

APPLICATION FOR FULL PLANNING PERMISSION

OFFICER DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION REFERENCE:	PL/2025/05830
APPLICATION TYPE:	Full Planning Permission
SITE ADDRESS:	Land at Flaxlands Farm, Royal Wootton Bassett, Swindon, SN4 8DY
DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION:	The construction and operation (including maintenance) of a 49.9MW solar farm to include ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays, electrical substations, grid balancing infrastructure, cabling, BESS (49.9MW capacity), communications tower, other associated infrastructure and areas for biodiversity net gain (BNG) enhancement and landscape mitigation.
RECOMMENDATION:	That planning permission be GRANTED subject to conditions

1. PROPOSAL

Planning permission is sought for the construction and operation (including maintenance) of a 49.9MW solar farm to include ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays, electrical substations, grid balancing infrastructure, cabling, BESS, communications tower and other associated infrastructure. Areas are also proposed for biodiversity enhancement and landscape mitigation.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION/CONTEXT

The application site comprises approximately 87 hectares of predominantly agricultural land at Flaxlands Field Farm and Flaxlands Manor Farm, located to the north of Royal Wootton Bassett and west of the village of Hook. The site is formed of two distinct land parcels either side of Flaxlands Lane.

The site consists of a series of pastoral fields and is characterised by an undulating landform and a predominantly rural character. Existing field boundaries comprise mature hedgerows, trees and woodland planting.

The site is bounded by agricultural land to the north, with ancient woodland located along parts of the west and north-west boundaries. To the east, the site adjoins a mix of agricultural land, woodland, the local highway network and development associated with the village of Hook, including residential and commercial properties. To the south, the site is bordered by agricultural land and woodland, beyond which lies the M4 motorway.

The site is not located within a nationally or locally designated landscape and does not lie within a National Landscape or National Park. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape

(formerly AONB) lies approximately 6km to the south-east. The site falls within the Great Western Community Forest Area, the historic Braydon Forest landscape and the emerging Western Forest initiative.

The site contains and is surrounded by a range of ecologically important features including areas of ancient woodland, County Wildlife Sites (CWS), priority habitats and associated ecological corridors. The site is closely related to the Flaxlands Manor CWS to the south and is adjoined by a network of ancient woodland blocks including Morris's Copse, Frith Copse, Flaxlands Wood, Cowleaze Copse and Midgehall Copse. Existing vegetation comprises hedgerows, mature trees, veteran trees and areas protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

There are no designated heritage assets within the application site itself however, a number of listed buildings, scheduled monuments and other heritage assets are located within the surrounding area, including the Grade II listed Manor Farmhouse, Grade II listed buildings in Hook, and the registered park and garden at Lydiard Park approximately 900m to the east.

The site lies wholly within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore considered to be at low risk of fluvial flooding. Areas of low groundwater vulnerability are identified within parts of the eastern parcel.

A site specific Agricultural Land Classification report indicates that approximately 10.4 hectares (11.9%) of the site is Grade 3a agricultural land with the remainder of the surveyed site being Grade 3b agricultural land.

A number of Public Rights of Way cross or adjoin the site, including routes LTRE 24, 24a, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 52, together with routes LMIL 8, 13, 16 and 22.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

None.

4. RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (August 2026)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- National Design Guide

Development Plan

The development plan for Wiltshire comprises the **Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) (adopted January 2015)** and any made neighbourhood plans, which remains the principal statutory planning document guiding development across the county. In line with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Though the development plan is considered as a whole, those parts deemed to be particularly relevant to this application are listed below:

The adopted **Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS)**, with particular regard to:

- Core Policy 1 Settlement Strategy
- Core Policy 2 Delivery Strategy
- Core Policy 3 Infrastructure Requirements
- Core Policy 19 Spatial Strategy Royal Wootton Bassett and Cricklade Community Area
- Core Policy 42 Standalone Renewable Energy Installations
- Core Policy 50 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Core Policy 51 Landscape
- Core Policy 52 Green Infrastructure
- Core Policy 57 Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping
- Core Policy 58 Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment
- Core Policy 60 Sustainable Transport
- Core Policy 61 Transport & Development
- Core Policy 62 Development Impacts on the Transport Network
- Core Policy 64 Demand Management
- Core Policy 67 Flood Risk
- Core Policy 68 Water Resources

Draft Wiltshire Local Plan

At Full Council on 19 May 2026, the elected members of Wiltshire Council agreed to withdraw the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan. The said Plan has no material weight for the purposes of the application.

In accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, on 30 June 2026 Wiltshire Council published a notice of intention to prepare a new local plan for Wiltshire. The next stage is a Scoping Consultation which commences on 02 September 2026. This plan is at a very early stage and currently carries no weight for decision making.

Neighbourhood Plan

None

Other Relevant Documents

- Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan (2008) (BAP)
- Wiltshire Design Guide (adopted April 2024)
- Local Transport Plan 3
- Wiltshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan 3 (2011-2026)
- Wiltshire Climate Strategy (2022-2027)

5. KEY ISSUES

- **Principle of the Development:**

Assessment against national and local policy support for renewable energy, including CP42 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the NPPF.

- **Impact on Heritage Assets:**
Consideration of direct or indirect effects on listed buildings, conservation areas, and their settings, in line with Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- **Archaeology:**
Assessment of the potential for archaeological interest on the site and the need for mitigation or further investigation, in consultation with the Council's archaeology team.
- **Landscape and Visual Impact:**
Assessment of effects on landscape character and views, including cumulative impacts with other nearby solar developments.
- **Loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land:**
Consideration of the site's Agricultural Land Classification and the implications of using Grades 1, 2, or 3a land, in accordance with the NPPF and Written Ministerial Statements.
- **Neighbour Amenity:**
Consideration of potential impacts on residential amenity, including outlook, noise, glint and glare.
- **Highway Safety and Access:**
Review of the Construction Traffic Management Plan, access arrangements, and anticipated vehicle movements during construction and decommissioning.
- **Ecology and Biodiversity:**
Assessment of submitted ecological surveys, biodiversity net gain, and mitigation/enhancement measures in accordance with Policy CP50 and the Environment Act 2021.
- **Flood Risk and Drainage:**
Evaluation of surface water management, flood risk
- **Fire Risk:**
Consideration of fire risk associated with electrical infrastructure, battery storage (if included), and grassland management, including any submitted fire prevention or emergency access plans.

6. CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Lydiard Tregoze Parish Council

Objection for the following reasons:

- Preferred access by works vehicles is via the entrance opposite the Bolingbroke Arms, LTPC prefers the access via the B4696 the volume of traffic through Hook possible restructuring and exit of road after construction.
- Food/Agricultural security - south of the site is a lower grade land than the north therefore LTPC would favour the south side only being used.
- Shepherds Lodge etc – LTPC view no need for a building as no grazing of sheep under existing solar farms in area.
- 1000+ vehicles over the building phase not ideal for the current road.
- Visual impact and glaring.

(Comment received 21/08/25).

WC Arboricultural Officer

No objections subject to the inclusion of a condition to secure the submission of an Arboricultural Method Statement. (Comment received 22/09/25 and updated 08/04/26).

WC Archaeology

The submitted results of the geophysical survey need to be 'ground-truthed' by means of an archaeological trial trench evaluation prior to determination. (Comment received 22/08/25 and updated 04/03/26).

[An Archaeological Evaluation Report was submitted on 22/04/26.]

The submitted report detailing the results of the archaeological trial trench evaluation has been reviewed and approved. The archaeological potential of the site has been sufficiently characterised. Conditions are recommended to secure: the submission of an Archaeological Mitigation Strategy; and further Archaeological Trial Trenching and Excavation. (Comment received 08/05/26).

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service

Design, operation and maintenance guidance provided. (Comment received 12/08/25).

WC Drainage

No objection subject to the inclusion of drainage conditions. (Comment received 26/08/25).

WC Ecology

Holding Objection - Further information is required to address multiple concerns. (Comment received 10/11/25).

[An updated scheme layout was submitted on 27/02/26 with updated ecology information submitted April 2026.]

Holding Objection - Additional information has addressed some concerns but multiple concerns remain outstanding. (Comment received 27/05/26).

[Updated ecology information submitted June 2026.]

No objection subject to the inclusion of conditions. (Comment received 15/07/26).

Environment Agency

Objection - The proposed development would pose an unacceptable risk of pollution of groundwater. (Comment received 25/08/25).

[An email was received from the planning agent, acting on behalf of the applicant, on 28/08/25 making the Environment Agency aware of the Outline Drainage Strategy submitted in support of the application.]

No objection subject to the inclusion of conditions to secure the submission of a Hydrogeological Risk Assessment (HRA), surface water drainage strategy, pollution controls in the event of a battery fire, and Construction Environmental Management Plan. (Comment received 10/11/25 and updated 31/03/26).

WC Highways

Concerns raised regarding construction traffic. Alterations to the submitted construction Traffic Management Plan are recommended and should be secured by condition. (Comment received 18/09/25).

WC Landscape

Whilst the site is not included within any nationally or locally designated landscapes, there are many landscape features and physical, visual, cultural associations which indicate a slightly elevated landscape value above normal countryside character. The proposal would have visual effects on nearby residential properties but users of the existing rural public rights of way network would experience the greatest levels of adverse visual change effects. There is unlikely to be much, if any, potential for harmful cumulative visual effects.

The development introduces substantial industrialising change that would change the local rural character and sense of place impacting multiple receptors. Mitigation cannot fully address the resulting harm, although further mitigation and green infrastructure enhancement is recommended and considered to be achievable. (Comment received 25/03/26).

Ministry of Defence (MoD) - Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) Safeguarding Team

No objection. (Comment received 22/10/25 and updated 22/04/26).

National Grid

No comment. (Comment received 16/01/26).

National Highways

No objection subject to the inclusion of a landscape planting condition. (Comment received 06/08/25 and updated 04/03/26).

Natural England

Holding Objection - The development has the potential to impact on the Flaxlands Manor County Wildlife Site (CWS) and priority species rich grassland habitat. The current scheme layout has the potential to cause significant harm to existing biodiversity interests. (Comment received 22/10/25).

[An updated scheme layout was submitted on 27/02/26 with updated ecology information submitted April 2026.]

No objection - Natural England are satisfied with the amended layout which includes removal of solar panels from the County Wildlife Site. It is understood that the County Wildlife Site field parcels within the red line boundary will be managed as part of the proposals and form part of the Biodiversity Net Gain from the scheme. (Comment received 22/04/26).

WC Public Protection

No objection subject to the inclusion of conditions to control noise and construction hours. (Comment received 06/08/25).

WC Rights of Way

No objections raised. The diversions required give the opportunity to improve the connectivity of the PRow network subject the separate approval process. (Comment received 03/09/26).

Thames Water

No objection. A build over agreement may be required and the proposed development could be within 3 metres of a public sewer. (Comment received 04/03/26).

7. REPRESENTATIONS

In accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), the application was publicised by way of:

- **Neighbour notification letters** sent to adjoining and nearby properties;
- **A site notice** displayed near the site; and
- **An advertisement placed in the local press.**

These methods were used to inform interested parties and provide a period of **21 days** for comments to be submitted.

Below is a summary of the representations received during the consultation period. Only **material planning considerations** have been taken into account in the assessment of this application. Non-material issues, such as property values or private legal disputes, cannot be considered in the determination process.

29 **objection** comments have been received from members of the public. These comments are summarised below.

Principle of Development:

- Objections to the use of agricultural land for a solar farm and battery energy storage development.
- Concern that renewable energy infrastructure should be prioritised on rooftops, car parks, industrial premises and previously developed land before greenfield sites are considered.
- Concern regarding the concentration and cumulative impact of solar farms and battery storage developments within the wider north Wiltshire area.
- Concerns that the development would provide limited direct local benefit.

Design, Visual Amenity and Landscape Impact:

- Concern regarding the visual impact of a large-scale solar installation within open countryside.

- Concerns about effects on rural landscape character and views from surrounding areas and public routes.
- Concern that solar arrays on elevated land would be visually prominent.
- Concern that the proposal would industrialise the countryside and alter the rural character of the area.

Residential Amenity:

- Concerns regarding the proximity of infrastructure, including the substation and battery storage compound, to neighbouring properties.
- Concerns regarding operational noise from the solar farm, substation and battery storage infrastructure.
- Concerns that neighbouring residential properties have not been fully assessed within submitted technical reports.
- Concerns regarding impacts on tranquillity and enjoyment of the countryside.

Highway Safety and Traffic Impact:

- Concerns regarding construction traffic, including heavy goods vehicle movements on rural lanes.
- Concerns about congestion, suitability of local roads, highway capacity and safety at junctions.
- Concerns regarding impacts on villages, schools, shops and other local destinations.
- Concerns regarding proposed passing places, access arrangements and potential impacts on verges and highway infrastructure.
- Concerns that transport assessments may not fully reflect recent road safety incidents.

Public Rights of Way:

- Concerns that the development would affect the amenity and experience of users of public rights of way within and around the site.

Ecology and Biodiversity:

- Concerns regarding impacts on wildlife, including protected species.
- Concerns regarding habitat loss, disturbance to bats, badgers, great crested newts and other wildlife.
- Concerns regarding impacts arising from removal or alteration of hedgerows and vegetation.
- Concerns regarding impacts on ecological connectivity and foraging areas.

Flood Risk and Drainage:

- Concerns that solar panels would increase surface water runoff and exacerbate existing flooding issues.
- Concerns regarding local springs, waterlogging and drainage conditions.
- Requests for further scrutiny of flood risk assessments and mitigation measures.

Agricultural Land and Food Security:

- Concerns regarding the loss of productive agricultural land and effects on food production.

- Representations asserting that parts of the site comprise Best and Most Versatile agricultural land.
- Requests for further verification of agricultural land classification.
- Suggestions that some areas of lower quality land may be more suitable for development than others.

Infrastructure and Utilities:

- Concerns regarding grid connection requirements and associated cabling infrastructure.
- Concerns regarding impacts on existing water infrastructure and future access for maintenance.
- Concerns regarding the location of infrastructure relative to neighbouring land interests.

Fire Safety and Public Safety:

- Concerns regarding fire risks associated with battery energy storage systems.
- Concerns regarding emergency access, fire-fighting capability and containment of contaminated fire water.
- Concerns regarding potential effects of smoke and pollutants arising from a battery fire event.
- Requests for evidence of consultation with emergency services and compliance with relevant guidance.

Planning Application Documentation and Consultation:

- Concerns regarding the accuracy of submitted plans and application boundaries.
- Concerns that land ownership matters and notification procedures may not have been correctly addressed.

25 **support** comments have been received from members of the public. These comments are summarised below.

Sustainability and Climate Change:

- Support for renewable energy generation as a means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change.
- Support for solar energy as part of national decarbonisation objectives and energy transition goals.
- Support for battery storage as enabling renewable energy integration and energy security.
- Consideration that the benefits of the proposal outweigh any disadvantages.

Energy Security and Renewable Energy Infrastructure:

- Support for increasing domestic renewable energy generation and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
- Support for improving energy security and long-term resilience of electricity supply.
- Views that both rooftop solar and ground-mounted solar developments are required to meet future energy needs.

Agricultural Land and Land Use:

- Representations stating that most of the site comprises lower-grade agricultural land.
- Support where agricultural use such as grazing or suitable crop production could continue alongside solar infrastructure.
- Views that temporary removal from intensive agriculture could provide benefits for soils.

Ecology and Biodiversity:

- Representations suggest that solar farms can provide biodiversity benefits compared with intensive agricultural land uses.
- ecological mitigation and protection measures should be secured.

Economic Benefits:

- References to investment, jobs, contracts and associated infrastructure benefits arising from the development.

1 **neutral** comment has been received from members of the public, making the following point:

- No objection subject to the applicant implementing ecological measures and changes proposed to address environmental impacts.

A number of representations referred to matters that are not normally material planning considerations. These included potential effects on property values, comments regarding developer motivations, ownership structures and investment arrangements, views on wider national energy policy and net zero policy, concerns regarding who may benefit financially from the development, comments regarding the origin or manufacture of solar panels, and comments regarding the nature of supporters or objectors participating in the consultation process. These matters have been noted but do not carry weight in the determination of this planning application.

Ramblers Swindon & North East Wiltshire Group

No objection in principle but request further information and clarification regarding the impact on the Public Rights of Way that cross the site. Improvements to the paths should be sought.

8. ASSESSMENT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states:

"If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."

In accordance with this statutory requirement, this application has been assessed against the relevant policies of the Development Plan, including the Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015) and, where applicable, any made Neighbourhood Plans. Consideration has also been given to the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as a material consideration in the assessment.

8.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) require certain types of development to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES) where they are likely to give rise to significant effects on the environment by virtue of their nature, scale or location.

A formal Screening Direction was issued by the Secretary of State on 17 March 2025. The Screening Direction concluded that the proposal does not constitute EIA development. Whilst the proposal falls within Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations, it was concluded that the development is not likely to give rise to significant effects in an EIA context. Accordingly, the submission of an Environmental Statement was not required.

8.2 Principle of Development

National Decision-Making Policy W3 of the NPPF confirms that applicants are not required to demonstrate the need for renewable or low carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure. Instead, their acceptability should be assessed against the policies of the NPPF, taken as a whole. Policy W3 expects substantial weight to be given to the benefits of improving energy security and supporting the transition to net zero future.

National Decision-Making Policy S5 of the NPPF relates to development which should be approved outside settlements, unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects. The range of development supported by this policy includes engineering operations and infrastructure for energy.

Wiltshire Council has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. This ambition is embedded within the Wiltshire Climate Strategy, which identifies renewable energy generation as a key priority for the efficient and environmentally responsible use of land, in support of a growing population and biodiversity.

Solar farms form part of the UK's strategy to reduce carbon emissions and transition towards cleaner, more sustainable sources of energy. As the impacts of climate change become more pressing, renewable energy developments like solar farms play an increasingly important role in helping to meet national and local carbon reduction targets. Wiltshire Council has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, and national planning policy encourages local authorities to support renewable energy projects where the impacts are, or can be made, acceptable.

However, the need for clean energy must be balanced with other important considerations such as protecting landscape character, heritage assets, local amenity, agricultural land, and biodiversity. This section of the report provides a detailed assessment of the relevant planning issues, including how the proposed solar farm aligns with local and national policy objectives, and whether its impacts are acceptable when weighed against the wider environmental benefits of the scheme.

At the local level, Core Policies CP1 and CP2 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) set out the spatial strategy for sustainable development in the county. While the proposal does not

directly deliver housing or employment development, it represents a form of sustainable development, supporting Wiltshire's transition to a low-carbon economy. The development may also deliver short-term employment opportunities during the construction phase.

Core Policy 42 of the WCS provides specific policy support for standalone renewable energy schemes, stating that such proposals will be supported where it is demonstrated that individual and cumulative impacts have been satisfactorily addressed. The policy identifies the following considerations as particularly relevant (in the context of this proposal):

- (i.) The landscape;
- (iv.) Biodiversity;
- (v.) The historic environment;
- (vi.) Use of the local transport network;
- (vii.) Residential amenity, including noise, odour, visual amenity and safety; and
- (viii.) Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land.

As a matter of principle, the development of a solar farm is supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will not result in unacceptable impacts, or that any identified impacts can be suitably mitigated. Policy S5 of the NPPF provides for support for energy related development outside of settlements. A detailed assessment of the proposal against the relevant criteria of Core Policy 42; including landscape, heritage, biodiversity, residential amenity, transport, and agricultural land quality; is provided in the following sections of this report.

8.3 Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land

The National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy, published in January 2024, is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The NPS is relevant to both nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) and smaller-scale renewable energy proposals considered at the local level.

In May 2024, a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero provided further guidance on balancing national priorities for energy security and food production. The WMS states:

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

Both the NPPF and the NPS define Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land as land falling within Grades 1, 2, and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.

National Decision-Making Policy N3 of the NPPF reinforces this approach, discouraging the use of higher quality agricultural land where land of poorer quality is available.

Further guidance is provided in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), Paragraph 013 (ID: 5-013-20150327), which advises that:

- Local planning authorities should encourage the use of previously developed and non-agricultural land for large-scale solar farms.
- Solar farms are typically temporary structures, and planning conditions can be used to secure the removal of infrastructure once it is no longer in use and restoration of the land to its previous condition.

At the local level, Core Policy 42 (criterion viii) of the Wiltshire Core Strategy requires that proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes demonstrate that the impact on Best and Most Versatile agricultural land has been satisfactorily considered.

In addition, the Wiltshire Climate Strategy (2022–2027) identifies as a key objective:

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

Agricultural Land Classification strategic maps show the likelihood of BMV land and identify the site as likely to have an ALC of Grade 3b; however, Natural England’s explanatory note on ALC strategic scale maps is clear that the gradings are predictions and that the map is *“intended for strategic planning purposes only, is not suitable for use below scale 1:250,000 or for the definitive classification of any local area of site.”*

A site specific Agricultural Land Classification report has been submitted in support of this application with the findings showing that approximately 10.4 hectares (11.9%) of the site is Grade 3a agricultural land with the remainder of the surveyed site being Grade 3b agricultural land. It should be noted that approximately 13.3 hectares of the site was not surveyed as it is being used for BNG habitat creation rather than solar development.

In line with national planning guidance, the use of previously developed land and non-agricultural land should be prioritised for the development of ground-mounted solar farms. However, it is recognised that across Wiltshire, there is a limited supply of previously developed or non-agricultural land of sufficient scale that is not already in active alternative use and capable of accommodating large-scale solar installations.

In this case, the proposal relates to land predominantly classified as Grade 3b agricultural land, considered to be of moderate quality. However, approximately 10.4 hectares of land classified as Grade 3a, considered to be of good quality, best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land would be used. Whilst this is noted, officers consider that the temporary nature of the development, combined with mitigation and land restoration measures, ensures that long-term harm to agricultural productivity would be minimal.

It is also noted that the proposal allows for the continued agricultural use of the site, such as sheep grazing between panel arrays, and that soil quality may improve over the operational lifetime of the development due to reduced intensive agricultural activity.

On balance, any limited and temporary harm arising from the use of Grade 3a and Grade 3b agricultural land is considered to be outweighed by the wider public benefits of renewable energy generation. Subject to conditions securing the removal of the solar farm infrastructure upon cessation of use, and restoration of the land to its original agricultural condition, the development is considered to comply with the aims of the NPPF, guidance in the PPG, and Core Policy 42 (criterion viii) of the WCS.

8.4 Cumulative Impact

In addition to providing updated guidance on the use of best and most versatile agricultural land, the Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) issued in May 2024 also provides direction on the need to assess cumulative impacts of solar energy developments. It states:

“[...] we are increasingly seeing geographical clustering of proposed solar developments in some rural areas. [...] When considering whether planning consent should be granted for solar development it is important to consider not just the impacts of individual proposals, but also whether there are cumulative impacts where several proposals come forward in the same locality.”

This reflects a growing national and local concern about the spatial concentration of solar farms and associated infrastructure in certain rural areas.

At its Full Council meeting on 21 May 2024 Wiltshire Council supported a motion (Motion No. 2024-03 - Solar Farms) calling for greater clarity on national policy regarding the distribution and cumulative assessment of solar development. The motion stated:

“[...] this Council is increasingly concerned at the concentration of solar farms, battery storage and associated infrastructure in Wiltshire. Some villages are now completely surrounded by solar farms and their continued concentration represents a significant cumulative impact and industrialisation of the countryside.

Wiltshire Council therefore calls on the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to define more closely what is meant by ‘cumulative impact’ regarding solar farms and to take clear steps to ensure that solar developments are more evenly spread across the UK [...].”

While no further central government guidance has yet been issued in response to this motion, and although the WMS stops short of defining cumulative impact in detail, national planning policy continues to emphasise the importance of balancing the need for clean energy investment with appropriate environmental and spatial safeguards. The Autumn Budget (30 October 2024) also reiterated the Government’s commitment to supporting clean energy technologies, which remains an important material consideration.

Within this context, officers have considered the potential cumulative landscape and visual effects of this proposal, including its relationship with other solar and battery storage developments in the surrounding area.

Core Policy 42 of the WCS explicitly requires consideration of cumulative effects when determining proposals for standalone renewable energy installations.

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides additional context, stating:

- Cumulative landscape impacts refer to the effects on the character, fabric, and quality of the landscape, and whether the proposed development would become a dominant or defining feature; and
- Cumulative visual impacts relate to the degree to which the development would be seen from the same viewpoints or along the same journey as other installations, and the resulting effect on visual amenity for those experiencing the landscape.

Although the term “locality” as used in the Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) is not formally defined, Wiltshire Council’s motion of 21 May 2024 highlights that multiple solar farm proposals within or surrounding the same village can collectively alter the local character and setting. This interpretation supports a more nuanced and locally responsive assessment of cumulative impact.

While technical assessments submitted with this application may cover a broader geographical area, officers consider that a radius of 2.5km from the edge of the application site represents a reasonable and proportionate study area for evaluating cumulative landscape and visual impacts in the wider countryside.

For the purposes of this report, officers therefore interpret “locality” as follows:

- For village setting, sites within close proximity to the village of Hook; and
- For countryside setting and broader landscape impacts, sites located within a 2.5 radius of the application site boundary.

This interpretation ensures a consistent and robust approach to the assessment of cumulative impacts in line with Policy CP42 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and national guidance.

There are no current or proposed solar farms within close proximity to the village of Hook, or to the other small villages/hamlets surrounding the application site. There are two solar farms approximately 1.5km and 2.4km south-east of the site, and one approximately 2km to the north-west. Whilst cumulative landscape change resulting from successive renewable energy developments remains a wider consideration in the north of Wiltshire, there is unlikely to be any significant cumulative visual impact arising from this proposal in combination with other solar developments in the area.

8.5 Archaeology and Heritage

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a statutory duty on decision-makers to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Similarly, Section 72(1) of the same Act requires local planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas when exercising their planning functions. This duty is further supported by Part 1 of the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953.

Relevant national policy is set out in Chapter 20 of the NPPF which provides guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. National Decision-Making Policies HE4 to HE10 of the NPPF specifically address how local planning authorities should assess and balance the potential impacts of development on heritage assets, including their settings.

At the local level, Policy CP42 (v) of the WCS requires standalone renewable energy proposals to demonstrate that impacts on the historic environment, including the setting of heritage assets, have been appropriately considered.

Core Policy 57 of the WCS promotes high-quality design and place-shaping for all new development, with criterion (iv) requiring proposals to be sympathetic to and to conserve historic buildings and historic landscapes. Core Policy 58 of the WCS provides further protection, requiring development to protect, conserve, and where possible enhance the historic environment of Wiltshire.

These combined national and local requirements form a robust framework for ensuring that solar farm developments are appropriately assessed in terms of their potential impact on the historic environment.

Historic England's Advice note 15 relates to Commercial Renewable Energy Development and the Historic Environment, paragraph 53 advises the following:

"When informed by relevant assessments, the design of a scheme can help to mitigate the visual impact of a proposal, for example through the use of landscape bunds or tree planting. This is likely to be particularly important in areas known and valued for their historic character, such as conservation areas, registered parks and gardens or registered battlefields. However, such measures need very careful consideration as they are not appropriate in all situations. Bunds, for instance, can themselves be intrusive features in the setting of a heritage asset. Any proposed landscape mitigation needs to be appropriately visualised and presented in the visual impact assessment. [...]"

Historic England's Advice note 17 relates to Planning and Archaeology, paragraph 43 advises the following summarised point:

"In dealing with applications for planning permission, there are a range of activities relating to archaeology which are usually carried out by planning officers:

- a) Agree and implement a consultation procedure with their archaeological advisers.*
- b) Validate the application ensuring that it meets local requirements.*
- c) Consult Historic England (when required).*
- d) Ensure sufficient information is available to make an informed planning decision.*
- e) Take advice from archaeological advisers before discharging conditions.*
- f) Take action if conditions are not being complied with.*

Conservation Areas

The nearest conservation areas to the application site are those of Lydiard Green and Lydiard Millicent, approximately just over 1km to the north-east. The conservation area of Royal Wootton Bassett sits approximately 1.6km to the south of the site. Due to the distances

involved and the intervening landscape and development features, the proposed development would result in no harm to the character or appearance of any conservation area.

Listed Buildings

The Grade II listed Manor Farmhouse sits within the historic Flaxlands Farm farmstead and is situated adjacent to the site boundary. The significance of the designated heritage asset is principally derived from its historic and functional association with the agricultural development of the farmstead, together with its architectural and evidential value as an example of local vernacular farmhouse design. Its setting contributes to this significance by enabling an appreciation of its historic agricultural context and its relationship with the surrounding farmland.

The submitted Concept Design and Biodiversity Net Gain plans confirm that the three agricultural fields closest to the existing farmstead would be retained as grassland and would remain free from solar infrastructure. The farmstead itself lies outside the application site and would remain physically unaltered by the proposed development. The retention of these intervening fields would maintain the immediate agricultural setting of the listed building and preserve its visual and functional relationship with the surrounding countryside. As a result, the proposal would preserve the significance of Manor Farmhouse and its setting, sustaining its special architectural and historic interest in accordance with the statutory duty under section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Whilst a number of other listed buildings are located within the wider area surrounding the application site (including the Grade II listed Lydiard Tregoze War Memorial, School House Restaurant, 38 Old Purton Road, and Lower Hook Farmhouse in Hook to the east of the site; and the Grade II listed Baynards Ash Farmhouse, Midge Hall, and The Marsh across the M4 to the south and south-east of the site), none have a historic or functional association with the site. The site does not form an important component of their settings and, accordingly, the proposed development would preserve their significance and special interest.

Registered Park and Gardens

The Grade II listed Lydiard Park registered park and garden sits approximately 900m east of the application site. The potential for shared intervisibility between the site and Lydiard Park was considered unlikely at pre-application stage, due primarily to the likely screening provided by Park Copes ancient woodland located at the western end of Lydiard Park and the woodland bordering the eastern edge of the application site. However, due to the elevated nature of the site, it was requested that the registered park and garden be assessed within the scope of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA).

The submitted LVA does consider Lydiard Park and confirms that there would be no potential for shared intervisibility between the site, its development area, and the Grade II listed registered park and garden.

Non-Designated Heritage Assets

A number of non-designated heritage assets have been identified within or in close proximity to the site. These include an infilled post-medieval quarry, an area of ridge and furrow ploughing, a former post-medieval field boundary, and a continuation of WWII anti-tank ditches. Whilst the proposed development has the potential to affect these assets, the impacts

are unlikely to give rise to unacceptable heritage harm and can be adequately mitigated through archaeological investigation and recording secured by condition.

Archaeology

The application was accompanied by a Heritage Environment Assessment, which included the results of a geophysical survey undertaken across the site. During the course of the application, the need to ground-truth the geophysical survey findings was identified and an archaeological trial trench evaluation was subsequently carried out. The results of this work have enabled the archaeological potential of the site to be sufficiently characterised and assessed.

The County Archaeologist has raised no objection to the proposed development subject to conditions requiring the submission and approval of an Archaeological Mitigation Strategy, together with a further programme of targeted trial trenching and any necessary mitigation, it is considered that the archaeological interest of the site can be appropriately safeguarded and recorded.

8.6 Landscape and Visual Impact, Design and Appearance

Core Policy 42 (criteria i) of the WCS requires standalone renewable energy installations to take into account the landscape, particularly in and around AONBs (National Landscapes).

Core Policy 51 of the WCS expresses that proposals should be informed by and sympathetic to the distinctive character areas and further expresses that development must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character. If there are negative impacts, they must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures. CP51 requires development proposals to demonstrate that identified aspects of landscape character have been protected, conserved and where possible enhanced, which includes the following summarised aspects which are relevant for assessment of the scheme:

- (i.) The locally distinctive pattern and species composition of natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and waterbodies;
- (ii.) The locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings;
- (iii.) The separate identity of settlements;
- (v.) Landscape features of cultural, historic or heritage value;
- (vii.) Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise and motion; and
- (viii.) Landscape functions.

Core Policy 57 of the WCS requires high quality design and place shaping for all new development and includes the expectation that proposals should make a positive contribution to the character of Wiltshire. Proposals should demonstrate how the development meets the expectations of criteria of CP57 which includes the following summarised points which are relevant for assessment of the scheme on landscape matters:

- (i.) Enhancing local distinctiveness by responding to the value of the natural and historic environment, relating positively to its landscape setting and the existing pattern of development and responding to local topography by ensuring that important views into, within and out of the site are to be retained and enhanced;

- (ii.) The retention and enhancement of important landscaping and natural features;
- (vi.) making efficient use of land whilst taking account of the characteristics of the site and the local context; and
- (xii.) The use of high standards of building materials, finishes and landscaping.

Wiltshire's Climate Strategy further refers to the Council's GBI which sets out a long-term vision, strategic goals and principles for delivering green and blue infrastructure across Wiltshire.

The application site comprises agricultural land centred upon a locally elevated limestone ridge, characterised by pastoral fields enclosed by mature native hedgerows, hedgerow trees and a network of ancient woodland blocks including Morris's Copse, Frith Copse, Flaxlands Wood, Cowleaze Copse and Midgehall Copse. The site is not located within a nationally or locally designated landscape, although it falls within the Great Western Community Forest Area, the historic Braydon Forest area and the emerging Western Forest initiative.

The Council's Landscape Officer has undertaken a detailed assessment of the submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) and the broader landscape implications of the proposal. It is noted that the site occupies a prominent position on a rolling hill feature and local topographical high point along the Limestone Ridge, with development proposed across plateau areas and upper slopes. Whilst the site contains certain detracting influences, including overhead transmission infrastructure, telecommunications equipment and the audible influence of the M4 motorway, the wider landscape is considered to display a distinctly rural character with strong woodland associations, mature hedgerow networks, veteran trees and areas of ecological interest. Therefore, it is considered that the site and its surroundings to possess a greater level of landscape value than attributed within the applicant's LVA.

In terms of landscape character, officers disagree with the applicant's conclusion that landscape effects would be minor adverse. Instead, it is considered that the proposal would introduce substantial industrialising change into a predominantly rural landscape. The introduction of extensive solar arrays, fencing, substations, battery storage infrastructure, lighting, security equipment (including a 15m communications tower) and associated development would result in a significant change in land use and perceptual character at a local level. Whilst important landscape features, including woodland, hedgerows, ponds and watercourses, would largely be retained, the relationship between these features and their rural setting would inevitably change as they become experienced within the context of the proposed development.

The application is accompanied by a comprehensive package of mitigation measures, including retention of existing vegetation, woodland and hedgerow buffers, biodiversity enhancement areas and additional planting proposals. These measures are welcomed. The proposed diversion of sections of Public Rights of Way LTRE26 and LTRE28 is acceptable in landscape terms, with the replacement of stiles by kissing gates providing a public access benefit. The WC PRoW Officer has not raised any objections to the required diversions in principle and note to potential for public access benefits. The diversion of these PRoWs would be subject to a separate approval process. It is noted that the Public Rights of Way team follow a policy of the least restrictive option when it comes to the provision of access furniture on the

rights of way network. Final details can be determined in discussion with the PROW team as part of the separate authorisation process.

It is considered that opportunities remain for additional mitigation, particularly through the creation of structured woodland belts linking existing woodland blocks and strengthening screening along parts of Flaxlands Lane and the northern edge of the site. Such measures are considered capable of delivering landscape, biodiversity and green infrastructure benefits whilst helping to soften views of solar infrastructure from nearby receptors. Details of this additional mitigation along with the mitigation already proposed should be secured by condition.

In terms of the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and substation compound, this element of the proposal would comprise a concentration of built development including battery storage containers, inverter units, substations, control buildings, security equipment, communications infrastructure, fencing and associated infrastructure. Owing to the scale, form and utilitarian nature of these structures, this area has the potential to appear as a more overtly industrial component of the development when compared to the solar arrays themselves. Details of the external materials colours and finishes of all buildings, containers, cabins, substations, fencing, poles, towers and ancillary infrastructure should be secured by condition.

With regard to visual effects, it is accepted that a number of moderate adverse visual effects would arise during construction, operation and decommissioning. Particular visual effects would be experienced by users of the local Public Rights of Way network that passes through and around the site and by residents of nearby properties, especially Flaxlands Field Farm, The Shepherds Rest and Four Acres Farm, where the proximity of development would result in a noticeable alteration to existing rural views and local sense of place. Users of Flaxlands Lane would also experience changed views, including views of solar arrays across the elevated ridge.

However, visual effects are recognised as reducing with distance and the proposal would not result in harm to the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Having considered representative Viewpoint 10, located approximately 6km from the site within the National Landscape, the development would form only a very small component within wider panoramic views and would not adversely affect the special qualities or setting of the designated landscape. Accordingly, no conflict is identified with Core Policy 42(i), Core Policy 51(ix) or the Council's duties under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

There is unlikely to be any significant cumulative visual impact arising from the proposal in combination with other solar developments in the area. Whilst cumulative landscape change resulting from successive renewable energy developments remains a wider consideration in the north of Wiltshire, it does not present a reason to refuse this application.

Overall, it is acknowledged that the proposal would introduce a substantial change to the character of the site and would give rise to localised adverse landscape and visual effects, particularly affecting nearby residents and users of the surrounding public rights of way. Whilst the proposed mitigation would reduce these effects, it would not eliminate them entirely. As such, there is a degree of conflict with Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy,

specifically criteria iv relating to visually sensitive skylines, soils and topographical features, and criteria (vi) relating to important views and visual amenity.

These adverse effects attract moderate weight against the proposal in the overall planning balance.

8.7 Residential Amenity

Core Policy 42 (criteria vii) of the WCS requires development to address and take into account residential amenity including noise, odour etc. Core Policy 57 (criteria vi) of the WCS requires development to have regard to the compatibility of adjoining buildings and uses.

NPPF Policy P3 requires development proposals to create a high standard of amenity for amongst others, existing users.

Noise and Disturbance

A Noise Impact Assessment has been submitted in support of the application which considers both the construction and operational phases of the development. Background noise monitoring was undertaken between September and October 2024 at four representative locations surrounding the site.

The construction phase is anticipated to last approximately six months and would involve the installation of solar arrays, inverters, transformers, the BESS compound, substation infrastructure and associated access works. The submitted modelling predicts daytime construction noise levels at all assessed residential receptors to remain below the significance thresholds identified within BS5228. The assessment concludes that no significant adverse construction noise effects would arise at any receptor. Whilst some temporary disturbance would inevitably occur during the construction period, this would be limited in duration and is characteristic of large construction projects. Construction working hours can be controlled, and the submission of a Construction Management Plan (CMP) can be secured, by condition.

Construction traffic is anticipated to average approximately 10 HGV deliveries per day, alongside staff vehicles during peak construction periods. The report concludes that this would result in a negligible and non-significant increase in road traffic noise.

The greatest potential vibration impact relates to impact piling associated with the installation of the solar panel mounting structures. The report predicts that vibration levels at Flaxlands Field Farm could temporarily exceed Significant Observed Adverse Effect Level (SOAEL) whilst vibration levels at Flaxlands Manor Farm would fall between the Lowest Observed Adverse Effect Level (LOAEL) and SOAEL. However, these effects would be temporary, localised and limited to specific construction operations.

Best Practical Means should be employed throughout construction and that residents potentially affected by piling operations are informed in advance through a communication strategy. Subject to the implementation of these measures, secured through a Construction Management Plan (CMP), the vibration impacts would not result in significant adverse effects on residential amenity.

Operational noise would principally arise from the BESS units, inverters, MV power stations and transformer infrastructure. The proposed location of the BESS and substation compound has been selected to maximise separation distance from nearby residential properties. The report identifies that, prior to mitigation, a number of properties would experience rating levels falling between the LOAEL and SOAEL during daytime, evening and night-time periods. As such, mitigation is proposed including silencers, attenuation kits and acoustic enclosures for the BESS units, MV stations and transformers. With these mitigation measures in place, predicted operational noise levels are reduced substantially. With these mitigation measures in place, all reasonable mitigation has been incorporated and no significant adverse operational noise effects are expected. Conditions can be used to control operational noise.

Glint and Glare

A Glint and Glare Assessment has been submitted in support of the application to consider potential effects upon residential properties within the vicinity of the proposed development. The report considers geometric reflection modelling together with the influence of topography, vegetation, buildings and other screening features.

The assessment considers 86 residential properties within the study area. Solar reflections are geometrically possible at 66 of these dwellings. Of these:

- 34 dwellings are predicted to experience no impact due to the presence of vegetation, buildings and/or intervening topography which prevent views of reflecting panels.
- 1 dwelling may experience reflections for less than three months of the year and less than 60 minutes per day, resulting in a low and not significant effect.
- 28 dwellings may experience reflections for greater than three months of the year but for less than 60 minutes per day. The effects are moderated by existing screening, the coincidence of reflections with direct sunlight and the likelihood that effects would principally be experienced from upper floor viewpoints. These effects are assessed as low and not significant.
- 3 dwellings are predicted to experience moderate effects in the absence of mitigation.

Additional landscape planting and screening are proposed at locations identified within the report to obscure views of the reflective areas from the 3 dwellings most affected. With these mitigation measures in place, effects would be significantly reduced. The proposed development also benefits from existing hedgerows, woodland blocks and substantial landscape mitigation, including infill hedgerow planting and additional screening, which would further reduce opportunities for views of reflective surfaces over time. All of which can be secured by condition.

Lighting

The proposal would not require routine operational lighting. CCTV cameras would utilise thermal imaging and infrared technology and would not require permanent illumination. Lighting within the substation compound would only be used on infrequent occasions for emergency works or maintenance activities. As such, significant effects arising from light pollution are not anticipated. Any external lighting associated with the development can be appropriately controlled through planning condition.

Other Considerations

The solar panels would have a maximum height of approximately 3m above ground level and would be dispersed across existing agricultural fields. Whilst the development would alter the outlook from certain nearby properties and public rights of way, the submitted landscape evidence demonstrates that the majority of views would be filtered or screened by retained and enhanced vegetation. The development would not introduce overlooking, loss of privacy or an overbearing relationship with surrounding dwellings.

The operational phase would generate very limited vehicle movements, generally restricted to occasional maintenance visits by vehicle once per month or as required. As such, disturbance associated with day-to-day operation of the site would be minimal.

8.8 Highways Safety

Core Policy 42 (criteria vi) of the WCS requires proposals to take into account the use of the local transport network. Core Policy 57 (criteria ix) of the WCS requires development to ensure the public realm, including new roads and other rights of way, are designed to create places of character which are legible, safe and accessible.

Core Policy 60 of the WCS expresses the Council's support and encouragement of sustainable, safe and efficient movement of people and goods within and through Wiltshire. Expressing under criteria vi of CP60 that there should be assessment and, where necessary, mitigation of the impact of development on transport users, local communities and the environment.

Core Policy 61 (criteria ii) of the WCS requires proposals to be capable of being served by safe access to the highway network. CP61 further expresses that, where appropriate, contributions will be sought towards sustainable transport improvements. Core Policy 62 of the WCS requires development to provide appropriate mitigating measures to offset any adverse impacts on the transport network at both the construction and operational stages.

Core Policy 64 of the WCS relates to demand management which includes traffic management measures.

The NPPF transport policies (TR3-TR8) seek to ensure that development is supported by a safe, sustainable and efficient transport system. Development proposals should provide appropriate access arrangements, promote sustainable modes of travel, support active travel and public transport use, minimise impacts on the transport network, and ensure that any residual impacts on highway safety or network capacity are appropriately mitigated.

The Highway Authority has undertaken a detailed review of the submitted Transport Statement, Framework Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), access proposals and associated plans. The principal highway considerations relate to the temporary impacts arising during the construction phase, given the site's reliance on Flaxlands Lane, a narrow rural road with limited opportunities for vehicles to pass. It is noted that long sections of Flaxlands Lane are incapable of accommodating two-way vehicle movements and that existing passing opportunities are limited and generally unsuitable for HGV movements.

Particular concern is raised regarding the proposed construction access strategy which would route construction traffic, including HGVs, from Greatfield Road via Flaxlands Lane. The proposal would result in an intensification of traffic at the junction of Flaxlands Lane and Greatfield Road, where visibility to the right when emerging from Flaxlands Lane is restricted. This is considered particularly relevant for large HGVs requiring greater gaps in traffic to complete turning manoeuvres safely. It is likely that temporary traffic management measures will be required during the construction period to facilitate the safe exit of HGVs from Flaxlands Lane.

The submitted proposals include the provision of temporary passing bays along Flaxlands Lane to facilitate the movement of construction traffic. Whilst these measures may well be acceptable in principle, the submitted drawings are indicative only and detailed designs would be required as part of any subsequent Section 278 process. At this stage, further assessment would be necessary to understand the implications for roadside drainage features, hedgerows and highway land, together with the structural requirements necessary to accommodate repeated HGV loading. These details should be secured by condition.

National Highways consider that the predicted construction traffic is unlikely to result in an unacceptable or severe impact on Junction 16 of the M4 motorway.

With regard to site access arrangements, there are no in principle objection to the proposed access locations but, detailed access designs, visibility splays, construction specifications and any required vegetation clearance would need to be secured through the highway approval process. The proposed visibility splays associated with the new western parcel access would be adequate given the likely vehicle speeds on Flaxlands Lane.

There are no concerns regarding traffic associated with the operational phase of the development. The anticipated level of operational traffic generation would be acceptable and that the existing access arrangements would be suitable for ongoing maintenance and operation of the solar farm and battery energy storage facilities.

The submitted Glint and Glare Study advises that approximately 2.96km of the M4 motorway has potential views of the proposed panel areas. The study concludes that *“existing vegetation, buildings and/or terrain [are] predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels such that views are not possible in practice”*. Whilst National Highways broadly accept this conclusion, they consider that there would be a 200m stretch of the M4 where there could be a risk of distraction to road users, notably for westbound traffic. Whilst the solar reflections visible to road users may be transient, they may be sufficient to cause distraction. It is therefore necessary to secure additional landscaping along the southern boundary of the solar panel fields located within the south-eastern extent of the development. This additional landscape planting for screening should be secured by condition.

The submission of details for traffic management should be secured by condition. This should consider concerns raised by the Highway Authority, specifically regarding temporary traffic management measures to facilitate the safe exit of HGVs from Flaxlands Lane.

The following should also be secured by condition:

- Access and highway improvement details;

- Temporary passing bays along Flaxlands Lane;
- Highway condition surveys;
- Visibility splays; and
- Reinstatement works.

Overall, concerns relate principally to the adequacy of the submitted construction traffic information and the detailed design of mitigation measures rather than to the principle of the development itself. Subject to the inclusion of the above conditions, the impacts on highway safety can be satisfactorily managed. Furthermore, no objections are raised in relation to the operational phase of the development. On this basis, the proposal is not considered to result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety subject to conditions.

8.9 Drainage

Policy 67 of the WCS relates to flood risk and requires new development to incorporate measures to reduce surface water runoff rates and improve infiltration to the ground through sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), unless site or environmental conditions render such measures unsuitable.

The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA), Outline Drainage Strategy and associated technical documents. These have been reviewed by the Council's Drainage Engineer, who raises no objection to the development, subject to conditions securing further drainage details and site investigations.

The submitted drainage strategy proposes the BESS and substation areas to be surfaced with a 300mm gravel layer, together with a perforated pipe drainage network discharging to a detention basin. The proposed discharge rate to the basin does not currently comply with Wiltshire Council's requirement to achieve a 30% betterment over greenfield runoff rates for all return period events. Further details are therefore required to demonstrate compliance with this requirement and this can be secured by condition.

Additional information is also required to demonstrate compliance with SuDS interception standards, ensuring that the first 5mm of rainfall is retained and managed on site without discharge. Exceedance flow routing details are likewise required to demonstrate that runoff from the solar panels and associated infrastructure would not increase flood risk elsewhere during extreme rainfall events.

Whilst the submitted information suggests that infiltration drainage may not be feasible, it is considered that site-specific ground investigations, infiltration testing and groundwater monitoring should be undertaken to confirm this and inform the final drainage design. These matters can also be secured by condition.

The site is located within an area where groundwater is particularly sensitive to potential contamination. The Environment Agency advises that further assessment is required to demonstrate that the development, including the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), would not adversely affect groundwater quality during its operational lifetime. To address this, the submission of a Hydrogeological Risk Assessment should be secured by condition to

identify potential pollutant sources, groundwater pathways, sensitive receptors and any necessary mitigation measures.

The issues identified relate to the detailed design and implementation of the drainage strategy rather than the principle of the development. Subject to the recommended conditions, officers are satisfied that surface water drainage and flood risk can be appropriately managed. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in drainage terms.

8.10 Fire Risk

The proposed development includes a 49.9MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) co-located with the solar farm. The BESS would comprise 14 battery units together with associated power conversion equipment, substations and ancillary infrastructure, located within the north-western part of the site. The BESS would be positioned away from residential and ecological receptors and that dedicated fire safety infrastructure, including fire water storage tanks and a lined drainage system, would form part of the development.

An Outline Battery Safety Management Plan (OBSMP) has been submitted in support of the application. The document has been prepared to address fire safety risks associated with the operational phase of the BESS and has been informed by guidance from the National Fire Chiefs Council and other recognised industry standards. The applicant advises that battery technology would comprise Lithium Iron Phosphate (LFP) cells, which are regarded as a more stable lithium-ion chemistry and less susceptible to thermal runaway than other lithium-ion battery types.

The OBSMP identifies thermal runaway as the principal fire hazard associated with battery storage systems. To mitigate this risk, the applicant proposes a layered approach to fire prevention, detection and suppression. This includes battery management systems (BMS), energy management systems, continuous remote monitoring, temperature monitoring, gas detection, smoke detection, automatic shutdown procedures and integrated fire suppression systems. The submitted information confirms that emergency response procedures would be developed in consultation with the Fire and Rescue Service.

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) has raised no objection to the proposal in principle and acknowledges both the pre-application engagement undertaken by the applicant and the submission of the Outline Battery Safety Management Plan. The Fire and Rescue Service supports the use of planning conditions to secure compliance and oversight of fire safety matters. The response highlights a number of design considerations relating to water supply, emergency access, battery spacing, fire-water containment and emergency planning. These matters are addressed within the submitted OBSMP.

The submitted plans show the battery units within the BESS arranged in grid form with separation distances of 3.5 metres. Comment received from the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service recommends a separation distance of 6 metres between battery units unless suitable design features can be introduced to reduce that spacing. The OBSMP directly addresses this, justifying the reduced spacing for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, LFP battery chemistry, one-hour fire-rated container enclosures, and internal fire detection and suppression systems. The applicant has also committed to ongoing review of

battery specifications and fire safety measures through the detailed design and procurement process.

Having regard to the submitted information and the consultation response from DWFRS, officers are satisfied that fire risk has been appropriately considered at this stage and that the proposal incorporates a range of mitigation measures intended to reduce the likelihood and consequences of a fire event. Should it later be found that changes are required to comply with relevant regulation or requirements, the applicant will need to consider whether amendments to any approved planning plans are needed.

8.11 Ecology

NPPF Policy N2 sets out the expectation that development should minimise any adverse impacts on biodiversity and include features which support priority or threatened species. In exercising its statutory functions, the local planning authority must ensure that it has sufficient information to assess whether the proposal is likely to result in harm to protected habitats or species.

Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021 introduces a requirement that all planning permissions granted in England are subject to a condition preventing development from commencing until a Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP) demonstrating at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

At a local level, Core Policy 50 of the WCS requires development to protect Wiltshire's natural environment, including features that perform ecological functions for wildlife. Proposals must demonstrate how they have considered features of nature conservation and geological value in their design. CP50 also expects all development to seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity, with enhancement measures contributing to the aims of the Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

The application has been subject to extensive ecological assessment and consultation with the Council's Ecologist. Following the submission of additional ecological information and amendments to the scheme, including revisions to the solar array layout and ecological buffer strategy, the Council's Ecologist raises no objection subject to conditions.

The application is supported by a comprehensive suite of ecological surveys and assessments, including: a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal; Ecological Impact Assessment; National Vegetation Classification Survey; Protected Species Surveys; Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment; Ecological Buffer Zones Plan; and Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing documentation. An outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP), and outline Skylark Mitigation Plan have also been submitted for review.

The site extends to approximately 87 hectares of agricultural land comprising predominantly pasture fields bounded by hedgerows, scattered mature trees, ponds and watercourses. The wider landscape contains a number of ecologically important features including areas of ancient woodland, County Wildlife Sites (CWS), priority habitats and associated ecological corridors.

Habitat Sites and Designated Areas

The application site lies within the outer zone of influence for the North Meadow National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) component of North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A test of likely significance has been carried out by the Council, acting as the relevant Competent Authority. This concluded that due to the site lying more than 8km from the SAC boundaries there is no mechanism for adverse effect on it or its qualifying features. In addition, given the non-residential nature of the development, there is no mechanism for adverse effect from increased recreational visits. The Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) has concluded that the application will not result in any mechanism for adverse effect on the conservation objectives of the SAC and subsequently is screened out of Appropriate Assessment.

Particular attention has been given to the relationship between the development and the adjacent Flaxlands Manor County Wildlife Site (CWS), which contains approximately 15.53ha of Priority Habitat Lowland Meadow. Significant concerns were initially raised regarding the inclusion of solar arrays within the CWS and the potential for direct habitat loss and deterioration through shading and management changes. Following these concerns, revised plans were received to amend the scheme, with solar arrays removed from the CWS. This amendment satisfactorily addresses the previous concerns regarding direct impacts on the CWS. Furthermore, the proposal now incorporates habitat retention, ecological buffer zones, construction safeguards and habitat enhancement measures within the CWS, all of which can be secured through planning conditions.

Ancient Woodland, Veteran Trees and Hedgerows

The site is surrounded by several areas of ancient woodland, including Frith Copse CWS, Cowleaze Copse, Flaxlands Wood, and Morris's Copse CWS. The revised layout incorporates substantial ecological buffer distances, including 30m buffers to ancient woodland, 15m buffers to woodland and tree groups, and 10m buffers to hedgerows. These measures are welcomed.

The proposal also retains veteran and mature trees and provides protection through root protection areas and ecological buffers. No loss of veteran trees is proposed and it is advised that such trees should remain connected within habitat corridors and not become isolated by development.

The sites extensive hedgerow network forms important ecological corridors and bat commuting routes. The development includes no-work buffers of between 10m and 15m to hedgerows, depending on their ecological value, together with measures to maintain connectivity during construction and operation. Where temporary gaps are required, replacement flightlines and additional planting are required.

Protected Species - Bats

Bat surveys identified a nationally important assemblage of bat species using the site, including lesser horseshoe and barbastelle bats. While no confirmed roosts were identified within the development site, the surrounding woodland and hedgerow network provide important foraging and commuting habitat. Whilst it is noted that the proposal could result in degradation of some grassland foraging habitat, the scheme incorporates extensive habitat

retention, ecological buffers and habitat enhancement measures aimed at maintaining key flight corridors and foraging resources.

Given the sensitivity of bats to artificial lighting, strict lighting controls are recommended. A condition requiring submission and approval of a detailed lighting scheme, compliant with relevant guidance and designed to protect bat habitat, is considered necessary and reasonable.

Protected Species - Birds

The submitted Breeding Bird Survey report identifies that the site supports six breeding pairs of Skylark. Following amendments to the scheme, two territories would be retained whilst four territories would remain affected by the development. Skylarks are a Priority Species under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. To address the loss of nesting habitat, the applicant has submitted an Outline Skylark Mitigation Plan proposing compensatory breeding habitat within land associated with the development. Following review, the compensation approach is considered acceptable, subject to the submission and implementation of a detailed Skylark Mitigation Strategy secured by condition.

In addition, standard controls relating to vegetation clearance and protection of nesting birds during construction are recommended through conditions and informatives.

Protected Species - Great Crested Newts (GCN)

Survey work confirmed the presence of Great Crested Newts within seven ponds on the site. The applicant has applied to Natural England to licence the proposal under the GCN District Licencing Scheme. The signed and countersigned Impact Assessment Conservation Payment Certificate (IACPC) has been submitted in support of this application.

Protected Species - Water Voles

Water vole field signs were recorded at one pond and one watercourse, confirming a low-level presence within the site. The recommendations contained within the submitted Otter and Water Vole Survey Report, including maintenance of a minimum 10 metre buffer to watercourses and waterbodies and implementation of pollution prevention measures during construction, are supported. These matters can be secured through the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).

Protected Species - Reptiles

Reptile surveys returned negative results, although suitable habitat exists across parts of the site. A precautionary method of working is recommended, including a sensitive, phased vegetation clearance methodology between March and October, under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist. Ecological enhancements, including the creation of reptile refuges and hibernacula, are proposed and should be secured as part of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).

Biodiversity Net Gain

The proposal is subject to the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements introduced under the Environment Act 2021. The applicant has submitted a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, statutory biodiversity metric and habitat condition assessments. The submitted baseline

habitat information is accepted, which records a baseline biodiversity value of 422.52 habitat units, 80.80 hedgerow units and 0.41 watercourse units.

Detailed confirmation of the final biodiversity gain calculations and delivery mechanism would be addressed through the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan process following any grant of permission. A Biodiversity Gain Plan condition would apply automatically to any permission granted. Given the scale of enhancement proposed, the biodiversity gain is considered significant and would require a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) together with long-term monitoring and management for a minimum period of 30 years.

Management, Mitigation and Enhancement

The application incorporates a range of ecological mitigation and enhancement measures including:

- Retention of existing woodland, hedgerows, ponds and mature trees;
- Ecological buffer zones around sensitive habitats;
- Habitat creation and enhancement within retained grassland areas;
- Enhancement of Flaxlands Manor CWS through lowland meadow management;
- Native planting and ecological corridor enhancements;
- Provision of bat, bird, hedgehog and invertebrate features;
- Long-term ecological management through a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan; and
- Species-specific mitigation for bats, skylarks, Great Crested Newts, water voles and reptiles.

Ecology Conclusion

Having reviewed the submitted ecological information and the amendments made during the application process, the proposed development would be acceptable in ecological terms subject to the imposition of appropriate planning conditions. The revised scheme avoids direct impacts on Flaxlands Manor CWS, provides suitable protection for ancient woodland and other sensitive habitats, incorporates mitigation for protected and priority species, and includes mechanisms for long-term habitat enhancement and biodiversity net gain. Subject to the recommended conditions relating to ecological mitigation, management, monitoring, lighting, biodiversity net gain and decommissioning, the proposal is considered to comply with Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, the relevant provisions of the NPPF and the requirements of the Habitats Regulations.

8.12 Other matters

Grid Connection

The presence of a confirmed grid connection is not a requirement for the grant of planning permission. While it is helpful for applicants to provide details of how the proposed solar farm will connect to the electricity grid, this is ultimately a technical and commercial matter between the developer and the relevant electricity network operator. The planning system is primarily concerned with assessing the land use impacts of the development itself, rather than the commercial arrangements behind its implementation.

That said, the likelihood of a viable grid connection can be a material consideration in the planning balance, insofar as it may indicate the deliverability of the scheme and the potential for renewable energy generation to be realised. The absence of a confirmed connection does not, in itself, amount to a reason for refusal.

It should be noted that any off-site infrastructure required to facilitate a grid connection; such as new cabling, substations, or overhead lines; may require separate planning consent, depending on its scale and nature. Such proposals would be subject to their own planning assessment at the appropriate time, including consideration of relevant land use planning matters such as archaeology, ecology, and the effect on residential amenity.

In this case, the development would be connected to the National Grid via the existing 132kV pylon, approximately 1.7km north of the site. It is anticipated that the cable route would leave the Site via the main access, then follow Flaxlands Lane east, before turning north up Greatfield Road before connecting to the existing pylon. This connection is not included as part of this application and, as such, would likely require separate planning consent.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Benefits of the Proposal

- The proposed development is for the installation of a renewable led energy scheme comprising ground mounted photovoltaic solar arrays together with ancillary infrastructure. The proposed development is sustainable development that would make a significant contribution to the supply of renewable energy helping to reduce carbon emissions required to meet the Climate Change Act 2050 net zero target. Policy W3 of the NPPF expects **substantial** weight to be given to the benefits of improving energy security and supporting the transition to net zero future.
- Limited benefit of delivering biodiversity net gain in line with the Environment Act. This benefit attracts **limited** weight.
- Limited benefit of improved soil quality over the scheme's lifetime. This benefit attracts **limited** weight.

9.2 Identified Harms

- Moderate localised landscape harm has been identified due to the visual change in the rural character of the site. This harm attracts **moderate** weight against the proposal in the overall planning balance.
- Limited harm identified due to the temporary loss of approximately 10.4 hectares of Grade 3a Best and Most Versatile agricultural land and 63.3 hectares of Grade 3b agricultural land. This harm attracts **limited** weight.

9.3 Neutral Impacts

- No unacceptable impacts have been identified in relation to heritage assets, archaeology, ecology, residential amenity, highway safety, drainage or flood risk, subject to the recommended planning conditions.

9.4 The Planning Balance

National Decision-Making Policy S5 of the NPPF requires that the development be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects.

The proposal would deliver a 49.9MW solar farm and co-located battery storage facility, making a significant contribution towards renewable energy generation, energy security and the reduction of carbon emissions. These benefits align with national policy support for renewable energy development and Wiltshire Council's climate objectives and attract substantial weight in favour of the proposal. The scheme would also deliver biodiversity enhancements and measurable biodiversity net gain through habitat creation, ecological buffering and long-term management. In addition, the development is temporary in nature and would allow continued agricultural use through sheep grazing, with restoration of the land secured at the end of the operational period.

Against these benefits, the proposal would result in moderate localised landscape and visual harm. The introduction of solar arrays and associated infrastructure would alter the rural character of the site and affect views experienced by nearby residents and users of public rights of way. Whilst mitigation planting would reduce these effects over time, it would not remove them entirely. Limited harm also arises from the temporary use of approximately 10.4 hectares of Grade 3a Best and Most Versatile agricultural land.

No substantial adverse impacts have been identified in relation to heritage assets, archaeology, ecology, residential amenity, highway safety, drainage or flood risk, subject to the recommended planning conditions. The proposal does not fail to comply with any decision making policies which state that development should be refused in specific circumstances.

Having regard to the Development Plan as a whole and all other material considerations, officers conclude that the substantial public benefits arising from renewable energy generation, climate change mitigation, energy security and biodiversity enhancement outweigh the identified landscape and agricultural land impacts. In accordance with Policy S5 of the NPPF the adverse impacts are not substantial and would not outweigh the identified benefits of the proposal. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the provisions of the NPPF, and planning permission should be granted subject to the appropriate and necessary conditions.

10. RECOMMENDATION

That Planning Permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

COMMENCEMENT

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of five years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

APPROVED PLANS

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

- Access Gate Elevation Details
- Access Track Details
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment (Parts 1 to 7)
- BESS Plan & Elevation
- CCTV Security Camera Elevation
- Communication Tower Elevation
- Customer Substation Elevation
- DNO Control Substation Elevation
- Flaxlands Lane Temporary Passing Bays
- Flood Risk Assessment (Parts 1 and 2)
- Framework Construction Traffic Management Plan
- Geotechnical and Geo-Environmental Desk Study (Parts 1 to 8)
- Glint and Glare Study (Parts 1 and 2)
- Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment (Parts 1 and 2)
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal (Parts 1 to 6)
- MV Station Elevations
- Noise Impact Assessment
- Outline Battery Safety Management Plan
- Segregated Waste Storage Container
- Site Location Plan
- Soils and Agricultural Land Report (Parts 1 to 3)
- Solar Array Boundary Fencing
- Solar Panel Elevations
- Storage Container Elevations
- Substation Compound Figure
- Substation Fence Detail
- Transport Statement (Parts 1 to 6)
- Water Tank Details

(Received 09/07/2025)

- Ecological Impact Assessment (including appendices received on 09/07/2025 and 17/07/2025)

- Proposed Site Plan (Concept Design)

(Received 27/02/2026)

- Archaeology Evaluation Report

(Received 22/04/2026)

- Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan
- Skylark Mitigation Strategy

(Received 23/04/2026)

- Ecological Buffers
- Habitat Condition Assessments

(Received 23/06/2026)

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interest of proper planning.

OPERATIONAL PERIOD

3. The permission hereby granted shall be for a temporary period and shall expire 40 years from the date that electricity from the development is first exported to the electricity distribution network ('First Export Date') or no later than 45 years from the date of this decision, whichever is the sooner. Written confirmation of the First Export Date shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than 1 calendar month after that First Export Date.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and the circumstances of the use and to ensure the long term management of and ecological features retained and created by the development and in the interests of the significance of the heritage assets, their setting and the wider landscape.

DECOMMISSIONING AND RESTORATION PLAN

4. Within 6 months of the date of expiry of this planning permission, or, if sooner, the cessation of the use of the solar panels for electricity generation purposes for a continuous period of 12 months, the solar panels together with any supporting/associated infrastructure shall be removed from the land and the land restored in accordance with a Scheme of Work to include a Decommissioning and Restoration Plans to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The Decommissioning and Restoration Plan shall be informed by up-to-date ecological surveys and include traffic management requirements to manage the HGV and contractor movements affecting the public highway network.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and the circumstances of the use and to ensure the long term management of and ecological features retained and created by the development and in the interests of the significance of the heritage assets, their setting and the wider landscape.

FINISH OF STRUCTURES

5. Prior to their installation; full details (including the RAL colour) of the finish and colour of all permanent structures, containers, compound features, equipment, fencing and CCTV poles, and support frames for the solar panels hereby approved have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of amenity and the appearance of the site.

AMS

6. No development, including site clearance, shall commence until; an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) prepared by an arboricultural consultant providing comprehensive details of construction works in relation to trees has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All works shall subsequently be carried out in strict accordance with the approved details. In particular, the method statement must provide the following:
 - A specification for protective fencing to trees during both demolition and construction phases which complies with BS5837:2012 and a plan indicating the alignment of the protective fencing.
 - A specification for scaffolding and ground protection within tree protection zones in accordance with British Standard 5837:2012.
 - A schedule of tree works conforming to British Standard 3998:2010.
 - Details of the works requiring arboricultural supervision to be carried out by the developer's arboricultural consultant, including details of the frequency of supervisory visits and procedure for notifying the Local Planning Authority of the findings of the supervisory visits.

Reason: In the interest of tree protection and retentions, and to ensure that as far as possible the work is carried out in accordance with current best practice and section 197 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

ARCHAEOLOGY 1

7. No development shall commence until; a detailed Archaeological Mitigation Strategy has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The strategy shall include details of:
 - Areas to be preserved in situ; and
 - Areas for further investigation, including on-site and off-site work, including the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval in writing.

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To enable the recording of any features of archaeological interest.

ARCHAEOLOGY 2

8. No development shall commence until:

- a. A written programme of archaeological investigation, which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and
- b. The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.

LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN & LEMP

9. No development shall commence until; a detailed Landscape Masterplan, including additional woodland planting, and Landscape Ecological Management Plan (LEMP), have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These shall include:
 - Details of all proposed trees, woodland, hedgerow and shrub planting;
 - Species schedules, planting densities and establishment methods;
 - Specific details for landscape planting, including measures which support early establishment and growth, to provide screening of the development for M4 motorway users.
 - Details of woodland belt planting and habitat connectivity measures;
 - Details of hedgerow enhancement and gapping-up works;
 - Management prescriptions for a minimum period of 40 years;
 - Monitoring arrangements and remedial measures;
 - Details of replacement planting for any failed trees or planting;
 - Details of the number, design and locations of ecological enhancement features including bat boxes, bird boxes, reptile features and hedgehog houses and bee banks, and
 - Long term objectives and targets, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules for each ecological feature within the development, together with a mechanism for monitoring success of the management prescriptions, incorporating review and necessary adaptive management to attain targets.

The approved scheme shall thereafter be implemented and maintained in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To mitigate the landscape and visual effects of the development and to mitigate an impact on highway safety from glint/glare effects.

LANDSCAPING IMPLEMENTED

10. All soft landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the date on which any part of the development becomes first operational or the completion of the development whichever is the sooner. All shrubs, trees and hedge planting shall be maintained free from weeds and shall be protected from damage by vermin and stock. Any trees or plants within the first five years of planting,

which die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority (as part of approved LEMP or otherwise). All hard landscaping shall also be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a programme to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features.

CEMP

11. No development shall commence until; a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan shall include details of the avoidance, mitigation and protective measures to be implemented before and during the construction phase, including but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Identification of ecological protection areas/buffer zones and tree root protection areas and details of physical means of protection, e.g. exclusion fencing;
- A full specification and method for the installation of perimeter fencing, access roads, internal & field access/tracks and passing places along with details of any no-dig specification and the extent of the area which will require a no-dig method. Please also provide further details with regard to the widening of the access track within the buffer zone of a ASNW (Ancient Semi Natural Woodland). Clarification on which woodland this refers to along with detailed plans to show the buffer zone along with Flaxlands Lane which is described as transecting the buffer zone.
- Working method statements for protected/priority species, such as great crested newts, nesting birds, water voles and reptiles;
- Mitigation strategies already agreed with the local planning authority prior to determination, such as for bats, skylarks and nesting birds, and reptiles; this should comprise the preconstruction/construction related elements of strategies only;
- Work schedules for activities with specific timing requirements in order to avoid/reduce potential harm to ecological receptors; including details of when a licensed ecologist and/or ecological clerk of works (ECoW) shall be present on site; and
- Key personnel, responsibilities and contact details (including Site Manager and ecologist/ECoW).

Development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure adequate protection and mitigation for ecological receptors prior to and during construction, and that works are undertaken in line with current best practice and industry standards and are supervised by a suitably licensed and competent professional ecological consultant where applicable.

SKYLARK MITIGATION

12. No development shall commence until; a Skylark Mitigation Strategy has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme will align with recommendations in Flaxlands Solar: Outline Skylark Mitigation Plan (April 2026. AECOM. Project No. 60727989) and shall provide details of the avoidance, mitigation and protective measures to be implemented before and during the construction phase, including but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Details of the location, number, size and distribution of Skylark plots;
- Details of habitat management prescriptions to maintain suitable breeding conditions; and
- Long-term management and monitoring arrangements.

The development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the approved mitigation strategies.

Reason: To ensure adequate protection, mitigation and compensation.

HMMP

13. No development shall commence until; a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP), prepared in accordance with the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The HMMP shall include:

- a non-technical summary;
- the roles and responsibilities of the people or organisation(s) delivering the HMMP;
- the planned habitat creation and enhancement works to create or improve habitat to achieve the biodiversity net gain in accordance with the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan and schedule for implementation;
- the management measures to maintain habitat in accordance with the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan for a period of 30 years from the completion of development; and
- the monitoring methodology and specification of a Monitoring Pack (to include but not exclusively up to date Management Actions Logs, Habitat Condition Assessment Reports, metric calculation; and corresponding post intervention Habitat Map) which shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority in years 2 (two) 5 (five) 10 (ten) 15 (fifteen) 20 (twenty) and 30 (thirty) of the Maintenance Period.

The created and/or enhanced habitat shall be managed and maintained in accordance with the statutory HMMP at all times thereafter.

Reason: To ensure the development delivers a biodiversity net gain on site in accordance with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

CTMP

14. No development shall commence until; a Construction Transport Management Plan (CTMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The Plan shall include:

- a highways condition survey of Flaxlands Lane and any other agreed construction traffic routes has been carried out and submitted to the Local Planning Authority.
- Construction vehicle routing arrangements;
- Numbers and types of HGVs anticipated throughout the construction period;
- Measures to manage HGV movements along Flaxlands Lane;
- Details of any temporary traffic management measures required at the junction of Flaxlands Lane and Greatfield Road;
- Construction staff parking arrangements;
- Wheel cleaning facilities;
- Delivery hours;
- Loading, unloading and storage of plant and materials;
- Banksman arrangements where necessary;
- Procedures for abnormal incidents and road obstruction.
- Measures to reduce and manage the emission of noise, vibration, dirt and dust during the construction and decommissioning phases of the development;
- Details of any cutting or other processing of building materials on site;
- A scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from demolition and construction works;
- The location and use of generators and temporary site accommodation;
- Details of temporary construction site lighting
- Where piling is required, this must be continuous flight auger piling wherever practicable to minimise impacts

The approved Plan shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in accordance with the approved Plan without the prior written permission of the Local Planning Authority.

Following completion of the construction phase a further highways condition survey shall be undertaken and any damage attributable to construction traffic shall be repaired in accordance with a programme agreed with the Local Highway Authority.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and the free flow of traffic on the local highway network during the construction phase of the development.

HIGHWAYS WORKS DETAILS

15. No development shall commence until; detailed drawings of all temporary and permanent highway works including passing bays, access improvements, visibility splays and associated drainage works, along with a timetable for their implementation have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The

development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and timetable.

The approved visibility splays shall be provided before the first use of that access and thereafter maintained free from obstruction at all times the access is in use.

Within six months of completion of the construction phase of development; all temporary highway works shall be removed and the highway restored in accordance with a scheme first approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and to ensure appropriate highway infrastructure.

PASSING BAYS

16. No development shall commence (excluding site access works) until the approved temporary passing bays have been constructed and made available for use. These passing bays shall be retained and maintained for the duration of the construction period.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety.

SURFACE WATER STRATEGY

17. No development shall commence until; a detailed surface water drainage strategy for the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The submitted drainage strategy shall:

- Be based on sustainable drainage principles and accord with the Non-Statutory Technical Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems;
- Include the results of site-specific investigations, including infiltration testing undertaken in accordance with BRE 365 and assessment of groundwater levels;
- demonstrate that runoff rates and volumes will be appropriately controlled and provide a minimum 30% betterment over existing greenfield runoff rates;
- provide details of any conveyance, infiltration, attenuation and discharge features, together with supporting calculations and drawings;
- demonstrate the management of the first 5mm of rainfall on site without discharge to the receiving system;
- include exceedance flow routing for events up to and including the 1 in 100 year rainfall event plus an appropriate allowance for climate change; and
- demonstrate that finished floor levels will be set above the design flood level associated with the approved drainage scheme.
- details of the implementation, maintenance and management of the surface water drainage scheme

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved drainage strategy.

Reason: To ensure satisfactory management of surface water drainage, reduce flood risk and secure sustainable drainage in the interests of the amenity and safety of the site and surrounding area.

HYDROGEOLOGICAL RISK ASSESSMENT

18. No development shall commence until; a Hydrogeological Risk Assessment (HRA) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The HRA must be prepared by a suitably qualified hydrogeologist and include the following as a minimum:

- Assessment of potential risks to groundwater arising from the proposed development.
- Include an updated site conceptual model identifying potential pollutant sources groundwater flow pathways, and sensitive receptors.
- Provide a tiered risk assessment (screening, generic quantitative, and detailed site-specific evaluation).
- Identify mitigation measures.

Development shall proceed in accordance with the approved HRA, and any mitigation measures identified therein, unless otherwise agreed in writing, by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any potentially contaminated effluent in the event of a pollution incident does not pose an unacceptable risk to the water environment in line with paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

EMERGENCY PLAN FOR POLLUTION CONTROL IN EVENT OF BATTERY INCIDENT FIRE

19. Prior to installation of battery energy storage system units on the site, a detailed method statement and emergency plan for pollution control in the event of, and remediation following, a battery fire incident shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- The pollution control methods used in case of a fire, such as how and when valves will be closed to ensure firewater is stored on site and ensuring there is sufficient capacity within the system if needed.
- How and where contaminated surface water, materials and drainage infrastructure will be sampled, managed and remediated/replaced following a fire incident to ensure no contamination enters the environment when normal operation resumes.
- A verification plan providing details of the data that will be collected and provided in order to demonstrate that the works set out in the remediation strategy are complete.

The scheme shall be implemented as approved in the event of a fire incident and any subsequent amendments shall be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any potentially contaminated effluent does not pose an unacceptable risk to the water environment in line with paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

DISPOSAL OF SURFACE WATER IN THE EVENT OF FIRE

20. Prior to installation of battery energy storage system units on the site, a final scheme to dispose of surface water for the battery storage area(s) in the event of a fire shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The final drainage design should demonstrate that in the event of a battery fire, all firefighting effluent can be retained on site with no discharge to surface or ground waterbodies. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: To ensure that any potentially contaminated effluent in the event of a pollution incident does not pose an unacceptable risk to the water environment in line with paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

NOISE

21. All plant shall be so sited, designed and maintained so that the rating level does not exceed 5dB below the existing background level, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, as measured and assessed in accordance with BS4142 2014 +A12019 at the nearest noise sensitive property. A post development noise assessment shall be carried out within 3 months of completion of the development to confirm compliance with the above. Any additional steps required to achieve compliance shall be taken, as necessary.

Reason: In the interest of preserving residential amenity.

LIGHTING

22. No external permanent light fixture or fitting shall be installed within the application site until details including height, design, location, intensity has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The submitted details will demonstrate how the proposed lighting will impact on bat habitat compared to the existing situation. The lighting installation shall then be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

The plans will be in accordance with the appropriate Environmental Zone standards set out by the Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP) Guidance Notes on the Avoidance of Obtrusive Light (GN01/2021) and Guidance note GN08/23 "Bats and artificial lighting at night", issued by the Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals.

Reason: To protect the rural character of the area and wildlife interests.

CONSTRUCTION HOURS

23. No construction or demolition work shall take place on Sundays or Public Holidays or outside the hours of 0800 to 18:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays.

Reason: In the interest of preserving residential amenity.

INFORMATIVES:

Public Rights of Way

The applicant is advised that nothing in this permission authorises the diversion, obstruction, stopping up or closure of any Public Right of Way crossing or adjoining the site. Public Rights of Way must remain open and available for public use unless and until a legal order has been made and confirmed. The granting of planning permission does not authorise any interference with a Public Right of Way. The applicant is advised to contact Wiltshire Council's Rights of Way and Countryside Team before commencing any works that may affect a Public Right of Way.

Land Drainage Consent

Wiltshire Council is the Land Drainage Authority under the Land Drainage Act 1991. Land Drainage Consent is required if a development proposes to discharge flow into an ordinary watercourse or carry out work within 8m of an ordinary watercourse. An ordinary watercourse is a watercourse that does not form part of a Main River. The term watercourse includes all rivers and streams and all ditches, drains, cuts, culverts, dikes, sluices, sewers (other than public sewers within the meaning of the Water Industry Act 1991) and passages through which water flows. Wiltshire Council's Land Drainage Byelaws and guidance on Land Drainage Consent applications are available from the Council's website

Land Ownership

The applicant is reminded that planning permission does not override private property rights. This permission does not grant any right of access to, or permission to carry out works on, land outside the applicant's ownership or control. The applicant is responsible for ensuring that all necessary land ownership, access and other legal rights are secured.

Bats

There is a low risk that bats may occur at the development site. Bat roosts are protected all times by the Conservation of Habitats and Species 2017 (as amended) even when bats are

temporarily absent because, being creatures of habit, they usually return to the same roost site every year. Planning permission for development does not provide a defence against prosecution under this legislation or substitute for the need to obtain a bat licence if an offence is likely. If bats or evidence of bats is found during the works, the applicant is advised to stop work and follow advice from an independent ecologist or the applicant is advised to follow the advice of a professional ecologist or to contact Natural England's Batline through the internet.

Nesting Birds

All British birds, their nests and eggs are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 while birds are nesting, building nests and sitting on eggs. The applicant is advised to check any structure or vegetation capable of supporting breeding birds and delay removing or altering such features until after young birds have fledged. Damage to extensive areas that could contain nests/breeding birds should be undertaken outside the breeding season. This season is usually taken to be the period between 1st March and 31st August but some species are known to breed outside these limits.

Great Crested Newts

The scheme will be operating under a District Level Licence (DLL) for Great Crested Newts. Great Crested Newts are protected under Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 which implements the EC Directive 92/43/EEC in the United Kingdom, and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Planning permission for development does not provide a defence against prosecution under this legislation.

Environment Agency Advice to applicant

Further BESS guidance

In line with [Renewable and low carbon energy - GOV.UK](#):

- Applicants are encouraged to engage with Local Fire & Rescue Services to ensure issues of siting and location of BESS are dealt with before applications are made. Ideally this should be done before submitting a planning application.
- Local planning authorities are encouraged to engage with Local Fire & Rescue Services and to refer to [guidance produced by the National Fire Chiefs Council](#) for consideration when determining applications.
- Applicants will also need to comply with relevant Building Regulations in [Part B](#).

They require applicants to provide suitable access for the fire service.

Applicants should also refer to guidance published by The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: [Health and safety in grid scale electrical energy storage systems](#), which provides guidance on a number of topics related to health and safety including on 'Design and planning' that provides guidance on battery technology, site selection, site layout and

emergency planning. It also includes a section on 'Decommissioning and end of life', including dealing with batteries that have come to the end of their use in the BESS.

Management of end of life industrial batteries

Battery energy storage systems (BESS) facilities are not regulated under the Environmental Permitting Regulations regime.

However, battery storage falls within the scope of the UK's producer responsibility regime for batteries and other waste legislation. This creates additional lifecycle liabilities which must be understood and factored into project costs.

Batteries have the potential to cause harm to the environment if stored inappropriately e.g. subject to a fire as the chemical contents escape from the casing. When a battery within a battery storage unit ceases to operate, it will need to be removed from site and dealt with in compliance with waste legislation. The party discarding the battery will have a waste duty of care under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to ensure that this takes place. Many types of batteries are classed as hazardous waste which creates additional requirements for storage and transport.

BESS water containment calculations

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the expected firefighting water volumes used by the fire service and potential extreme rainfall event volumes are reflected correctly in the drainage strategy. This is to ensure there is effective containment to protect the water environment