strip of land with drainage ditches and a low-key gravel track to the east. A taller and denser informal belt of water meadow vegetation runs along a ditch to the east. The southern application boundary runs through the open field and is therefore not defined. The norther application boundary adjoins a 20m wide belt of mature trees, including stands of conifers. The tree belt, together with the western hedge, provides a high level of screening into the site within the local area.

3.4 The flood plain associated with the River Avon lies within a wide and flat valley floor, extending between the road corridors of the A338 to the south and A36 to the north. The valley landscape extends for approximately 1.4km in the vicinity of the site. The Avon valley falls gently south-eastward away from Salisbury towards Fordingbridge.

3.5 The application site is within a rural landscape associated with the urban edge of Salisbury and within the northern sections of a wedge of water meadow extending to the north-west towards, and then around, the southern edges of the historic city centre of Salisbury.

3.6 To the south of the application site, the main course of the River Avon splits into a series of separate watercourses often linked by a dense and complicated network of interlinked drains and ditches, often controlled by sluices, within a patchwork of

medium to large-scale water meadow pasture. The course of the River Bourne runs through a narrower valley to join the Avon from the north at approximately 600m north-west of the application site. A historical disused navigational section of ditch has been excavated further south, between the A338 and the River Avon. Many of the field boundaries, watercourses and ditches are lined by a loose network of belts of trees, small woodland blocks and other waterside vegetation, which in combination form a semi-enclosed landscape in places. At 250m to the south-east is a man-made lake adjoining the River Avon and enclosed by dense belts of trees.

3.7 The modern peripheries of Salisbury extend along the road corridors of the A338 and A36 to the south and north of the site, with the landscape becoming increasingly rural to the south-east. The village of Aldebury and Whaddon are located just off the eastern valley floor at 3km to the south-east and the small village of Nunton is just off the western valley floor at 3km to the south. A rail line is located immediately north of the A36 near the site, running along the northern valley edge, linking Salisbury with Romsey, to the south-east. Petersfinger to the north, appears on historic maps to be a small settlement which is now partly incorporated within the south-eastern edges of Salisbury as it has expanded eastwards in the 20th century.

3.8 The application site is currently accessed via a low-key gravel track running westwards from the A36 then turning southwards at Peterfinger Farm. Petersfield Farm is located 200m north of the site boundary and has recently been converted to a retirement community of four dwellings under planning reference 19/01294/FUL. This will form part of the overall scheme for nineteen new units on the site which is still at the planning stage.

3.9 A small bungalow and associated units and storage areas is located on the A36, immediately east of Petersfinger Farm. Hughenden Manor is an older large detached property on the norther edge of the A36 with a small row of 20th-century dwelling along Petersfinger Road to the west.

3.10 Willow Cottage is a detached individual dwelling behind a tall garden fence, located on the southern edges of the A36, at approximately 150m north-west of the application boundary. Further north-west, Peterfinger Park and Ride is an extensive area of hardstanding behind a tree belt north of the A36 and centred at approximately 250m north-west of the site boundary. Further west is a Premier Inn Hotel and the Southampton Road retail park with a Tesco superstore, and numerous other large-scale modern retail and commercial units extending between 400m to 1200m north-

west of the site. The busy road traffic and noise associated with the retail park is evident in the local landscape, although there is a relatively high degree of screening towards the site in the form of intervening hedges and tree belts.

3.11 The A36 road corridor marks the relatively sharp transition between the retail park and other modern development just off the valley floor to the north-west of the site and the more rural and undeveloped flood meadows associated with the valley landscape around the application site and further south.

3.12 Beyond the valley landscape, the overall characteristics of the rural landscape south of Salisbury is a network of larger-scale arable fields and scattered woodlands associated with the higher chalk downland. The woodlands are particularly dense beyond the Avon valley to the east, with the rural landscape beyond the valley to the west more open in character.

3.13 Due to intervening woodland blocks, tree belts and other vegetation the application site is well screened within the valley floor which also allows the surrounding rural landscape to retain much of its rural character, despite the presence of extensive areas of modern development and infrastructure nearby.

The Study Area

3.14 The area of search for the LVIA was determined by desk study and field observation. The study area was then established to enable a general understanding of the wider landscape context within which the application site is located while limiting information to that which is most relevant and to avoid excessive analysis of elements that do not directly benefit the appraisal. As such it conforms to best-practice guidance.

3.15 The application site is located in a semi-enclosed landscape. Therefore, the potential 'zone of visual influence' of the proposed development is limited. Views from the north tend to be screened by the dense woodland block close to the site boundary, with just partial and glimpsed views from the A36 road corridor near Petersfinger Farm. From the west, the dense hedge provides a relatively high degree of screening for potential views around the edges of the Salisbury and the A36 to the north-west.

3.16 Although the southern site boundary is open and the eastern boundary is relatively open, the increasing degree of intervening vegetation associated with the watercourses and ditches and small woodland blocks in the valley floor also provide

a high degree of screening. This, in combination with the cluster of dwellings associated with The Church of St Peter, screens the site from publically accessible locations to the west and the south.

3.17 Partial views may be possible from the higher valley sides at around 600 to 800m to the north-east over the site boundary tree belt, although no views have been identified due to the lack of publicly accessible locations in this part of the upper valley side.

3.18 From the ridges beyond the valley to the south-west, near Salisbury District Hospital, no views could be identified due to the PRoW being located behind hedges and a woodland belt around the hospital car park. From the lower valley sides along the A338 road corridor and lower down closer to the site, the intervening vegetation in the valley floor tends to screen views.

3.19 As a result of the site visit, the study area has been set to take in the wider valley landscape to provide a setting to the site and allow it to be assess in conjunction with the important landscape features in the area. The study area also extends outwards to cover the valley sides to the south-west and north-east of the application site to illustrate the site in its wider context.

Topography & Development

3.20 The key feature in the study area is the wide and flat Avon Valley, falling gently towards the south coast. To the north, the River Avon valley landscape runs southwards past Amesbury near Stonehenge to turn south-eastwards at Salisbury where it is joined from the west by the River Nadder. The smaller valley of the Bourne River joins the Avon from the north, just west of the application site.

3.21 The confluence of these three river valleys has formed a series of low ridges over which the historic city centre of Salisbury has developed to the north-west of the application site. Much of the lower valley floor in the flood plain is more sparsely settled forming green corridors extending into and through the city.

3.22 The wider landscape beyond the valley to the west is formed by the extensive higher rolling chalk landscape much of which is in the Cranborne Chase AONB. At its closest, the AONB boundary is located at approximately 3km to the south-west of the application site. The land beyond the Avon valley to the east is a more enclosed

rolling chalk landscape, before falling down to the Test Valley at around 13km to the east.

3.23 The site itself is located in the flat valley floor at under 45m AOD (above ordnance datum). The ridgelines beyond the valley to the east rise to over 100m AOD at approximately 2km from the application site, with the ridge around the District Hospital rising to over 80m AOD at 2km south-west of the application site.

Historic Landscape

3.24 No historic features or artefacts of interest are identified on or adjacent to the application site on the Historic England online map. The nearest Scheduled Monument is a Medieval pottery kilns at Milford Farm. This is located north of the Southampton Road Retail Park covering fields on the eastern valley side of the River Bourne at 850m north-west of the application site. Due to the intervening modern infrastructure and development associated with the south-eastern edges of Salisbury, there is no intervisibility with the application site and no direct or strong relationship. Therefore, it is unlikely that the proposals will affect the wider landscape setting of the Scheduled Monument.

3.25 Woodbury Ancient Villages are a Scheduled Monument covering the open ridges north of Salisbury District Hospital, on both sides of Odstock Road leading to the hospital and extending eastwards down the ridge towards the park and ride on the A338. The monument is centred at approximately 1.9km south-west of the application site. These are evident as earthworks dating back to the Iron Age, but the site has never been fully excavated. There may be some limited intervisibility with the application site due to the elevated and open character of the Scheduled Monument. However, due to its setting close to significant areas of development in and around Salisbury and the small scale and distance of the proposals, it is unlikely that changes on the application site will affect the wider landscape setting of this Iron Age monument.

3.26 The ruins of Clarendon Palace are located adjacent to a woodland in an isolated rural dry valley east of the river Bourne at approximately 2.3km north-east of the application site. The Ancient Monument is a ruined medieval royal palace which fell into disuse and is now represented with only small sections of remaining walls. As Clarendon Palace is beyond a ridge in an adjacent valley and set in woodlands, it is

unlikely that any changes on the site will affect the wider landscape setting of this monument.

3.27 A Grade II* Listed Park and Garden is located across the grounds of Longford Castle lying across large parts of the Avon Valley floor, at its closest just over 1km to the south-west of the application site. These include a late 18th-century pleasure ground and park improved by Capability Brown. Due to intervening features in the landscape, distance and relatively small scale of the solar arrays, it is unlikely that the proposals will affect the wider landscape setting of Longford Castle gardens and parkland.

3.28 There are a large number of Listed Buildings associated with the medieval city centre of Salisbury, including the Grade I Listed Salisbury Cathedral centred at approximately 2km north-west of the application site. Although within the local areas adjoining the site there are occasional and intermittent views towards the upper sections of the distinctive 123m tall Cathedral spire, many of the views are screened by the tall vegetation along the western site boundary and elsewhere. As a result, the cathedral does not form a prominent landmark in or around the site.

3.29 There is no other identifiable intervisibility with other listed buildings associated with the city centre, with the site being beyond the modern large-scale retail development extending along the A36 to the north-west. Due to the distance and relatively small scale of the proposals, it is therefore, unlikely that the proposals will have an impact on the wider landscape setting of Listed Buildings forming the historic core of the city.

3.30 Listed Buildings are scattered across the more rural landscape near the site, including a group of four relatively isolated buildings grouped around the church at the far end of Church Lane at Britford, a dead-end, enclosed, single-track and rural lane. The group of buildings are close to the southern banks of the River Avon at just over 300m south of the application site boundary. Several further listed buildings are also found within the scattered dwellings and farmsteads further south associated with Britford, between approximately 500m to 1000m south-east of the site. These include the grade II Moat House, Moat Cottage, buildings at Bridge Farm and around Little Manor on Lower Lane, facing the linear village green at Britford.

3.31 The closest listed building is Rectory Farm. This is a mid-17th century red brick Grade II* farmhouse located on the southern banks of the River Avon at approximately 300m south of the application site boundary. The Church of St Peter

and attached Radnor Mausoleum is an Anglican Parish Church with a low tower dating back to the Saxon period. The church and mausoleum are Grade I listed and set in a semi-enclosed church yard immediately south of Rectory Farm, with the Grade II Listed vicarage at 70m west of the church, on the opposite side of Church Lane and immediately south of the dwelling of Peterslee and farm buildings associated with Rectory Farm.

3.32 The Britford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (2014)' points out that; *'Around the church is centred one of the most significant groups of historic buildings within the conservation area'* and *'There is a general sense of seclusion to this section of the conservation area. Views from the churchyard comprise open countryside. Elsewhere, views are localised and enclosed by the hedgerows and boundary walls.'* Peterslee (The Old Coach House) is also noted as a 'Building of Local importance' in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

3.33 A private footbridge crosses the southern watercourse of the Avon, just west of Rectory Farm to access a private 'island' where the River Avon separates into two distinct watercourses south of the site. But there does not appear to be any further direct access to the norther banks of the Avon from Britford. Although in close proximity, the shortest access by road access between the areas around the application site and The Church of St Peters is via Salisbury, along the A36 and A338 a distance of just over 4km. A footpath route is also possible over the river to the south, via Britford Trout Farm and the A36 at a distance of over 3km.

3.34 This group of historic buildings and the Church of St Peter are close to the river corridor and separated from other scattered and lower density properties at Britford by intervening meadows. These are therefore, a distinct and isolated historic close group associated with the church and the River Avon. Their rural integrity has largely been preserved, being set in the surrounding water meadows and mature vegetation. The group of buildings are therefore, perceived as being in a remote and rural location, despite being in close proximity to modern urban fringes of Salisbury north of the river.

3.35 The mausoleum at the church is a modest low stone building, party below ground and attached to the north-eastern corner of the church and enclosed within the church yard. The enclosed church yard also contains a number of listed tombs and monuments to the south.

3.36 Rectory Farm is located on the southern bank of the Avon and therefore is open to the north with windows and two conservatories overlooking the river. From within the application site, there is some limited intervisibility with Rectory Farm and the upper parts of the Church of St Peters tower, between and over intervening belts of scrub, shrubs and trees to the south-west of the site.

3.37 The lower sections of the church, church yard, mausoleum and the adjacent vicarage are screened from the site by a combination of intervening hedges around the churchyard, buildings near Rectory Farm and the farmhouse itself. The only view from a publically accessible location identified northwards towards the application site in the area was from the far north-western corner of the church yard, between buildings at Rectory Farm. However, further vegetation north of the river screen this potential limited view towards the application site. The visual assessment was undertaken during the winter months and during the summer any available views are likely to be further screened when deciduous vegetation is in leaf.

3.38 The Moat House, Moat Cottage and three grade II Listed buildings at Bridge Farm are located south of Lower Road and Church Lane, towards the northern edge of Britford. In areas, the lane boundaries are relatively open and the properties afford rural views across the open fields toward the vegetation associated with the River Avon. However, even in winter months, any specific views towards the site could not be identified from Lower Road or Church Lane due to the belts of intervening trees and a small woodland blocks associated with the river corridor. However, from some localised areas glimpsed and partial views are possible to sections of the sewage works and small sections of the larger-scale modern development to the south-east of Salisbury, over the intervening dense vegetation.

3.39 The extent of large-scale modern development and infrastructure associated with Salisbury to the north is not prominent or generally readily apparent. Therefore, the setting of Britford remains overall rural and isolated in character, despite some noise intrusion from roads and other activities. The application site itself could not be readily identified from Britford and its environs due to dense intervening vegetation on the valley floor. However, the spire of Salisbury Cathedral is intermittently visible in localised areas, near the site, but not overly prominent.

3.40 No other significant views towards the application site could be identified from other listed buildings at a greater distance in the study area. It is therefore, unlikely that the

proposals on the site are will impact the wider landscape setting of other listed building due to a combination of distance and screening.

3.41 The site is located to the north of the Britford Conservation Area and east of the adjoining Britford Watermeadows and Churchill Gardens Conservation Area, extending north-westwards to the city centre. The 'City of Salisbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2014' relating to the Britford Watemeadows states: *'The relevance of these sections of watermeadows to Salisbury city lies in the role played by the open tree-lined section of the River Avon, forming such an important part of the foreground to views towards the city and the cathedral.'*

3.42 On historic maps dating back to the 19th-century, Petersfinger (Peter's Finger) appears as a small isolated settlement comprising of Peter's Finger Farm, Ashleyhill Farm House, Hughenden Manor and several associated dwellings east of Peter's Finger Bridge (now under the A36), all located immediately south of the Eastleigh and Salisbury railway line. The application site itself is shown as part of the extensive areas of flood plain water meadow associated with the River Avon. As Salisbury extended eastwards in the 20th century the settlement of Petersfinger has become partly incorporated into the settlement boundary of Salisbury, with Petersfinger Farm and Ashleyhill Farm House remaining outside.

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

3.43 There are no PRoW or other publically accessible areas of land on or adjacent to the site, or between the A36 to the north and the main river corridor to the south. In the study area, there are no publicly accessible tracks or PRoW which cross the River Avon between Britford and the south-eastern urban edges of Salisbury.

3.44 The closest PRoW runs along the open fields to the rear of properties on the village green at Britford to link with Church Lane just west of the Church of St Peter, at the closest approximately 400m south of the application site. A further PRoW is located at 1km to the south, linking Britford village green with Southampton Road to the east, via Britford Trout Farm and over the River Avon. Due to the layers of dense vegetation associated with the River Avon, together with intervening buildings, no views have been identified towards the site from these PRoW.

3.45 No PRoW have been identified beyond the Avon Valley to the east with elevated views towards the application site. Potential long-distance views have also not been identified from the open ridgelines beyond the valley to the south-west or the north

and east of Salisbury District Hospital due to intervening hedges and woodland belts. There is however, the potential for views from the upper storeys of the hospital over the intervening woodland belt around the car park.

3.46 There are a number of other PRoW dispersed across the rural landscape of the study area, but no particular views have been identified towards the application site.

Soils and Hydrology

3.47 The Site is located over Newhaven Chalk on the British Geological Survey - Geology of Britain Viewer, a sedimentary rock formed in the Cretaceous period. The chalk is overlain by superficial deposits of alluvial clay, sand and gravel formed up to 2 million years ago.

3.48 The site is located within the River Avon flood plain, and as such is identified as an area at a high flood risk on the government's Long Term Flood Risk map. Watercourses in the form of man-made ditches are located along the western and eastern site boundaries running southwards towards the River Avon. Further ditches, which appear to have become infilled over time, appear across and adjacent to the application site, running eastwards towards the site boundary.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSALS

4.1 For details of the site proposals see plan (ACLA/BNB 04) 'Illustrative Layout - Landscape Mitigation and Enhancement' in the appendices of this report.

4.2 The proposals would comprise of a 1.5 megawatt solar farm consisting of banks of panels with a height of approximately 2.2m above ground level at the top of the 20 degree plain and arranged in rows facing south to optimise exposure to the sun.

4.3 The proposals include transformers to convert the current and deer proof security fencing around the boundaries, together with CCTV and a containerised battery store and associated infrastructure at the north-eastern corner of the site.

4.4 A strip of land in the site will remain undeveloped to accommodate a water main easement linking into the adjacent sewage works.

4.5 Access during construction and operation would be via the established farm track at Petersfinger Farm from the north and into the open north-eastern corner of the site.

4.6 Petersfinger Farm is in the process of being developed into a retirement 'village'. This application site and adjacent areas are to be donated to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) on condition of the approval of the second stage of the development of the retirement village, which is still at the planning stage. The donation to the WWT is therefore, subject to the second planning application being successful. Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy will rent the proposed solar farm whilst WWT will manage the land to benefit wildlife. The area to the south of the solar panels will be managed and restored to traditional water meadow habitat, with a reduction in the intensity of sheep grazing to a light summer graze. The margins will be maintained as rough, tussocky grassland for reptiles and small mammals.

4.7 As part of the initial proposals, the setting of the site has been considered. The solar arrays have been reduced in extent and have now been located across the northern sections of the linear field only, which benefits from the more substantial tree and hedge screening to the north, east and west. This will also provide a more substantial standoff to the Britford Conservation Area and River Avon SAC and SSSI at approximately 250m to the south. This will also aim of reducing potential impacts on the immediate setting of the listed buildings associated with the Church of St Peters near the southern banks of the River Avon and preserve the group of buildings immediate rural context associated with the River Avon.

4.8 A secondary landscape strategy will aim to further reduce visual and landscape effects and enhance the setting of the proposals. All the existing boundary vegetation will be retained and enhanced. Further landscape proposals will include new native hedgerow mixes to contain the solar array in the landscape setting and respond to the rural context of the site, as well as screening to the south to further preserve the setting of the listed buildings and Conservation Area associated with Britford. The western boundary hedge will be interplanted with appropriate native species where the vegetation is weak. The tree belt on the northern boundary will be interplanted with native tree and shrub species to improve structure and screening.

4.9 Further biodiversity enhancements can be undertaken within the site in the form of the creation or enhancement of the water meadow grassland to be managed by WWT. The boundary ditches can also be managed to enhance wildlife habitats as part of the wider area.

4.10 The mitigation aims to respond to the rural context of the site to ensure the proposals are sympathetic to the landscape and to reflect the character of the wider Avon Valley water meadows. This will also provide enhanced wildlife habitats and mitigate against potential impacts on the nearby Conservation Area, listed buildings, SAC, River Avon SSSI and adjacent County Wildlife Site. Mitigation is discussed in greater detail in chapter 9.0.

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy

5.1 National planning guidance was completely revised with the issue of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012. This has been updated several times with the latest revision being issued in July 2021.

5.2 Section 2 '*Achieving sustainable development*' in the revised framework document has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The environmental objectives aim to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a *'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.*

5.3 Section 15 *'Conserving and enhancing the natural environment*' section of the revised NPPF outlines the way the planning system should *'contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment'*. The relevant key objectives are to protect and enhance valued landscapes; recognise the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside; minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains where possible. Paragraph 179 aims *'to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity*'.

5.4 Section 16 *'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*' aims to ensure heritage assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance including listed buildings, registered parks or gardens and World Heritage Sites.

5.5 Guidelines relating to renewable and low carbon energy at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy#solar-farms aims to help local councils in developing policies for renewable and low carbon energy and identifies the planning considerations.

Regional & Local Planning Policy

5.6 The principle adopted document of relevance to this development is the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted in January 2015 and a saved policy in the former Salisbury District Local Plan.

Wiltshire Core Strategy

5.7 The relevant policies have been extracted below.

Core Policy 42 -Standalone renewable energy installations

Proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site-specific constraints. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate how impacts on the following factors have been satisfactorily assessed, including any cumulative effects, and taken into account:

i. *The landscape, particularly in and around AONBs*

ii. *The Western Wiltshire Green Belt*

iii. *The New Forest National Park*

iv. *Biodiversity*

v. *The historic environment including the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting*

vi. *Use of the local transport network*

vii. *Residential amenity, including noise, odour, visual amenity and safety*

viii. *Best and most versatile agricultural land.*

Applicants will not be required to justify the overall need for renewable energy development, either in a national or local context.

Core Policy 50 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity

'Development proposals must demonstrate how they protect features of nature conservation and geological value as part of the design rationale. There is an expectation that such features shall be retained, buffered, and managed favourably in order to maintain their ecological value, connectivity and functionality in the long-term. Where it has been demonstrated that such features cannot be retained, removal or damage shall only be acceptable in circumstances where the anticipated ecological impacts have been mitigated as far as possible and appropriate compensatory measures can be secured to ensure no net loss of the local biodiversity resource, and secure the integrity of local ecological networks and provision of ecosystem services.

All development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species and habitats throughout the lifetime of the development.

<u>Biodiversity enhancement</u>

All development should seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity. Major development, in particular, must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to restore, enhance and create valuable habitats, ecological networks and ecosystem services. Such enhancement measures will contribute to the objectives and targets of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) or River Basin/ Catchment Management Plan, particularly through landscape scale projects, and be relevant to the local landscape character.

<u>Local Sites</u>

Sustainable development will avoid direct and indirect impacts upon local sites through sensitive site location and layout, and by maintaining sufficient buffers and ecological connectivity with the wider environment. Damage or disturbance to local sites will generally be

unacceptable, other than in exceptional circumstances where it has been demonstrated that such impacts:

i. cannot reasonably be avoided

ii. are reduced as far as possible

iii. are outweighed by other planning considerations in the public interest

iv. where appropriate compensation measures can be secured through planning obligations or agreements.

Development proposals affecting local sites must make a reasonable contribution to their favorable management in the long-term.'

Core Policy 51: Landscape

5.8 The relevant sections of Core Policy 51 states: '*Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures. Proposals should be informed by and sympathetic to the distinctive character areas identified in the relevant Landscape Character Assessment(s) and any other relevant assessments and studies. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures'.*

i. The locally distinctive pattern and species composition of natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies.

ii. The locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings.

iii. The separate identity of settlements and the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the urban fringe.

iv. Visually sensitive skylines, soils, geological and topographical features.

v. Landscape features of cultural, historic and heritage value.

vi. Important views and visual amenity.

vii. Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.

viii. Landscape functions including places to live, work, relax and recreate.

5.9 The policy also states that *'Applications for development which would by its nature, scale, appearance or location have the potential to change local landscape character must be accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.'*

Core Policy 58- Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment

Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment. Designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance, including:

i. nationally significant archaeological remains

ii. World Heritage Sites within and adjacent to Wiltshire

iii. buildings and structures of special architectural or historic interest

iv. the special character or appearance of conservation areas

v. historic parks and gardens

vi. important landscapes, including registered battlefields and townscapes.

Distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved, and where possible enhanced. The potential contribution of these heritage assets towards wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits will also be utilised where this can be delivered in a sensitive and appropriate manner in accordance with Core Policy 57 (Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping).

Heritage assets at risk will be monitored and development proposals that improve their condition will be encouraged. The advice of statutory and local consultees will be sought in consideration of such applications.

Site Specific Designations (see plan ACLA/BNB 02)

5.10 The relevant designations within the study area are only brought forward and potential impacts are discussed only if it is judged that there are likely to be direct or indirect impacts on the integrity or setting of the designated features or areas.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSS) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

5.11 An SSSI and SAC are located along the watercourses associated with the River Avon, at the closest approximately 250m south of the application site boundary. The river is designated due to its important and internationally recognised chalk stream habitat. As the application site is located within the River Avon flood plain and in relatively close proximity to the river, there is the potential for the proposals to have either a direct or indirect impact on the integrity of the river corridor habitat, both during construction and/or during the operational phase. The most likely impacts could be through loss or fragmentation of habitats or the disturbance of flora or fauna. The release of silt, chemicals or nutrient enrichment of the drainage ditches linking to the river corridor could also be an issue for the Avon Sac and SSSI.

County Wildlife Site

The Peterfinger Farm Meadows County Wildlife Site has recently been extended to the north-eastern boundaries of the site. As for the above habitats wildlife designations, there is the potential for the proposals to have either a direct or indirect impact on it integrity due to the close proximity.

Priority Habitats

5.12 The southern and eastern sections of the site are located in an area identified as a Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh Priority Habitat on the MAGIC website (Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside). There is therefore the potential that the proposals could have a direct impact on the integrity of the grazing marsh.

Listed Buildings

5.13 The closest listed building is Rectory Farm. This is a mid-17th century red brick Grade II* farmhouse located on the southern banks of the River Avon at approximately 300m south of the application site boundary. The Church of St Peter and attached Radnor Mausoleum is a Grade I listed and set in a semi-enclosed church yard immediately south of Rectory Farm. The Grade II Listed vicarage is located at 70m west of the church, on the opposite side of Church Lane and immediately south of the dwelling of Peterslee and farm buildings associated with Rectory Farm.

5.14 Intervening vegetation in the valley floor provides a relatively high degree of screening between the application site and the listed buildings. However, there are some filtered views towards Rectory Farmhouse and the upper sections of the church tower from within the application site and possible some heavily filtered views between trees to the rear of the vicarage. Due to the relatively close proximity to the site, there is the potential for the proposals to have an impact on the rural riverside setting of the listed building immediately south of the River Avon, notable Rectory Farm Grade II*, The Grade I Church of St Peter and the Grade II vicarage. Peterslee (The Old Coach House) is also noted as a 'Building of Local importance', but is tucked behind outbuildings associated with Rectory Farm and is likely to be screened from the application site.

Conservation Areas

5.15 The site is located to the north of the Britford Conservation Area which covers the River Avon and the water meadows to the south of the river corridor around Britford. The adjoining Britford Watermeadows and Churchill Gardens Conservation Area extends north-westwards across the valley floor towards Salisbury city centre.

5.16 Therefore, there is the potential that the proposals could have an impact on the landscape setting of the Britford Conservation Area, and to a lesser degree, the

landscape setting of the more distant Britford Watermeadows and Churchill Gardens Conservation Area.

Scheduled Monuments

5.17 As discussed in paragraphs 3.25 to 3.27 earlier in this report, it has been assessed that due to both distance, intervening features in the landscape and the relatively small scale of the proposals, it is unlikely that the proposals will impact upon the wider landscape setting of Scheduled Monuments in the area.

Registered Parks and Gardens

5.18 A Grade II* Listed Park and Garden across the grounds of Longford Castle is located at just over 1km to the south-west of the application site. It is unlikely that the proposals will affect the wider landscape setting of Longford Castle gardens and parkland due to intervening vegetation and distance.

Cranbourne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

5.19 The site is located at over 3km to the north-west of the boundary of the Cranbourne Chase AONB which covers an area of over 980 sq. km of countryside overlapping the boundaries of Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire, and Somerset. At this distance, it is unlikely that the proposals will impact the wider setting of the AONB.

Saved Policies in the Salisbury District Local Plan

Policy C6 - Special Landscape Area (SLA).

Within the Special Landscape Area, proposals for development in the countryside will be considered having particular regard to the high quality of the landscape. Where proposals which would not have an adverse effect on the quality on the landscape are acceptable, they will be subject to the following criteria;

(i) the siting and scale of development to be sympathetic with the landscape; and

(ii) high standards of landscaping and design, using materials which are appropriate to the locality and reflect the character of the area.

5.20 The Site is located within the SLA which covers the wider landscape surrounding Salisbury. The guidelines aimed at protecting the high-quality landscape should be taken into consideration within the proposals and mitigation measures as part of this application.

Compliance with Planning Policies

5.21 The NPPF objectives are to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. Other objectives include appropriate and effective landscaping which is sympathetic to the local character, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, recognising the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside, minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains where possible.

5.22 The Wiltshire Core Strategy further builds upon the national policies with aims at protecting, conserving and enhancing landscape character. Core Policy 42 relating to renewable energy installations aims to support renewable energy schemes if all site-specific constraints can be resolved. Core Policy 50 aims to ensure development proposals demonstrate how they protect features of nature conservation. Core Policy 51 requires that development should consider locally distinctive character, landscape settings and take regard of relevant character assessments. Core Policy 58 aims to protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment in a manner appropriate to their significance, including buildings and structures of historic interest and the character or appearance of Conservation Areas. The saved Special Landscape Area policy further aims to ensure development is sympathetic to the landscape character.

5.23 The proposals have recognised the rural characteristics of the landscape by considering the location of the site with a standoff to the river corridor and the retention of the screening woodland belts and hedges. Further to this, landscape mitigation measures are proposed. These include retaining and enhancing the existing boundary vegetation and the planting of native hedges to provide screening and wildlife corridors, in line with the existing networks of riparian vegetation in the area. Other bio-diversity enhancements could also be considered, including the enhancement of the species-rich grassland and ditches on or adjacent to the site. This should ensure that the proposals do not have a significant adverse effect on the wider landscape character of the Avon Valley and potential visual effects are avoided. In the long term, the site will be managed by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to benefit wildlife.

Site-specific Designations

River Avon SSSI and SAC & County Wildlife Site

5.24 A standoff of over 200m between the River Avon and the southern site boundary aims to avoid direct impacts on the river corridor. An appropriate ecological management plan should be carried out and identify and put forward measures required to protect and enhance areas of ecological value on and around the site. The boundary vegetation will be protected from the site works with appropriate tree protection fencing. The location of temporary storage, compounds and on-site parking during construction should be agreed prior to the commencement of works to avoid disturbance to flora or fauna contributing to the setting of the River Avon and forming a part of the River Avon flood plain. Any works to drainage ditches and the methodology employed to avoid the release of nutrients, silt or chemicals into the watercourses to should also be agree with the LPA if necessary. As part of the landscape mitigation measure, the boundaries will be planted with new native hedges and tree species to reinforce and contribute to the semi-enclosed river valley landscape.

Priority Habitats

5.25 Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh Priority Habitats on the site should be protected where possible during the construction phase of the solar farm with appropriate mitigation measures agreed with the LPA and disturbance while installing the solar arrays minimised where possible or mitigated. In the long term, the ground flora on the site should be managed by WWT to increase biodiversity and its value to wildlife.

Listed Buildings

5.26 A standoff of approximately 300m will be established between Rectory Farm (Grade II*) and the southern edges of the solar arrays. The aim will be to protect the immediate setting of the farmhouse and other nearby listed buildings and their relationship to the corridor of the River Avon and its rural water meadow setting.

5.27 The landscape mitigation measures will include planting a native hedgerow along the southern site boundary to screen lower-level views and provide a green buffer in line with other nearby areas of existing vegetation. The aim will be to ensure that the immediate setting of the farmhouse and other nearby listed buildings, including, the

Church of St Peter, retains its semi-enclosed rural river side setting where nearby modern development and infrastructure are not prominent or readily perceived.

5.28 The Church is Grade I listed and the farmhouse Grade II*. The sensitivity to change of the landscape setting is assessed as medium as the application site is currently largely screened by intervening riverside and ditch vegetation, with just partial and glimpsed view possible. The magnitude of change is likely to be negligible once the hedge has established. The proposals are likely to represent a very minor alteration to a feature in the wider setting of the listed buildings, and not readily visible.

5.29 The solar arrays are not intended to be permanent and will be removed after an agreed period of time. The residual effects are likely to be enhanced biodiversity and landscape. The immediate riverside setting and rural context of the listed buildings will remain unaltered. The significance of the landscape effect on both The Church of St Peter and Rectory Farm is therefore likely to be **negligible** in the long term.

Conservation Areas

The site is located to the north of the Britford Conservation Area which covers the River Avon and the water meadows to the south of the site. The adjoining Britford Watermeadows and Churchill Gardens Conservation Area extends north-westwards across the valley floor towards Salisbury city centre.

5.30 The application site is contained along its western boundary by a mature hedge with trees with sections of the large-scale retail parks off Southampton Road, parts of the sewage works, further dense tree screening and other areas of 20th-century development to the west. The site is within an area that is not accessible to the public and is semi-enclosed. It is not considered that the site currently forms part of an important foreground in views of the city centre or cathedral for which parts of the Conservation Areas are recognised.

5.31 The application site is however, within a semi-enclosed area in the far northern sections of the water meadows and within the setting of the Conservation Areas and therefore, does form a minor part of the rural water meadows contributing to the setting of Salisbury. However, in an area where modern infrastructure and development has eroded the former traditional water meadow landscape character in places, although not prominent in the Conservation Areas due to the intervening vegetation associated with the river corridors and ditches.

In line with the listed building above, any changes on the setting of the Conservation Areas are likely to be negligible due to the standoff, existing intervening vegetation, the proposed landscape mitigation measures and the temporary nature of the scheme.

Policy C6 - Special Landscape Area (SLA).

5.32 The Site is located within the SLA which covers the wider landscape surrounding Salisbury. The guidelines aimed at protecting the high-quality landscape should be taken into consideration within the proposals and mitigation measures as part of this application.

As discussed earlier, a number of measures have been put forward to protect the rural landscape and historic features contributing to the particular qualities of this part of the River Avon valley. These include a 250 to 300m standoff to the Conservation Area, listed buildings, SSSI and SAC and mitigation measures in the form of retaining and enhancing the existing vegetation and new native hedge planting.

6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

6.1 Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy document states that the *'Proposals should be informed by and sympathetic to the distinctive character areas identified in the relevant Landscape Character Assessment(s) and any other relevant assessments and studies'.*

6.2 Landscape character assessment is a technique used to develop a consistent understanding of what gives a landscape its character to ensure future development is well situated, sensitive to its location and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives. The assessment identifies distinctive features, recognisable and consistent patterns of elements and natural and/or human features in the landscape that make one area distinctive from another. An assessment of pressure for change, the ability of a given landscape to accommodate change and landscape sensitivity to change may also be undertaken. The assessment can also include strategies and guidelines for future development and management to retain and enhance particular aspects of the landscape.

National Character Map of England

6.3 The National landscape character is set out in Natural England's Character Map of England. The study area is located in the southern sections of **NCA 132 – 'Salisbury Plain & West Wiltshire Downs'**, Some of the relevant key characteristics of the NCA which are evident in the wider landscape of the study area, have been extracted from the published document and include:

- *Salisbury Plain, an extensive and open rolling chalk plateau and one of the largest remaining areas of calcareous grassland in north-west Europe.*
- *Many small, sheltered river valleys, such as the Wylye, with narrow floodplains and meandering river courses.*
- *Woodland generally confined to valley slopes, with scattered copses and shelterbelts (usually of beech or conifer) found on the high downs, and occasional ancient oak woods on the ridgetops.*
- *Large arable fields predominate, with generally very few hedgerows or obvious boundary features; there are often wide grass buffer strips.*
- *Rare flora and fauna of national significance, associated with a chalk landscape, from stone curlew, hobby and corn bunting to dropwort, early gentian and slender bedstraw.*
- *Outstanding prehistoric ritual landscape, with many Scheduled Ancient Monuments and earthworks prominent in the open landscape, notably Stonehenge.*

- *A sparsely settled landscape, with few settlements of any size, and notable for nucleated villages at the foot of the scarp along the spring line. Large-scale farmsteads are a prominent feature.*

- *Abundant use made in older buildings of local stone such as flint, Chilmark stone, and clunch, together with timber frame and chalk cob.*

- *Large parks and estates found in the valleys, with related groups of estate housing in common style.*

- *Military tracks, airfields, and structures reflecting a major land use. Visually prominent modern military housing and supporting development are found on the eastern side of the NCA.*

6.4 The key characteristics above are all evident in the wider landscape near Salisbury. NCA 132 is large in scale and the proposals are small in scale in relation to the wider landscape character area. Changes are therefore not likely to alter the key landscape characteristics or elements that contribute to the integrity of the wider NCA. Potential changes to landscape character are more appropriately discussed on a county, district and local level outlined below.

District & Local Landscape Character

6.5 The Site falls with an area covered by two landscape character assessments and guidelines covering the study area and application site published by the former Wiltshire County Council in 2005 and the Salisbury District Landscape Character Assessment of February 2008, published by the former Salisbury District Council.

Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (2005)

6.6 The main purpose of the landscape character assessment was to assess the current status of the Wiltshire landscape and give indications to areas in need of enhancement and conservation to enable better-informed decisions to be made on future management and provide an objective basis for developing policies.

6.7 The assessment sets out 16 landscape character types within Wiltshire. Each of the generic landscape types has a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical attributes such as geology, landform, land cover, biodiversity and historical evolution. The landscape types can be further subdivided into component landscape character areas. The 2008 assessment below however, is a slightly more up-to-date document and has been extracted below.

Salisbury District Landscape Character Assessment (February 2008)

6.8 The aim of the study was to provide an integrated assessment of the character of the district to serve as baseline environmental information to ensure that full account is given to landscape character in planning decisions. As well as assessing landscape character, the study also evaluates landscape condition, inherent landscape sensitivities, and key changes and outlines management strategies and objectives.

6.9 The wider Avon Valley landscape including the application site and forming the setting to the west and south fall within Character Area **A4 Lower Avon Narrow Chalk River Valley.**

6.10 A summary of the **Lower Avon Narrow Chalk River Valley** is extracted below;

Key Characteristics:

- *Relatively contained valley, encompassing the confluence of the Wylye, Nadder and Bourne and Ebble within the River Avon;*
- *Narrow meandering river channel, bordered by a wider landscape of navigation channels and numerous ditches adjacent to the Avon;*
- *Frequent copses and belts of mixed woodland along the river corridor, providing an intermediate sense of enclosure;*
- *Generally inaccessible river corridor, despite proximity to Salisbury, culminating in a very strong sense of tranquillity and strongly rural character throughout;*
- *Striking views towards Salisbury cathedral's spire provide recognisable sense of place within this generally flat landscape;*
- *Small-scale patchwork of small pastoral fields, delineated by a network of lush hedgerows, mature hedgerow trees and riverside trees such as willow and alder;*
- *Pockets of herb-rich grassland, which were once managed as water meadows;*
- *Relatively sparse settlement pattern, consisting of scattered farmsteads, small linear hamlets such as Bodenham and Charlton; and nucleated villages such as Downton and Wick;*
- *Settlements generally have a strong vernacular character of red brick and flint buildings, with thatched roofs often as a feature;*
- *Historic halls and manor houses and associated parklands within the valley, including Longford Castle and Wilton House;*

Summary of Visual Character

This narrow chalk river valley is wider than the Till, Bourne and Upper Avon valleys to the north of Salisbury because it encompasses the confluence of these river channels, which have merged to become the River Avon. Consequently, the gently meandering river corridor and numerous adjacent ditches and navigation channels dominate this landscape character

area. Sense of openness varies throughout this predominantly flat landscape. In places, dramatic views towards Salisbury Cathedral (as celebrated within Constable's famous painting of Salisbury Cathedral from the river) can be gained. From other locations, copses and linear belts of woodland limit views across and along the valley. Sense of tranquillity throughout the valley is strong, despite proximity to Salisbury to the north and The A338 and Witherington road corridors. A small-scale patchwork of pastoral fields, delineated by a rich network of lush hedgerows, line the river, which is generally inaccessible other than at Downton and Salisbury. Settlement pattern is sparse, consisting of a pattern of small farmsteads dotted within the valley, small linear hamlets and the larger nucleated villages of Wick and Downton to the south. Buildings exhibit many vernacular details and typical materials include red brick, thatch and flint. Historic halls and manor houses also provide recognisable landscape features, often with associated designed parklands.

Human Influences

Historic Environment

- *The rich pastures in the Wylye Valley would have attracted many small homesteads probably since the Early Neolithic period circa 4000BC. Bronze Age (3000 – 3500BC) fortifications which are further developed in the Iron Age are evident in the Valley. Occupation has continued throughout history although the most prominent remnants are those from the medieval period onwards;*

- *Longford Castle, a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden 16th century park landscaped in 18th century, with 19th formal gardens is a surviving example of the concerns, within the feudal system of land-tenure, that manorial estates had access to the full range of economic resources, from the pastures along the river and open fields around the valley sides to the common grazing land on the downs.*

Field Patterns and Boundaries

- *In the medieval period the valley side would have been the focus of open field cultivation, between the valley floor meadows and the upland grazing, as a component of sheep-and corn agriculture. This system of mixed farming affected the arrangement of later enclosed fields, the layout tracks, droves and hollow-ways which survive to the present being influenced largely by the movement of livestock to and from the downs. Agricultural innovations in the post-medieval and modern periods saw the inclosure of the open fields adjacent to the villages. The large scale fields are the result of the recent amalgamation of earlier straight-sided fields characteristic of late 18th/ early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.*

Historic Development of Settlement

- *Settlement is concentrated on the River and elsewhere within this landscape character area settlement is notably absent. Evidence of rural diversification is present where converted farm buildings are being let for business;*
- *Red brick is a common building material especially in Downton and Bodenham, although flint and timber-framing with brick noggin is also visible in some structures;*
- *Due to there 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance', three towns or villages within this character area are designated as Conservation Areas: Salisbury, Bodenham and Downton*

Biodiversity

- *The spring fed streams and river in this area are rich in plant and animal communities, deriving, in part, from the high-quality of the base-rich water which is naturally clear and fast flowing. The river irrigates the valley floodplains to create a rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats including water meadows, damp pasture, wet woodland and fens.*
- *The Lower Avon is part of the River Avon System SSSI, which is of national and international significance for rare/vulnerable species – populations of Atlantic salmon, bullhead and brook and sea lamprey – and for its habitat value for flowing water vegetation and Desmoulin's whorl snail.*

EVALUATION

Current Condition

- *Landscape within the Lower Avon Narrow Chalk River Valley is considered to be in generally good condition. An intact network of hedgerows delineated fields; and well maintained vernacular building materials are evident throughout much of the area. There is, however, evidence of loss of historic water meadows, which are currently managed as herb-rich grassland.*

Inherent Landscape Sensitivities

Landscape Character Sensitivity

- *Inherent landscape sensitivities within this area include the small-scale patchwork of pastoral fields, delineated by a network of lush hedgerows, pockets of herb-rich grassland (once managed as water meadows), frequent copses and belts of mixed woodland and riverside trees such as willow and alder. In addition, a strong vernacular settlement character and historic halls and manors, contribute sensitive cultural elements to overall character. The river corridor is generally inaccessible, and overall sense of tranquillity is therefore strong. As a result of the combination of above elements, this landscape character area is considered to have high landscape character sensitivity overall.*

Visual Sensitivity

- *From several locations within this character area, striking, open views towards Salisbury cathedral's spire can be gained. Open views north-south along the river corridor are also a feature of the visual character. In places, however, riverside trees and vegetation limit cross valley views. Related to this, sense of enclosure varies throughout the area. The visual sensitivity of views to the spire is considered to be high, whilst overall visual sensitivity is considered to be moderate to high.*

Key Landscape Changes

- *Potential pressure for expansion of small hamlets and villages and the southern edges of Salisbury resulting in changing settlement pattern and character;*
- *Potential loss of mature hedgerow field boundaries and woodland belts and copses;*
- *Nutrient pollution from farmland adjacent to riverside, in addition to road and urban run-off affecting the high water quality within the River Avon;*
- *Agricultural intensification, leading to gradual drainage and improvement of herb-rich grassland and loss of willow and alder along the river corridor;*
- *Increased traffic pressure on roads running adjacent to valley, resulting in potential widening, new crossing points and erosion of sense of tranquillity and strong rural character;*
- *New development, which may block views to Salisbury Cathedral's spire.*

Management Strategy and Objectives

- *The overall management strategy for the Lower Avon Narrow Chalk River Valley should be to conserve the strong landscape pattern of small-scale fields, mature hedgerows and riverside willows and poplars. In addition, conserve the small-scale historic settlement pattern and predominantly vernacular character of built form. There may be opportunities for reinstatement of water meadows.*

Specific management objectives are to:

- *Conserve open views towards Salisbury Cathedral and other views across and along the valley;*
- *Conserve the strongly rural character and associated strong sense of tranquillity;*
- *Ensure that potential new development along the valley, particularly at the southern fringes of Salisbury and the village edges, respects the historic settlement scale, pattern and vernacular materials;*
- *Monitor road engineering to safeguard the rural character of road corridors;*
- *Encourage conservation and management of the existing hedgerow network;*

- *Conserve the existing scattered settlement pattern and avoid large developments that would be out of character with the existing layout;*
- *Conserve mature riverside willow and alder as landscape features;*
- *Identify, conserve and consider opportunities for reconnecting and recreating wetland habitats such as wet woodland, fen, marsh and swamp.*

Local Landscape Character

6.11 The application site is within a rural landscape, but associated with the urban edge of Salisbury within the northern sections a wedge of water meadow extending to the north-west towards, and then around, the southern edges of the historic city centre of Salisbury. The application site is semi-enclosed and not prominent in the local landscape.

6.12 Due to intervening woodland blocks, tree belts and other vegetation the application site is relatively well screened within the valley floor which also allows the surrounding rural landscape to retain much of its rural character, despite the presence of large areas of modern development and infrastructure nearby.

6.13 In summary, some of the main elements contributing to the local landscape character include:

- The distinctive and isolated and rural character of the nearby water meadows and River Avon to the south. Often with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- The lack of visually prominent modern development or infrastructure emphasises the rural character to the south of the site.
- The scattered and historic rural buildings at Britford, retaining their strong connection with the rural water meadows, surrounding farmland and river corridor.
- The meadows providing a nationally recognised historic rural setting to Salisbury and the cathedral.

6.14 Elements that detract from the local landscape have been identified as:

- The modern retail buildings, infrastructure and sewage works close to the site. There are often screened or intermittently screened, from the water meadow landscape and therefore can be less prominent, despite their close proximity, although noise is readily evident throughout.

- The busy road corridor of the A36, often with queueing traffic, busy roundabouts, and noise pollution.

6.15 The sensitivity of the local landscape to change is assessed as ranging from high to low from south to north. The local area is not covered by a nationally recognised designation, but it is within a Special Landscape Area which recognises the landscape sensitivity and aims to ensure development responds to the landscape character.

6.16 Areas in the local landscape have preserved their rural integrity, particularly to the south, as a result of the screening afforded by woodland blocks and hedges and the lack of modern development or infrastructure, having a strong connection with the rural water meadows and River Avon and traditional historic buildings.

6.17 To the north, the local landscape is heavily influenced by the busy urban edges of Salisbury and therefore, the sensitivity to change is assessed as low. The site itself is assessed as lying in an area with moderate sensitivity to change, being located in a transitional landscape influenced by both rural elements and areas of modern infrastructure and large-scale development. Although the application site is in a semi-enclosed landscape where the screening by vegetation helps to preserve more of its rural integrity in places.

6.18 The local landscape to the south is distinctive and has a strong sense of place and it is considered important to preserve its rural integrity. It is, therefore, important to avoid introducing modern man-made elements in prominent locations, particularly along the southern boundaries of the site, which have a stronger relationship to the rural river corridor landscape and the potential to affect the wider landscape setting of historic buildings associated with the Church of St Peter.

Nature of Character Effects

6.19 Landscape effects can be adverse (negative), beneficial (positive) or neutral. The landscape effects will be considered against the landscape baseline, which includes published landscape strategies or policies and habitats. Changes involving the addition of man-made objects in a rural landscape are typically considered to be adverse unless otherwise stated within the assessment.

Summary of Effects on Landscape Character

Effects on the Lower Avon Narrow Chalk River Valley Character Area

6.20 The former District Council assessment identifies the overall condition of the valley landscape to generally be in good condition with an intact network of hedgerows. The overall sense of tranquillity is assessed as strong with a high landscape character sensitivity overall. The visual sensitivity is assessed as moderate to high overall and rising to high where views are possible to Salisbury cathedral's spire.

6.21 The overall management strategies and objectives are to conserve the strong landscape pattern of small fields with mature hedgerows and riverside willows and poplars and to conserve the small-scale historic settlement pattern. Specific management objectives that may have relevance to the site include: conserving the strong rural character and sense of tranquillity, ensuring new development on the southern fringes of Salisbury respects the historic settlement scale and pattern, manage the existing hedgerow network, avoid large developments out of character with existing layouts, conserve riverside willow and alder as landscape features and consider opportunities to recreate wetland habitats.

6.22 Overall the landscape character sensitivity across the Avon Valley assessed as high in the assessment. The application site however, is located towards the perimeters of the flood plain and beyond the more deeply rural areas to the south associated with the River Avon. The landscape sensitivity of the wider Avon Valley to this form on development in this semi-enclosed location is therefore, assessed as slightly lower and high to moderate.

6.23 In the wider valley landscape, the changes on the application site could potentially represent a minor addition of modern development in a semi-enclosed location within the water meadows but not in the more highly sensitive location to the south, or in an area recognised for its association with the rural setting of the cathedral, being more closely associated with the modern urban edge of Salisbury. Overall the magnitude of the change is likely to be low resulting in potentially a **Moderate** to **Slight** significance of effect on the wider valley landscape.

6.24 To comply with some of the management objectives outlined in the character assessment, the proposals have been set back with a standoff of approximately 300m to the historic buildings associated with the Church of St Peters to the south,

as well as over 200m form the River Avon SSSI and SAC and Conservation Area of Britford. The aim will be to retain the rural character of the river corridor.

6.25 The landscape proposals will aim to be in line with the existing belts of vegetation which are characteristic of the area and add to the distinct sense of place. New native hedges with willow and alder to provide screening and extend the belts of existing vegetation around the site and enhance the strong network of hedgerows in the area. As part of the ongoing management by WWT the ground flora will be managed to benefit wildlife as well as the enhancement of boundary ditches. The aim will be to further integrate the proposals into the landscape setting and reduce the potential landscape effects as far as is possible to potentially **Slight** to **Neutral**.

Effects on the Local Character

6.26 Overall the landscape to the south of the application site is tranquil and has retained much of it rural flood plain character, despite the presence of modern development which are often screened in the wider landscape. To the north of the site the influence of the urban edges of Salisbury are readily apparent. The sensitivity to change of the local landscape character is therefore, assessed as medium.

6.27 The proposals will not directly impact the strong pattern of ditches lined by vegetation or network of tree belts or small woodland belts. The site is not within a publically accessible area or a location with recognised significant views, or part of the rural setting to the cathedral due to intervening man-made and natural feature in the landscape. The proposals will not result in the removal of landscape features and will be temporary in nature and generally very well screened.

6.28 The introduction of an area of new technical structure would however, result in a localised loss or rural character with a solar farm introduced in a rural but enclosed area, which is not readily visible and in close proximity to a sewage works and the urban edge of Salisbury.

6.29 The proposals also have a relatively strong relationship with the rural water meadow and River Avon landscape to the south and could potentially further degrade the remnant rural characteristics. The potential magnitude is assessed as medium to low and the degree of effect as a result of the proposals is assessed as potentially **Moderate** to **Slight** on the local landscape.

6.30 As above, the landscape mitigation measure should provide a standoff to the river corridor and over time, screen views of the proposals with the introduction of hedges and enhanced boundary vegetation to provide screening for the very limited views available. In this location, new native planting is considered appropriate within the context of the semi-enclosed landscape and would be in keeping with the character of the local area. The grassland below the solar arrays will be manged to benefit wildlife by WWT.

6.31 Over time as the planting develops it is anticipated that the most significant effect can be reduced to at most **Slight to Neutral** on the local landscape surrounding the application site.

6.32 **Table 2 –Effects on Landscape Character Summary** (see the Landscape & Visual Impact Methodology in Appendix 3)

Receptor	Distance from Site	Predicted Change	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Effect and Type
River Avon Character Area	The wider valley landscape	The changes on the application site could potentially represent a minor addition of modern development in a semi-enclosed location within the water meadows but also associated with the urban edge of Salisbury.	High to Medium	Low	**Moderate to Slight** (Falling to Slight to Neutral with mitigation)
The Local Landscape	300 to 500m from the Site	The proposals will not result in the removal of landscape features and will be temporary in nature and generally very well screened. The introduction of an area of new technical structure would result in a localised loss or rural character with a solar farm introduced in a semi-rural but enclosed area, which is not readily visible and in close proximity to a sewage works and the urban edge of Salisbury.	Medium	Medium to Low	**Moderate to Slight** Falling to Slight to Neutral with mitigation)

7. VISUAL AMENITY

Introduction

7.1 This section examines the influence of the landscape on the visual amenity of the area and the visual effects will be assessed from a series of representative viewpoints take within the study area. Visibility and key viewpoints are illustrated on the Site Analysis plan ACLA/BNB 03 and on photo sheets 1 to 6 in appendix 2. The viewpoints have been selected to represent key visual receptors.

7.2 A further four on-site views are also included looking south, west, north and east out of the site and towards the boundary vegetation. These views demonstrate the semi-enclosed site and surrounding landscape and illustrate the relatively high degree of screening afforded by boundary and off-site vegetation and overall lack of views outwards. Most of these views have been taken in December they represent the 'worst case scenario', when deciduous vegetation is not in leaf.

The Existing Zone of Visual Influence

7.3 As the application site is located in a semi-enclosed part of the norther Avon Valley floor with areas of more open elevated valley sides beyond. The belts of vegetation and small woodland blocks in the flat valley floor on and around the site has resulted in a high degree of screening, with only partial of heavily filtered views possible from localised publically accessible areas.

7.4 From within the site, sections of Rectory Farm and the upper sections of St Peter Church tower are possible, between and over intervening riparian vegetation. No views from public areas have been identified to the east due to the dense valley floor vegetation. The tree belt along the norther boundary also screens the majority of views to the north, with just very localised views below the canopies of the trees to small sections of the northern parts of the site.

7.5 No views for public areas have been identified to the west due to the boundary hedge and other intervening vegetation in the wider landscape. There are however, views outwards to the upper sections of some of the buildings associated with Southampton Road retail park to the north-west, in particular the clock tower associate with the Tesco superstore. Small sections of the sewage works and security fencing are also possible, where the boundary hedge has become thin and gappy.

7.6 Partial and localised long distance and elevated views form the upper valley sides are occasionally possible, but generally screened by the valley vegetation. No views from publically accessible locations have been identified from the upper valley sides to the north.

7.7 From the upper valley sides surrounding Salisbury District Hospital, to the south-west and the lower valley sides around the Britford Park and Ride, no views have been identified towards the site. Most of the footpaths on the ridges near the hospital are enclosed by dense field hedges and the hospital is screened by a maturing tree belt planted around the main car park. From elsewhere on the southern valley sides, including the open sections of the A338 road corroder and environs, no views have been identified due to the dense screening by intervening woodland blocks and belts in the intervening valley floor. However, partial winter views are possible from the south-western valley sides to the sewage works adjacent to the site in some areas, as there is less intervening vegetation long the river corridor in that particular location.

7.8 Within the nearby valley floor most publically accessible areas with potential views are also screened by intervening vegetation. With only partial and localised views possible from the A36 to the north at close distance through a gap in the north eastern corner of the site or very localised views under the canopies of the tree belt on the norther boundary.

7.9 To the south, from Lower Road or Church Lane, along the norther edges of Britford, tend to be screened by intervening vegetation. In the region of the Church of St Peter, no views have been identified due to the intervening buildings, hedges and lack of publicly accessible areas. From all other areas within the valley floor, view tend to be screened by the belts of scrub, hedges and small woodland blocks, which in combination provide a high degree of screening, even in the winter months.

7.10 Based on the desk study and field observations, the distance boundaries for the assessment have been set at:

- Up to 500m Close Distance – the development and associated proposals are likely to be a recognisable and prominent new element where views are possible.

- 500 to 1km Middle Distance – the development is likely to be a recognisable but not an overly prominent new element in views.

- 1km and over Long Distance – any development may be noticed in clear conditions but without the perception of detail and increasingly less significant with distance in a wider panoramic view.

Brief Description of Key Viewpoints

7.11 The key viewpoints were selected from a number of locations assessed during field surveys and based on an initial desktop evaluation of the topography. All off-site viewpoints are from publicly accessible areas or roads and tend to be heavily screened. Areas visited but omitted due to a lack of views include; the Southampton Road retail park, the A36 & environs, Petersfinger and Clarendon Way to the north, roads and footpaths within an around Britford, the Britford Park and Ride and environs, Salisbury District Hospital and environs and the A338 road corridor to the south-west.

Selection of Representative Viewpoints

7.12 The selected viewpoint photographs are presented in Appendix 2. They are not intended to cover every single possible view but are intended to be representative of a range of views at a range of distances to the application site. The assessment was undertaken on the 10th of December 2021. Visibility on the day of the visit was good and suitable for assessing longer distance views. Following Pre-application feedback from Wiltshire Council, a further visit was carried out to verify certain views on 9th June 2022. The weather on the second visit was clear and overcast but with good visibility.

Viewpoint 1 – From the A36 at 260m north-east of the application boundary.

7.13 A view in a gap between buildings and at close distance. The view across the application site is generally screened by the tree belt on the northern application site boundary, with just a localised view to the far eastern sections of the site along the farm access track and small localised gaps below the canopies of boundary trees. The view is very localised and from a busy road corridor. The view was selected to illustrate the degree of screening from the north and the semi-enclosed character of the landscape around the site.

Viewpoint 2 – From the A36 close to the entrance of Petersfinger Farm.

A further close distance view from the A36. In this view however, the view is more heavily screened due to some areas of intervening hedge and the dense boundary

understorey. The view is very localised and from a busy road corridor. The view demonstrated the high degree of screening, even in the winter months.

Viewpoint 3 – From the A36 at 160m north-west of the site boundary

7.14 A close distance view south of the Petersfinger Park and Ride on the A36. From this location both the belt of trees on the northern boundary and the mature hedge along the western boundary tends to screen views into the site. This is a summer view, in winter the view may be opened up slightly along the western site boundary. It should also be noted, from within the site in winter, no views have been identified at low-level north-west to the A36. This view further demonstrates the high degree of screening afforded by boundary vegetation.

Viewpoint 4 – From the yard of The Church of St Peter at 230m south-east of the site boundary.

7.15 A very localised close distance view towards the site between The old Coach House (Peterslee) and Rectory Farm, over the river Avon from the Church of St Peter. From this location the intermittent vegetation just east of the site appears to screen potential views. A very localised and sought view. Form elsewhere in the local area views are screened.

7.16 **Viewpoint 5** – From Lower Road north of Bridge Farm, Britford at just over 600m south-west of the application boundary

7.17 A rural middle distance view from Britford where the road rises as it approaches the bridge. Small sections of the sewage works are just visible between the dense vegetation associated with the River Avon. However, views towards the proposed site are screened by both the intervening sewage works and areas of dense vegetation. The view also illustrates the rural character of Britford and the rural setting of the Church of St Peter, together with the high degree of screening by the flood plain vegetation, where modern buildings and infrastructure associated with Salisbury are generally screened.

Viewpoint 6 – From the junction of Lower Road and the A338 at just over 1km south-west of the site.

7.18 A slightly elevated long distance view from the middle valley sides on the A338. A predominantly rural view where small sections of the sewage works are just visible between the dense vegetation associated with the River Avon. However, views

towards the proposed site are screened by both the intervening sewage works and areas of dense vegetation. Other development associated with Salisbury are more prominent to the left of the view.

Effects on Visual Receptors

7.19 Visual receptors with potential views to the development site have been assessed in terms of their sensitivity and the magnitude of the change. A conclusion on the overall significance of the visual effect brought about by the proposals is then assessed in line with the methodology in Appendix 3.

7.20 The viewpoints selected are representative of the views available and have been selected by professional judgement during on-site work and the desk study. The aim is to present a thorough and reasoned evaluation of the study area whilst keeping the amount of information at a reasonable and accessible level.

Construction Effects

7.21 Principal construction effects on the landscape resource in the area would include:

- Increased activity on-site and the track leading to it for a period of approximately 12 weeks,
- Potential to impact on site boundaries if no suitable temporary protection is put in place,

7.22 The increase in activity for a short period of time is not considered an issue in this case as the access and local area is not publically accessible and the site is heavily screened.

Glare and Glint

7.23 In summary, glare is unlikely to be an issue as solar panels are designed to maximise absorption of light and have a surface that is anti-reflective and diffusing. As a result, there may be some localised glare in very close proximity to panels, but not from any distance and not form the north. At a distance, the glare will simply be perceived as a lighter area in the landscape id views are available. In addition, glare and glint would only be perceived at very specific times of year and day in a limited area defined generally by a narrow segment to the east and west coinciding, with sunrise and sunset or evening sun times. As the site is heavily screened, even during

the winter months, glint and glare is not considered to be an issue in this particular case.

Nature of Effects

7.24 Potential visual effects are more subjective as the human perception of development can vary considerably from negative, neutral and positive attitudes. In the assessment of visual effects the assessor will exercise objective professional judgement in assessing the level of effects and, unless otherwise stated, will assume that all effects as a result of new built form in the view are adverse, thus representing the worst-case scenario.

Summary of Visual Effects (Operational Stage)

7.25 The degree of all the visual effects below has been assessed as negligible. This is due to the high level of screening afforded by the intervening vegetation in both the local landscape and any potential long distance views.

7.26 The proposed screening is in the form of interplanting and new native hedges will aim to further reduce the visual effects for localised area and ensure that, over time, there will be no specific visual effects as result of the proposals. The enhanced landscape structure will also aim the reduce the potential effects on the setting of listed buildings at Britford, as well as responding to the rural landscape setting and semi-enclosed character of the area and enhancing biodiversity on the site.

7.27 **Table 1 – Visual Effects Operational Phase** (See the Detailed Assessment Methodology in Appendix 3)

Receptor	Distance from Site	Predicted Change	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Effect and type
Viewpoint 1 Users of the A36	260m north	Potentially views to small sections of the rear of the dollar panels between the existing vegetation which provide a high degree of screening. Any changes are likely to be barley perceivable and from a localised area.	Low	Negligible	**Negligible**
Viewpoints 2	<5m	As above, any changes are likely to be barley perceivable	Low	Negligible	**Negligible**

Receptor	Distance from Site	Predicted Change	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Effect and type
Users of the A36		though dense vegetation and from a localised area.			
Viewpoint 3 Users of the A36	160m north-west	A further view heavily screened by the sites boundary tree belt and hedges. Possibly the localised opening up in winter views where the western site boundary hedge is weak to allow localise and partial views t0 the rear of the solar panels.	Low	Negligible	**Negligible**
Viewpoint 4 User of the church yard	230m south-east	A partial view towards the site between buildings. Potential views will be heavily screened by the intervening valley floor vegetation east of the site.	Medium	Negligible	**Negligible**
Viewpoint 5 Users of Lower Road	610m south-west	The proposals will be screened and heavily filtered by the intervening vegetation associated with the river corridor. Any changes, if at all, will be barely perceivable.	Medium	Negligible	**Negligible**
Viewpoint 6 Users of the A338	1km south-west	A view screened by intervening vegetation in the valley floor. Any changes, if at all, will be barely perceivable.	Medium	Negligible	**Negligible**

8. EFFECT ON LANDSCAPE FEATURES

8.1 As part of the primary design and mitigation measures, the development has been located away from significant boundary vegetation. Root protection zones will be established around retained vegetation which will be protected with temporary fencing during the construction phase.

8.2 With the construction of the solar arrays, the land will be be managed by Wilshire Wildlife Trust as traditinal water meadow with reduced grazing and rough grassland to the boundaries to enhance biodiversity & provide habitats.

8.3 A mitigation strategy will also aim to provide an overall net benefit in green infrastructure; create enhanced and additional habitats on-site and screen potential views.

9. MITIGATION STRATEGY

Mitigation

9.1 Mitigation has been undertaken as part of the initial design providing a stand-off to the River Avon and dwellings associated with the Church of St Peter to preserve the riverside setting and rural river corridor landscape. All the boundary vegetation that provides landscape structure and significant screening to the north and western site boundaries will be retained.

9.2 Landscape proposals include the planting of a new native field hedge mixes to the site boundaries where thy are open, together with the interplanting with native species where boundary vegetation is gappy. This will aim to further integrate the proposals withn the locally semi-enclsed water meadows and respond to the landscape character, as well as significantly reducing the potential effects on the landscpe setting of Rectory Farm and The Church of St Peters to the south. The interplanting will consist of a mix of native trees and shrubs typically planted as whips or transplants on a 1 to 3m grid, including willows and alders to respond to local landscape setting.

9.3 A native mixed filed hedge is proposed along the southern and eastern site boundary. This can consist of a typical field hedge mix of native whips of transplants planted in a double staggered row at approximately 5 plants per linear metre. Willow and alder in the mix will also respond to the specific water meadow setting of the site and nearby belts of informal vegetation. The hedges can be allowed to grow out in key areas to form informal belts of taller vegetation, in line with the nearby landscape.

9.4 The internal grassland within the application site will be managed as traditional water meadows and rough grassland by Wiltshire Wildflife Trust. The nearby ditches can also be managed to increase biodiversity.

Construction Phase Mitigation

9.5 Advanced boundary planting can be undertaken at an early stage to provide earlier screening and protected from construction works.

9.6 During construction, specific measures should be in place to protect retained vegetation and habitats. These should include the protection of the existing boundary vegetation in accordance with BS5837:2012 ‘Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations’.

10. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

10.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared to accompany a planning application for the construction of a 1.5 megawatt solar photovoltaic array on land south of Petesfinger, Salisbury, Wiltshire. The application Site is part of a single rectilinear pastoral field located on the River Avon valley floor and just beyond the south-eastern settlement boundary of Salisbury, Wiltshire.

10.2 The land beyond a linear field to the north-west of the A36 near the site is occupied by the large-scale Southampton Road Retail Park with modern superstores, a hotel, a park and ride and numerous other modern commercials, shopping and residential areas associated with the south-eastern edges of Salisbury.

10.3 The River Avon is located at just 250m to the south-east of the application site in a semi-enclosed rural landscape with numerous side streams, floor meadows and drainage ditches throughout the valley floor. The low-density and dispersed rural village of Britford is located just south of the River Avon linked by narrow single-track rural lanes running across the valley floor from the A338 to the south.

10.4 The historic city centre of Salisbury is located at approximately 2km to the north-west and Salisbury District Hospital is located on a ridge beyond the valley floor at approximately 2km to the south-west. In the Wiltshire Core Strategy development plan, the site itself is within a Special Landscape Area and the Salisbury Conservation Area covers the River Avon and land to the south and west of the application site. The River Avon corridor and major side streams to the south are also designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). A recently extended County Wildlife Site is located immediately to the north-east.

10.5 There are a number of Listed Buildings associated with Britford to the south, several of which are located close to the southern banks of the River Avon, south of the application site. These include the Grade I Church of St Peter and the attached Radnor Mausoleum, the nearby grade II Old vicarage and the Grade II* Rectory Farmhouse, together with several monuments in the church yard.

10.6 In the wider valley landscape, the changes on the application site could potentially represent a minor addition of modern development in a semi-enclosed location within the water meadows but not in the more highly sensitive location to the south, or in an area recognised for its association with the rural setting of Salisbury, being more

closely associated with the modern urban edge of Salisbury. Overall the magnitude of the change is likely to be low resulting in potentially a moderate to slight significance of effect on the wider valley landscape.

10.7 The proposals will not directly impact the strong pattern of ditches lined by vegetation or network of tree belts or small woodland belts. The site is not within a publically accessible area or a location with recognised significant views, or part of the rural setting to the cathedral due to intervening man-made and natural feature in the landscape. The proposals will not result in the removal of landscape features and will be temporary in nature and generally very well screened.

10.8 The introduction of an area of new technical structure would however, result in a localised loss or rural character with a solar farm introduced in a rural but enclosed area, which is not readily visible and in close proximity to a sewage works and the urban edge of Salisbury.

10.9 The proposals also have a relatively strong relationship with the rural water meadow and River Avon landscape to the south and could potentially further degrade the remnant rural characteristics. The potential magnitude is assessed as medium to low and the degree of effect as a result of the proposals is assessed as potentially moderate to slight on the local landscape.

10.10 A standoff of approximately 300m will be established between Rectory Farm (Grade II*) and the southern edges of the solar arrays. The aim will be to protect the immediate setting of the farmhouse and other nearby listed buildings, including the Church of St Peter and their relationship to the corridor of the River Avon and its rural water meadow setting. The standoff will also aim to avoid impacts on the landscape setting of the Britford Conservation Area and the river SSSI and SAC.

10.11 All the boundary vegetation around the application site ill be retined. Landscape proposals include the planting of a new native field hedge mixes to the site boundaries, together with the interplanting with native species where boundary vegetation is gappy. This will aim to further integrate the proposals withn the local semi-enclsed water meadows and respond to the landscape character, as well as further significantly reducing the potential effects on the landscpe setting of Rectory Farm and The Church of St Peters to the south.

10.12 The internal grassland within the Site will be managed as traditional water meadows by Wiltsihre Wildlife Trust. The nearby ditches can also be managed to increase biodiversity.

10.13 Over time as the planting develops it is anticipated that the most significant landscape effect can be reduced to at most slight to neutral on the landscape surrounding the application site.

10.14 The degree of all the visual effects from publicly accessible locations has been assessed as negligible. This is due to the high level of screening afforded by the intervening vegetation in both the local landscape and any potential long distance views.

10.15 The assessment concludes that development could be successfully incorporated within its surroundings without causing substantial harm to the landscape character, the overall visual amenity or landscape features within the study area.

Anthony Clarkson BA Hons Dip LA **ACLA Ltd August 2022**

APPENDIX 1

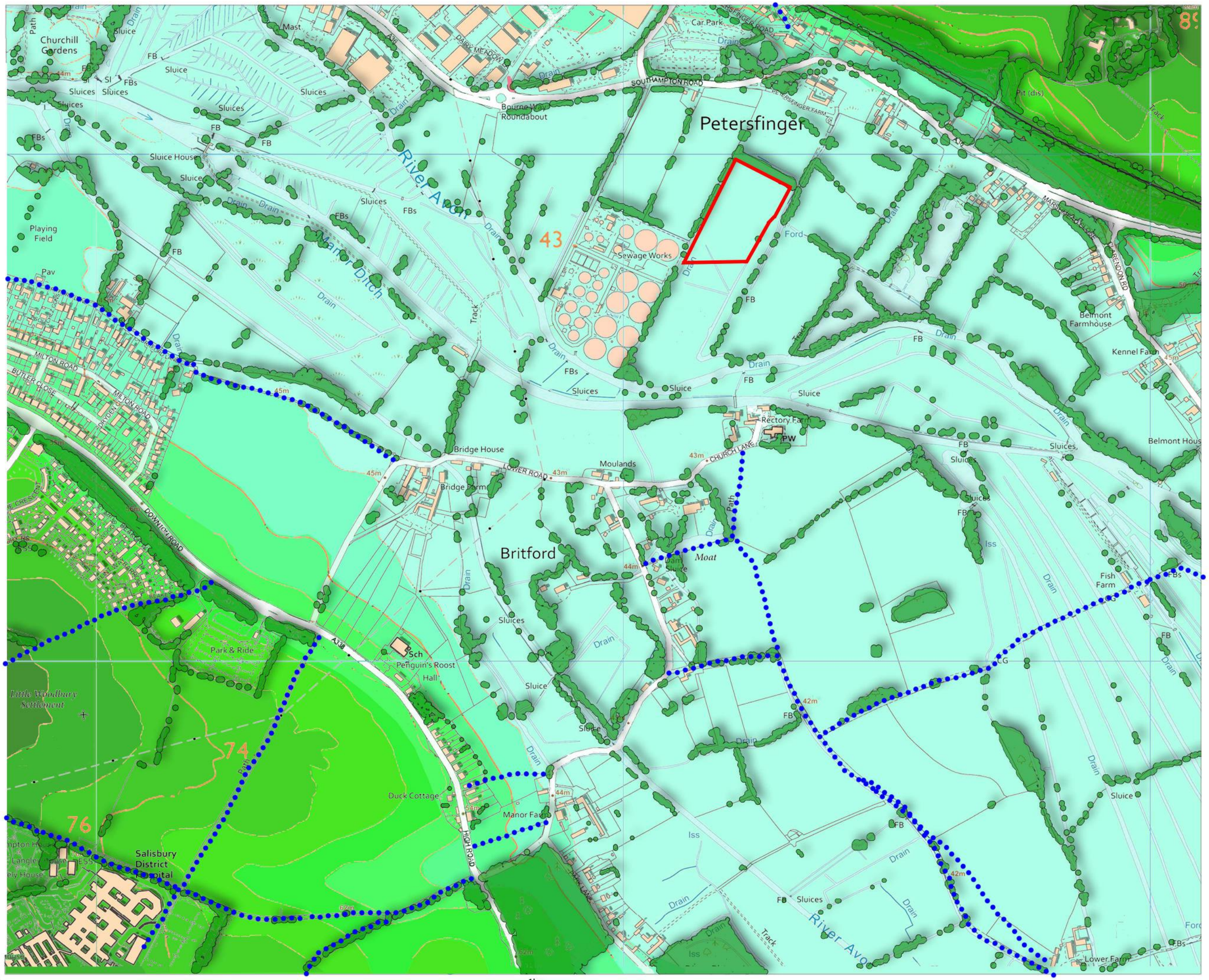
Plans

ACLA/BNB 01 Site Context

ACLA/BNB-02 Planning Context

ACLA/BNB-03 Site Analysis

ACLA/BNB-04 Illustrative Layout -Landscape Mitigation & Enhancement



Application Boundary

Public Rights of way (PRoW)

Significant Vegetation

NOTES:

The location of significant vegetation beyond the application boundary has been identifed form a combination of on site observations and online mapping (Google Earth).

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) have been identified from the Wiltshire Council Rights of Way Explorer online

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Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Site Context

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 01

Scale: NTS Date: Dec 2021

ACLA Landscape Architects
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Application Boundary

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

Listed Buildings

Listed Parks & Gardens

Scheduled Monuments

Conservation Area

Settlement Framework Boundary

Special Landscape Area

Extended County Wildlife Site (Petersfinger Farm Meadows)

NOTES:

0m 1km

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Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Planning Context

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 02

Scale: NTS Date: Dec 2021

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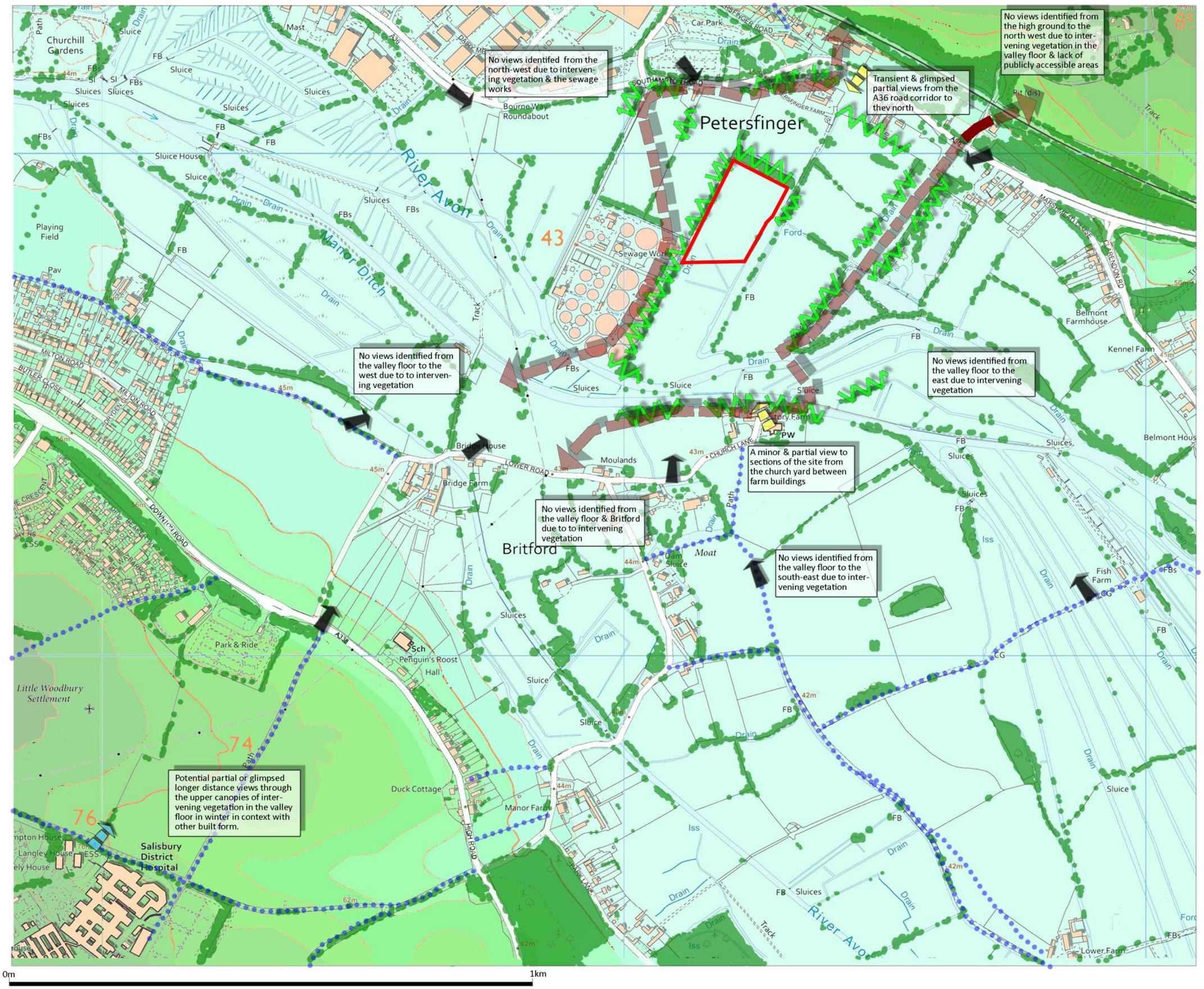

Application Boundary

Potentail Zone of Visibility

Screening by Intervening Vegetation & Structures

Screened Views

Largely Screened Close Distance Views

Potential Largely Screened Longer Distance Views from the South

Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Site Analysis

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 03

Scale: NTS Date: Dec 2021

ACLA Landscape Architects

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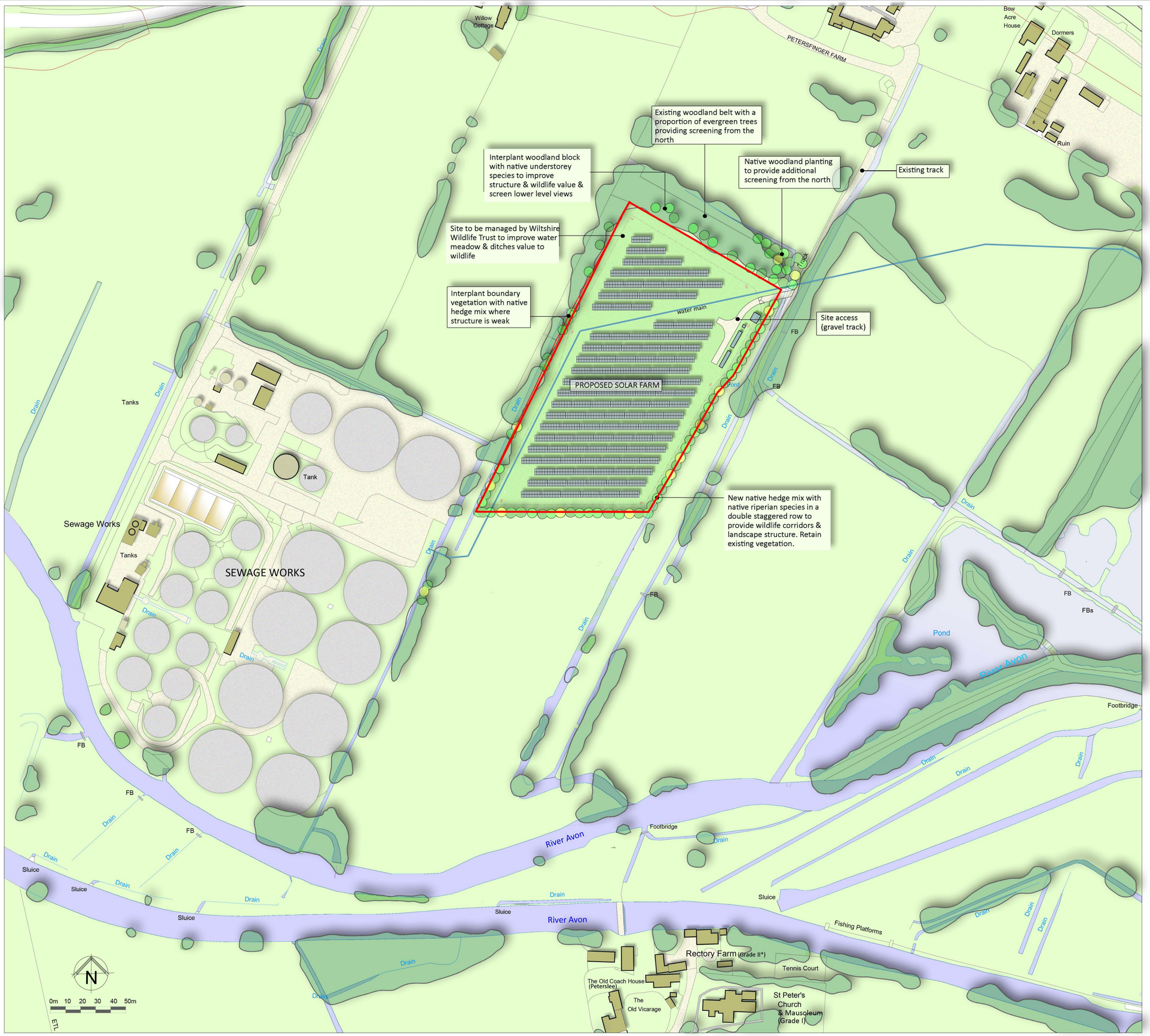

KEY

- Application Boundary
- Existing Significant Vegetation
- Native Hedge Mix & Woodland Blocks/Interplanting

NOTES:
Significant off-site vegetation has been identified from on-site observations and aerial photography

Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Landscape Proposals

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 04a

Scale: 1:1250@A1 Date: May 2022

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APPENDIX 2

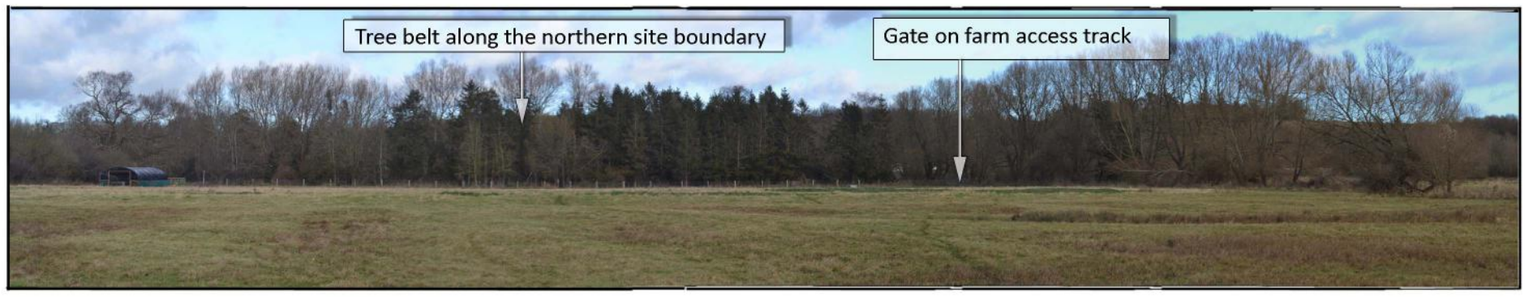
Photo Viewpoints A to D & 1 to 6



Viewpoint A Date: 10th December 2021. OS grid ref: SU 16236 28900. From approximately centrally withn the site viewing **south**



Viewpoint B Date: 10th December 2021. OS grid ref: SU 16236 28900. From approximately centrally withn the site viewing **west**



Viewpoint C Date: 10th December 2021. OS grid ref: SU 16236 28900. From approximately centrally withn the site viewing **north**



Viewpoint D Date: 10th December 2021. OS grid ref: SU 16236 28900. From approximately centrally withn the site viewing **east**

Camera: Nikon D3100 DSLR - 50mm lens

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Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
On-site Photographs A to D

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB

NTS Date: June 2022

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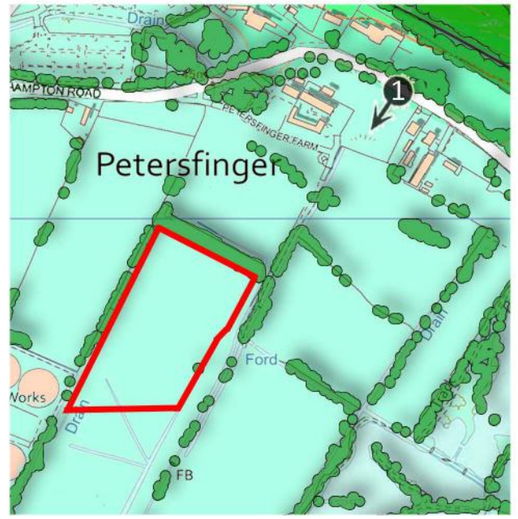
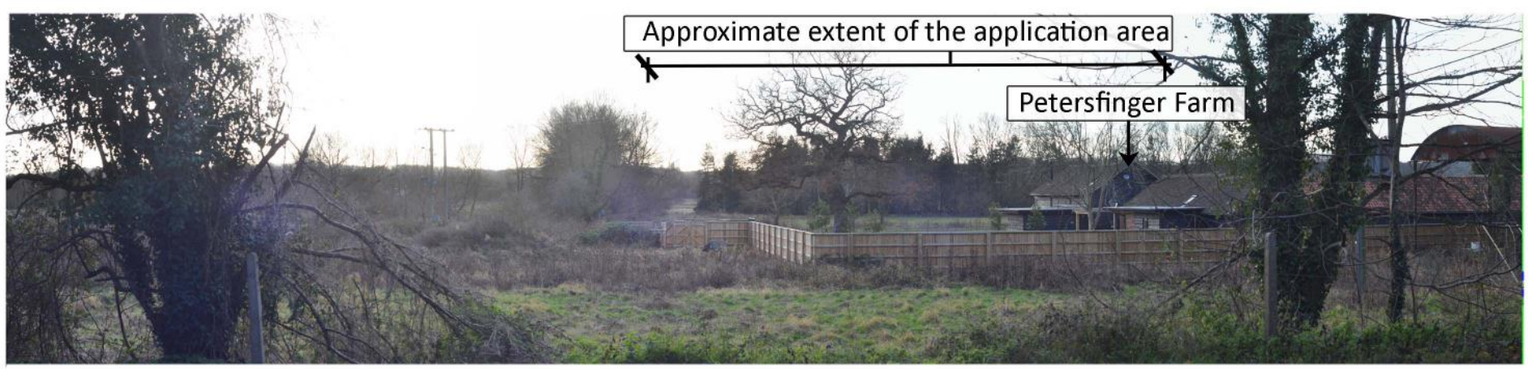


Photograph Location

Viewpoint 1 Date: 10th December 2021. Time 1:31pm OS grid ref: SU 16459 29160 From the A36 at apprximately 260m north-east of the Site boundary



Viewpoint 1 Context

Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy
Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury
Drawing:
Photosheet 1
Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 05
NTS Date: Jan 2021

Camera: Nikon DSLR - 50mm lfixed focal lens. Sheet Size: A3 Landscape. Visualisation Type 1
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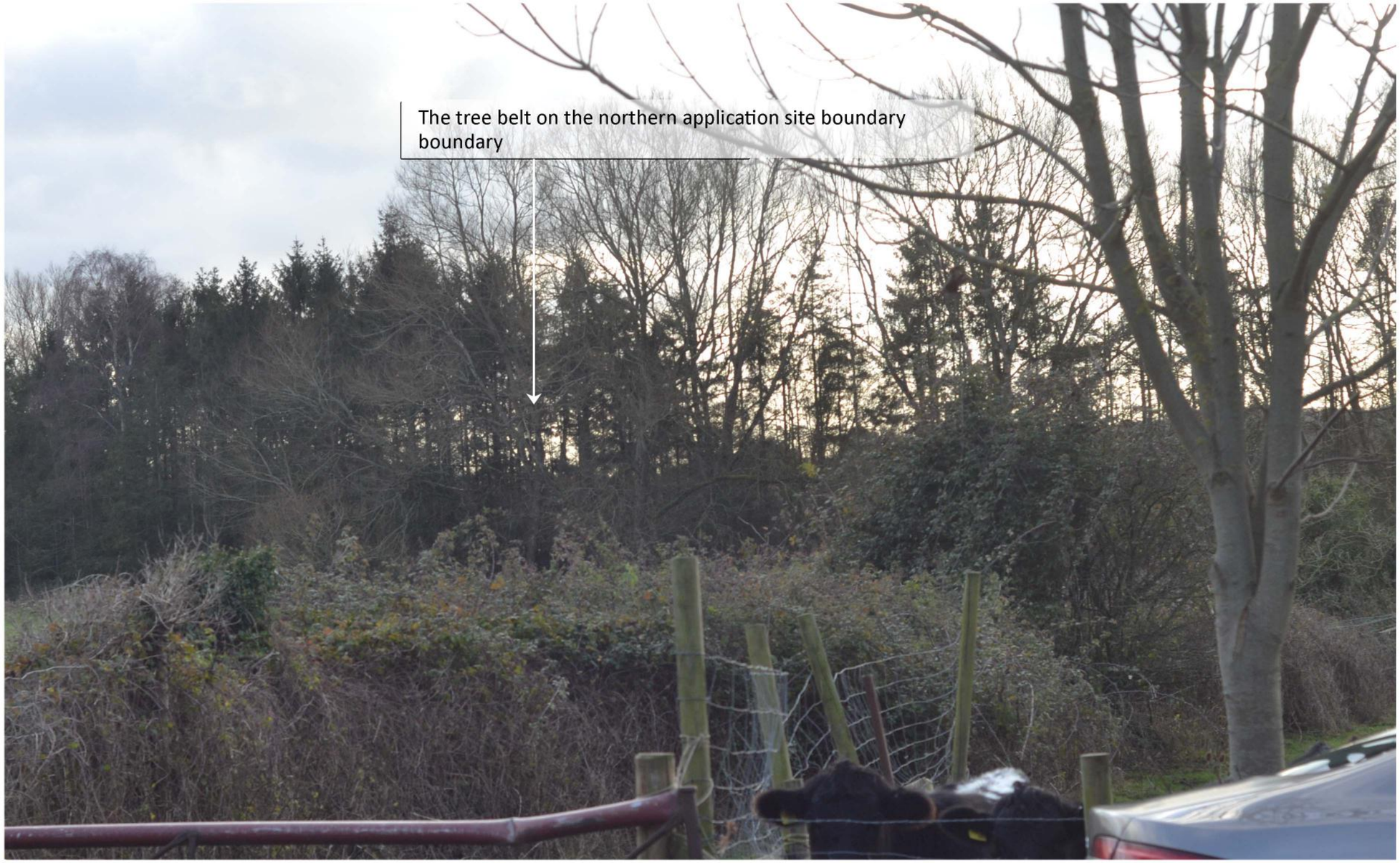



Photograph Location

Viewpoint 2 Date: 10th December 2021. Time 2:43pm OS grid ref: SU 16253 29151

On the A36 at the entrance to Petersfinger Farm at 260m north of the application boundary



Viewpoint 2 Context

Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Photosheet 2

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 06

NTS Date: Jan 2021

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Camera: Nikon DSLR - 50mm lfixed focal lens. Sheet Size: A3 Landscape. Visualisation Type 1

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Photograph Location

Viewpoint 3 Date: 9th June 2022. Time 2:35pm OS grid ref: SU 16165 29143

On the A36 at 160m north-west of the application boundary



Viewpoint 3 Context

Camera: Nikon DSLR - 50mm lfixed focal lens. Sheet Size: A3 Landscape. Visualisation Type 1

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Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Photosheet 3

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 06

NTS Date: June 2022

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Photograph Location

Viewpoint 4 Date: 10th December 2021. Time 2:35pm OS grid ref: SU 16262 28462 In the yard of St Peter's Church at 230m south-east of the Site Boundary



Viewpoint 4 Context

Camera: Nikon DSLR - 50mm lfixed focal lens. Sheet Size: A3 Landscape. Visualisation Type 1

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Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Photosheet 4

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 06

NTS Date: Jan 2021

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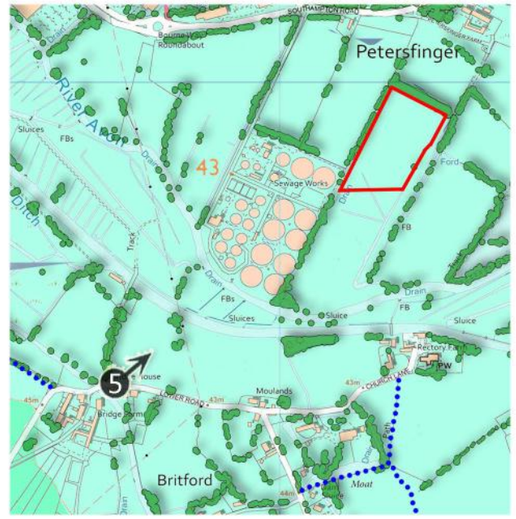

Photograph Location

Viewpoint 5 Date: 10th December 2021. Time 2:44pm OS grid ref: SU 15682 28409

From the road north of Bridge Farm at 610m south-west of the Site Boundary



Viewpoint 5 Context

Camera: Nikon DSLR - 50mm lfixed focal lens. Sheet Size: A3 Landscape. Visualisation Type 1

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Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Photosheet 5

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 07

NTS Date: Jan 2021

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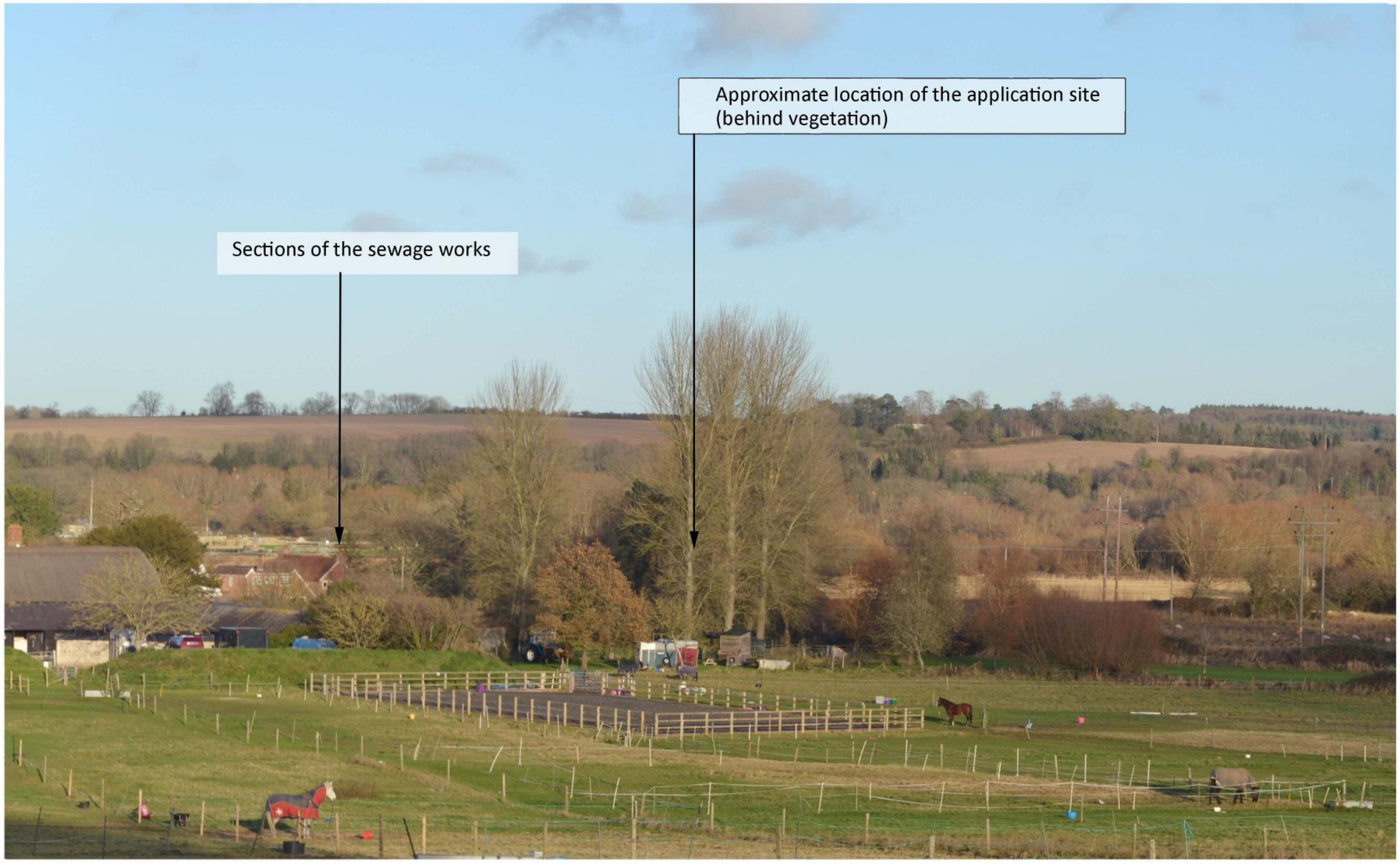



Photograph Location

Viewpoint 6 Date: 10th December 2021. Time 3:01pm OS grid ref: SU 15419 28076

From the junction of Lower Road and the A338 at just over 1km south-west of the application site



Viewpoint 6 Context

Camera: Nikon DSLR - 50mm lfixed focal lens. Sheet Size: A3 Landscape. Visualisation Type 1

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Client:
Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy

Site:
Solar Farm, Petersfinger, Salisbury

Drawing:
Photosheet 6

Dwg No:
ACLA/BNB 07

NTS Date: Jan 2021

ACLA Landscape Architects
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APPENDIX 3

LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT - METHODOLOGY

1. LVIA

The LVIA methodology is based on the principles outlined in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – 3rd Edition (April 2013) which is widely accepted as the industry standard, together with the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland - (2002) Countryside Agency / Scottish Natural Heritage and the Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment - (2011) Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment. The LVIA report covers:

- Evaluation of the existing landscape character, designation and visual baseline and based on this, identification of potential landscape and visual receptors within the study area;
- Evaluation of the sensitivity of potential landscape and visual receptors;
- Evaluation of the magnitude and nature of likely changes resulting from the proposals;
- Conclusion on the overall effects of the proposals on the landscape character and key views within the study area.

2. Landscape Elements and Character Assessment Methodology

A baseline landscape assessment was carried out to determine the current elements and character of the landscape within and surrounding the site. This involved an initial desktop study of:

- Ordnance survey maps at 1:50,000, 1:25,000, 1:10,000 scales
- Aerial photographs of the site and surrounding area
- Datasets for rural designations from the MAGIC website (Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside)
- Published relevant planning policies
- National and local scale landscape character assessments
- Historic England online map of listed buildings and parks
- Public rights of way mapping online

3. Visual Assessment Methodology

The assessment of visual effects was undertaken on the basis of viewpoint analysis as recommended in best practice guidelines. The viewpoints which are in different directions from the site and are at varying distances and locations were selected to represent a range of views and visual receptor types.

The viewpoints are representational and not exhaustive. They are taken from publicly accessible land and not from any third party, private, land.

The viewpoints were used as the basis for determining the effects of visual receptors within the study area. The viewpoints were photographed at 1.7 metres above the ground level in accordance with the 'Photography and photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' - Landscape institute Advice Note 01/11.

4. Assessment Criteria

The significance of effects is ascertained by cross referencing the sensitivity of the baseline landscape or visual receptor and the magnitude of change as a result of the development.

5. Receptors

Landscape receptors are things, those landscape elements, character areas or designations potentially experiencing a change as a result of the proposals.

Visual receptors are contemporary humans, users of the landscape and residents potentially experiencing a change to their views and visual amenity.

Though intrinsically interrelated, landscape character and visual receptors are therefore considered as separate entities.

Landscape character can be defined as the combination of the inherent physical elements – geology, soils, topography, vegetation and land cover, built form, field pattern, water bodies – and perceived elements – time depth or connection to history, tranquillity, scale, texture, coherence – that make an area of land different to the next. Landscape character receptors are therefore the key components that define an area's overall character, or the areas themselves.

Visual appraisal is related to this in that character is part of what defines a view, but the experience of that view is also influenced by subjective personal values and interpretation, weather, distance, time spent exposed to the view etc. A visual impact therefore needs a viewer to perceive it and those viewers are separate visual receptors.

Essentially landscape character exists whether or not it is seen, as do any impacts upon it e.g. if you clear a glade in an area of dense woodland it's character will change regardless of whether it can be viewed from a public path. If there are no points from which the glade can be viewed the clearance cannot result in a visual impact, if there are the effects on visual receptors should be considered.

6. SENSITIVITY OF RECEPTORS

6.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The judgement of landscape sensitivity varies, can be influenced by subjectivity, and is often based on landscape character. A number of studies have been carried out to identify a common definition, notably a combined commission from Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage concentrating principally on the clarification of landscape character sensitivity building on advice in Landscape Character Assessment Guidance Topic Paper 6i. The Paper does not attempt to define sensitivity instead noting that judging it requires professional judgement based on whether significant characteristics elements of the landscape, and as a result its amenity value, will be lost as a result of the development. It is understood that the revisions will provide a concise definition of landscape character sensitivity that reflects the nature and perception of change to landscape character and is flexible to incorporate the type of development being assessed.

For this assessment, landscape sensitivity is a reflection of a landscape element, designation or character area's condition, value, and location in relation to the proposed development. Table 1 outlines the parameters used to define categories. The assessor should always consider a number of the scenarios given in the table to choose the most appropriate sensitivity rating within the given landscape and site context. Designated areas are considered to be of higher sensitivity due to the public perceptions and often cumulative pressures for change attached to them and should never receive a low sensitivity rating.

The overall consideration for a sensitivity rating should be the amount of change that can be accommodated by a given receptor, without it being devalued or unacceptably changed in the long-term, thereby damaging the overall landscape resource. High sensitivity receptors would either be those in pristine condition, where change would be very obvious and distracting, or those that have already been significantly damaged so that further change would result in the receptor being totally devalued in the long-term removing the option for restoration.

Medium sensitivity would be mainly associated with average receptors of good

condition, with some damage or distraction, but generally still able to accept more change without irreversible damage. Low sensitivity receptors would be for example those in a changing environment, where change is a defining element, those of low quality, where change would lead to improvements or those of good quality and condition, where there is plenty of capacity to accommodate more change without irreversible damage.

This LVIA will reference the published character assessments undertaken by the local authority which can also include an assessment of landscape sensitivity. If this has not been carried out the assessor will draw their own judgement on the landscape sensitivity of the wider character area. But it should be noted that these can cover a larger area which can encompass a range of landscape elements and areas of varying sensitivity, therefore a further assessment of the sensitivity of the local landscape character will also be carried out.

Table 1 Sensitivity of Potential Landscape Receptors	
Sensitivity	**Receptor Category**
High	Only minor changes can be accommodated without impact on value and / or loss of character or no more than moderate changes can be compensated by replacement or substitution, for example: Value may be expressed as a national designated area or may be an element that is rare or in pristine condition. Intact historic landscapes with great time depth and no or very limited modern intrusions. Valuable, but damaged landscapes, where further change would result in complete loss of their integrity and quality (in this scenario high sensitivity is based on the assumption that any further change would result in unacceptable long-term damage to a resource, which makes it highly sensitive to further change, although its condition at the point of assessment may not be favourable). The landscape receptor to be assessed has a small area, where the proposal would affect much or all of that area.
Medium	Minor to moderate changes can be accommodated without impact on value and / or loss of character or moderate changes can be reduced or eliminated by replacement or substitution, for example: Value may be expressed through a regional or local designation or element that is in good condition and occurs relatively frequently within the landscape context. Good quality landscapes with preserved integrity, but modern influences apparent. The landscape receptor to be assessed has a medium sized area significantly exceeding that of the proposal area so that any change would not affect the whole landscape receptor.

Low	Moderate to substantial changes can be accommodated without impact on value and / or loss of character or substantial changes can be reduced by replacement or substitution, for example: There is no value defined through designations or clear local use or definition and the receptor does not display specifically valuable properties within the context of the wider landscape area. The landscape receptor is devalued already through character changes etc and restoration is not an option. Proposals would contribute to improvements of the receptor. The receptor is of such a large area that a change would only affect a minor part of that area without any consequence for the remainder of the receptor area and it is not a nationally or regionally designated area. The receptor has plenty of capacity to accommodate change, for example plenty of key elements and features are present so that the loss of a minor percentage would not be significant and can be replaced or visual characteristics can be successfully retained and improved.

6.2 Visual Sensitivity

Visual sensitivity is a reflection of a combination of the receptor's type, the context within which the view is perceived and the importance of the view.

Visual sensitivity should be assessed in both terms of the susceptibility to change and also the value attached to a particular view. Susceptibility of a view to change is mainly a function of the occupation or activities of people as a particular location and the extent to which their interests may be focussed on the view or the visual amenity experienced. Landscape value is a judgement made about value given to views. i.e. does the view have any particular heritage value (such as a planning designation where views are considered as integral to its value) or does the view have any other value such as appearance in literature, art or guide books. Sensitivity is inherent to the receptor and not influenced by weather conditions, distance etc. Factors like prevailing weather, distance and extent of the view are reflected in the magnitude assessment for each receptor. Table 2 outlines the parameters and categories used for this appraisal.

Table 2 Sensitivity of Potential Visual Receptors by Type

Sensitivity	Receptor Category
High ↓	Visitors to nationally designated areas of public and private open space where landscape appreciation is a primary function of their use or where landscape and visual quality is integral to the designation's value e.g. AONBs, Heritage Coasts, National Parks, etc
	Users of PRoW - long distance footpaths and routes with direct view of the development for long sections of path.
	Residential communities and private properties with direct views of the development from apparent key living and access areas.
	Visitors to designated areas of historical importance such as SAMs, Conservation Areas and Historic Parks and Gardens where setting is recognised as an integral to the area's importance
Medium ↓	Visitors to locally designated areas of public and private open space where landscape appreciation is a primary function of their use or where landscape and visual quality is integral to the designation's value e.g. AGLVs, Country Parks etc.

Table 2 Sensitivity of Potential Visual Receptors by Type	
Sensitivity	Receptor Category
	Users of PRoW – national trails, local trails and footpaths with partial or glimpsed views from sections of the path or direct views from short sections of the path
	Residential communities and private properties with partial or glimpsed views of the development from apparent key living and access areas.
	Users of areas of public and private recreational space where landscape is not a primary function of use i.e. sports grounds, golf courses etc.
Low ↓	Users of PRoW associated with highways or local routes the primary function of which is access between two points or users of paths with partial or glimpsed views from short sections of the path.
	Employees
	Road users

7. Effects

Landscape effects are described in the GLVIA 'as effects on the landscape resource in its own rights'. These can include changes as a result of the proposed development to the landscape elements within the site or indirect impacts such as changes to key landscape character elements of the study area, the integrity of landscape designations within the study area or the overall landscape condition of the study area.

Visual effects are described by the GLVIA as 'effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people'. This includes direct effects on the visual amenity or views available to visual receptors located within publicly accessible areas and residential dwellings resulting from changes to that view as a result of the proposed development such as introduction, removal, obstruction, or modification of elements within the view. The assessment of visual impacts is informed by the use of a series of viewpoints. The viewpoints are selected to provide a comprehensive range of visual receptors, types and angles of view and distances from the development site. If possible they should represent more than one visual receptor category e.g. locating a viewpoint at the junction between a PRoW/cycleway and road would illustrate the view experienced by road users and pedestrians/cyclists

at a point where they are more likely to pause and be more aware of their surroundings and view.

Cumulative impacts are described by the LI as those which result from changes as a result of the proposed development in conjunction with other development, of intervisibility of a range of developments or elements of the proposed development, and of actions that occurred in the past, present or foreseeable future.

8. Magnitude of Change

Magnitude of change is a measure of the level of an effect on potential receptors arising from addition, alteration, or removal of baseline resources as a result of the proposed development and is classed as high, medium, low or negligible. The parameters and categories used for this appraisal are outlined in Table 3. Magnitude is based on professional judgement and determined by a combination of:

- The scale of the change in relation to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition;
- The degree or contrast or integration of any new features or changes in relation to remaining landscape feature, including scale, mass, height, colour etc..
- The nature of the view and the amount of time it will be experienced and whether the view will be direct, full, full partial or glimpsed.
- The duration and reversibility of the change.

The magnitude of change of potential impacts on visual receptors is assessed through a process of analysing the change in the visual envelope of the existing site. This assessment is informed by the photo record (Appendix 2).

In addition to nature, scale, and duration of the change, the magnitude of change to visual receptors takes into account the distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development as this will determine visibility of the site, its landscape elements and proposed structures and the context in which the view is experienced. It is another assessment tool which is evaluated for each project based on site location, context and size, as well as the character and scale of proposals.

Table 3 Landscape and Visual Effects Magnitudes		
Magnitude of Change – landscape		Magnitude of Change –Visual
Total loss of or major alteration to key elements / features / characteristics identified in the baseline study	HIGH ↓	Proposals form a significant and immediately apparent part of the view with often long-term and irreversible changes to its overall character. Often associated with close distance or direct and open views.
Partial loss of or alteration to one or more key elements / features / characteristics identified in the baseline study	MEDIUM ↓	Proposals form a visible and recognisable new element within the overall view which are readily noticed by the observer or receptor. Often associated with middle distance or partial views and often possible to mitigate.
Minor loss of or alteration to one or more key elements / features / characteristics identified in the baseline study	LOW ↓	Proposals constitute a minor component of the wider view, which might be missed by the casual observer or receptor. Often associated with long-distance or glimpsed views or can be short-term, reversible effects.

Table 3 Landscape and Visual Effects Magnitudes		
Magnitude of Change – landscape		Magnitude of Change –Visual
Very minor, localised, loss of or alteration to one or more key elements / features / characteristics identified in the baseline study	NEGLIGIBLE ↓	Proposals constitute such a minor component of the view as to only be visible when deliberately sought out and not casually perceptible, or are severely restricted so that proposals can be barely perceived. Can be associated with any distance from site, usually middle to long.
No loss or alteration to one or more key elements / features / characteristics of the baseline (pre-development landscape) and / or no introduction of new elements / features / characteristics	NO CHANGE NB: this level is normally scoped out in the baseline and not carried forward to the assessment	No part of the development, or work or activity associated with it, is discernible or they are at such a distance that they are scarcely appreciated

9. Assessment of Effects

An effect is the result of an impact at a certain magnitude combined with the sensitivity of a receptor. For example, a moderate magnitude impact on a low sensitivity receptor may be considered differently to such an impact affecting a high sensitivity receptor.

10 Operational Effects

This appraisal considers operational effects. Operation phase effects are generally considered to be permanent, though for certain developments such as renewable energy installations they are temporary as the development has a built in decommissioning date. For this appraisal the duration of the operational phase has been set at a minimum of 25 years.

11 Guidelines for PV Solar Plant assessment

The main landscape and visual effects caused by PV solar plants in an open landscape occur due to the introduction of large areas of technical structures into a normally rural landscape, often without connection to developed areas; the optical effects caused by the module surfaces; strongly geometric layouts and through earthworks, foundations; and construction activities associated with the plant, cabling and access. Height is not normally an issue for static row arrangements as they do not exceed 3m, which often is lower than adjacent hedges or one storey buildings.

This assessment is concerned with a static PV array of polycrystalline silicon modules. Those modules are equipped with an anti-reflection layer to increase the absorption of sun light by the cells (the aim is to absorb as much light as possible). Depending on the thickness of the anti-reflection layer, the perceived surface colour of the modules varies from dark blue to black. Some predominantly diffuse reflection still occurs (see 8.6.1 below), leading to a lighter appearance of the modules in comparison to surrounding natural non-reflective surfaces.

The cells are combined into a larger module, which in turn are connected to each other in rows. A number of modules are then connected to a generator, which via a DC-AC converter and transformer (housed in a building) feeds into the grid. Cabling associated with the plants is normally laid underground. Sites can be fenced.

The visual prominence of the plant in the landscape depends on the direction of view (i.e. viewer looks directly at the modules or looks at the sides or backs of rows), the location of the site in relation to surrounding ridges and features, the openness of the landscape, and the position of the site in relation to the horizon line (i.e. above or below horizon or locally important ridges). Obviously, weather and light conditions play an important part on the perception of a PV solar plant at any one time due to the optical issues described below.

<u>Optical effects of PV solar plants</u>

PV solar plants can lead to a number of optical effects, those are:

- Light reflection from textured, diffusing surfaces (modules) and less diffusing smooth surfaces (metal frames)
- Mirroring through reflection from glass surfaces
- Development of polarised light through reflection

12. Light Reflection:

PV solar cells need the sun rays to generate electricity and reflection is therefore discouraged to optimise absorption of sun light. This is done through anti-reflection layers and special glass surfaces.

Despite this, not all reflection can be avoided. High quality glass lets 90% of light pass through, approximately 2% is diffused and 8% reflected. Modern anti-reflection layers can increase light absorption to over 95%, with reflection below 5%. The remaining reflection results in modules appearing slightly lighter in the landscape than vegetation covered areas.

A low sun position (angle below 40 degrees) increases reflection, total reflection occurs at an angle of 2 degrees. This reflection is diffused through use of textured front glasses. In addition, to see the reflection at those angles, the viewer would have to stand opposite the sun, which at low angles has an increased blending effect far exceeding the effect of the module reflections.

Frames can also reflect light, but this is considered of low relevance to the assessment in the context of the small proportion of frame surface in relation to the modules.

13. Mirroring:

Mirroring surfaces reflect images in the vicinity that for example can imitate bird habitats and encourage birds to fly into it. This risk is greatest in vertical mirror glass frontages in urban areas, when vegetation is reflected.

The polycrystalline silicon modules only have a very small mirror capacity due to their colour and textured surface. In addition, they are installed at angles that prevent direct mirroring of vegetation. It is not considered an issue for this type of proposal.

14 Polarisation:

Natural light is not polarised, it oscillates in all directions. Polarised light only oscillates in one direction. Polarisation occurs naturally through reflection and diffusion on air particles and surfaces, such as water or wet roads. Some birds and insects can see polarised light and use it to navigate. Solar modules could potentially change the polarisation of light, therefore there is an assumption that in some circumstances this could lead to irritation of some birds or insects. However, research in Germany has failed to proof such impacts to date. No visual or landscape impacts arise from the polarisation of light.

The issues discussed above have been taken into account in the impact assessment as appropriate and have been discussed in the report as required.

15. Degree of Effect

The degree of effect of the proposed development on potential landscape and visual receptors is measured as a combination of receptor sensitivity and magnitude of change using the matrix in the table below.

Whilst degree of effect is determined for any project, a consideration of a significance threshold is only applicable to projects falling under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations in accordance with the Town and country Planning Act and the European Union Directive 2011/92/EU. This project was not subject to EIA Regulations.

Table 4 Degree and Significance of Effects

		Sensitivity		
		High	Medium	Low
Magnitude	High	Substantial	Moderate/Substantial	Moderate
	Medium	Moderate/Substantial	Moderate	Slight
	Low	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
	Negligible	Slight	Negligible	Negligible

11. Nature of Effects

Effects can be adverse (negative), beneficial (positive) or neutral. The landscape effects will be considered against the landscape baseline, which includes published landscape strategies or policies if they exist. Changes involving the addition of built form in the landscape are typically considered to be adverse unless otherwise stated within the assessment.

Visual effects are more subjective as the human perception of development can vary considerably from negative, neutral and positive attitudes. In the assessment of visual effects the assessor will exercise objective professional judgement in assessing the level of effects and, unless otherwise stated, will assume that all effects as a result of the introduction of new built form are adverse, thus representing the worst case scenario.

12. Mitigation and Enhancement

For certain adverse / negative impacts it may be possible to identify mitigation measures to reduce the magnitude of change and consequently lower the overall (residual) level of effect. ‘Mitigation’ refers to measures which are proposed to avoid, prevent, reduce or where possible offset or remedy any significant adverse / negative effects. Potentially significant effects identified during the design process have been prevented or reduced through design changes and embedded mitigation prior to the LVIA assessments.

The identification of additional mitigation measures in order to avoid, reduce, manage or compensate potential significant effects identified have been outlined within the LVIA.

Enhancement goes beyond mitigation of adverse landscape and visual effects such as proposals that seek to improve the landscape and / or visual amenity of the proposed development and its wider setting beyond its baseline condition. In practice enhancement is not specifically related to mitigation of adverse landscape and visual effects but means any proposals that seek to improve the landscape and / or visual amenity of the proposed development site and its wider setting beyond its baseline condition. The Indicative landscape mitigation and enhancement plan in the LVIA outlines the proposed enhancements alongside the landscape and visual mitigation proposals.