

Stourhead Solar

Stourhead Gardens, Wiltshire

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Rev D



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Swan Paul Partnership Ltd is instructed by Aardvark to prepare this landscape and visual assessment LVIA. This assessment relates to the proposed development of a solar photovoltaic array together with infrastructure and landscaping within 1.48 hectares of land and to the south of Stourhead Gardens, Wiltshire. The site is situated within the Wiltshire Council area.
- 1.1.2 This report was undertaken in September 2025 and was carried out by John Burgess, Director at Swan Paul Partnership Ltd, and Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.1.3 Throughout this document measurements are provided of distances to and from the site of various elements. For the avoidance of doubt this should be taken to mean the site centre, located at grid reference 377618E and 133632N.

1.2 Scope of Assessment

- 1.2.1 The report will consider the potential impact of these proposals, if any, on the surrounding areas both on views and the landscape and if necessary, recommend appropriate mitigation. Its purpose is to inform and enhance the design of the proposed development and assist the Local Authority in its consideration of the proposal. It should be noted this report is a landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA as described in the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment's 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVA)', third edition released April 2013.)
- 1.2.2 The objectives of the assessment are to:
 - Describe and evaluate the landscape and visual amenity of the site and surrounding area which may be affected by the proposed development.
 - Identify and consider the effects on landscape or visual amenity, associated with the proposed development.
 - Set out mitigation measures which could be incorporated into the scheme design and are proposed in order to avoid, reduce or remedy potential adverse effects.
 - Describe any enhancements of the landscape or visual amenity incorporated into the design of the proposed development.
 - To enable the Determining Authority to make a decision on the planning application based on the objective analysis of the above factors.
- 1.2.3 A detailed study area with a radius of 4km has been selected for this study.
- 1.2.4 This landscape assessment report is supported by the following drawings, included in Appendix Section 8. All photographs were taken during the site assessments, undertaken during October 2025. The drawings are:
 - **Plan SPP01 Location Plan**
 - **Plan SPP02 Landscape Assessment - Designations**
 - **Plan SPP03 Landscape Assessment – Wiltshire Planning Explorer**

- **Plan SPP04 BAP Habitats Assessment**
- **Plan SPP05 Heritage Assessment**
- **Plan SPP06 Zone of Theoretical Visibility and Viewpoint Locations**
- **Plan SPP07 Landscape Mitigation Plan**

2.0 Assessment Methodology

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The methodology used for assessing the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development is based on the recommendations and guidance published by The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment's 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA)', third edition released April 2013. The guidance is not prescriptive; it concentrates on principles and process but does not provide a detailed 'recipe' that is to be followed in every case. Swan Paul has therefore used this guidance to formulate a methodology which is appropriate for purpose.
- 2.1.2 For Non-EIA Landscape Assessment and Visual Impact Assessment:
In carrying out non-EIA assessments, the same principles and process as EIA assessment may be applied but, in so doing, it is not required to establish whether the effects arising are or are not significant, given that the exercise is not being undertaken for EIA purposes. The reason is that should a landscape professional apply non-EIA principles and processes in carrying out an assessment and then go on to determine that certain effects would likely be significant, given the term 'significant' is enshrined in EIA Regulations, such a judgement could trigger the requirement for a formal EIA. As this study is therefore a non-EIA assessment and not a supporting chapter to a full EIA report, Swan Paul has used the guidelines to establish if any effects will be 'substantial', rather than 'significant'. It is therefore very important to establish how substantial the harm to any landscape or visual resource will be when determining potential adverse effects. This is determined by considering the sensitivity of the receptor in relation to the magnitude of change brought about by the development, and how this might be moderated by mitigation measures.
- 2.1.3 In this landscape and visual assessment the landscape and visual receptors need to be identified:
- *Landscape receptors* include the elements that physically form that landscape, its perceptual qualities and character.
 - *Visual receptors* are the people who will be affected by changes in views or visual amenity at different places.
- 2.1.4 The assessment requires a combination of objective analysis and subjective professional judgment and is undertaken in two stages; these are the desk study and the field survey. The desk study includes reference to other studies and landscape assessments, including those undertaken at a national, regional and local level. It involves analysis and evaluation of the baseline, including landscape features, landscape character, and views available of the site and the effects on them likely to arise from the proposed development. In outline, the assessment involves:
- A site survey and inspection of publicly accessible viewpoints with views of the site, including a photographic survey.
 - A desk study to review landscape designations; a review of published landscape characterisation, to define areas of distinct character, with a description of their distinguishing characteristics and qualities.

- An evaluation of the landscape of the site and its context and setting, and their sensitivity, or ability to accommodate the changes associated with the proposed development.
- The identification of potential landscape and visual effects.
- Consideration of mitigation and enhancement measures to avoid, reduce or remedy detrimental effects on the landscape or on views, as far as is possible without full consideration of magnitude and scale.

2.1.5 Scale of Effect

The scale of the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed development is determined by the susceptibility to the changes arising from the development proposal (the sensitivity), and the degree of change this will potentially create in the landscape or view to which they will be subjected (the magnitude). GLVIA3 suggests that levels of these two factors be established from none through to negligible, low, medium and high which are then considered in combination to arrive at a scale of impact. The assessment will establish a level of effect that is judged to be the most substantial towards the top of the scale and the least substantial towards the lower end. The assessment text will provide supporting information on whether the levels of effect can be considered **very adverse** for the landscape or visual resource in question, or not. In general, the former is likely to be the case for effects that are judged to be **moderate/ substantial** (adverse) or **substantial** (adverse). The effects will also be assessed after any mitigation has been applied to reduce or offset the change.

2.2 Landscape Baseline Methodology

- 2.2.1 Landscape receptors include elements of the physical landscape or landscape fabric, for example vegetation, boundaries, landform, land use and other landscape features. These are combinations of features and patterns, which give rise to particular characteristics or landscape character, and which may be affected by the proposed development.
- 2.2.2 The potential landscape receptors include:
- Topography which provides a backdrop or obscures views.
 - Existing land, water bodies and vegetation are part of the setting of the site and the selected study area.
 - The value of landscape receptors can also reflect areas with landscape designations such as National Parks, NL's, SSSI's etc.
 - Landscapes that help define regional and local landscape character.
- 2.2.3 The landscape character baseline is based on fieldwork observations and reference to other landscape studies and landscape character assessments. Assessments are ideally prepared at different scales that should fit together as a nested series or a hierarchy of landscape character types and/or areas, such that each level of assessment adds more detail to the one above. This study will use the regionally assessed county level study together with site level observations.
- 2.2.4 Landscape Value
- As part of the baseline description the GLVIA 3 guidelines state that the value of the potentially affected landscapes should be considered in order to help inform the sensitivity of the receptor and its susceptibility to change. This should consider the value not only of the site and its

immediate environs, but also the other landscape receptors considered within the study area. Landscapes or their component parts may be valued at the community, local, national or international levels. A review of existing landscape designations is usually a starting point, but the value attached to undesignated landscapes also needs to be considered. This assessment therefore examines the landscape and considers the potential value using the following terminology:

- **Excellent Value** - Areas of very high-quality landscape, probably within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Parks, but not exclusively so, having outstanding scenic values as well as quality managed landscapes. They may be nationally important in historical or cultural terms. Visitors and tourists will make special journeys to view and perhaps stay.
- **Good Value** - These areas are of particularly outstanding regional or local quality and may have a designated protection by the planning authority for example conservation areas, heritage listings, SSSI's or other national habitat designations. They will also be of high scenic quality with well-managed landscapes.
- **Average Value** - Landscapes that have an attractive quality, are unspoilt and are well maintained and enjoyed on a local level. Unlikely to have any designations.
- **Fair Value** - These areas are landscapes that have been changed and are unlikely to match the local character. Possibly related to urban areas or spoilt by adjacent developments.
- **Poor Value** - Landscapes that have been neglected or run down that have very little character and may need restoring. Any development may enable an improvement to such a landscape, by giving it a positive use.

2.3 Visual Baseline Methodology

2.3.1 The GLVIA 3 states that visual receptors are always people, and the baseline studies will identify some of the people within the study area who will be affected by the changes in views and visual amenity as defined by specific viewpoints. The viewpoints should be assessed for their susceptibility to change, and the value attached to particular views. The nature of views should also be considered in terms of whether they are direct, glimpsed or oblique and whether they will have seasonal variation.

2.3.2 Desk Study

The desk study includes computer studies to test the visibility of the proposed development. A computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is prepared to identify the general locations and extent of the visual envelope for each part of the proposed development. This only uses terrain data and does not take into account potential screening features such as vegetation and structures. From this plan (and in line with GLVA 3) a representative selection of viewpoints has been chosen to give a fair reflection of public views that may be possible from the surrounding area. These viewpoints are then tested at the site analysis stage to see how conditions 'on the ground' relate to the ZTV plan and whether a particular viewpoint is suitable for inclusion in the analysis.

2.3.3 Photography

The photographs used in this assessment follow best practice set out in the *Landscape*

Institute's guidance TGN 06/19 Visual Representation of development proposals (as updated). (sept 2019). The guide recommends using a lens with a focal length equivalent to 50 mm for a 35 mm Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera, and a horizontal field of view of a little under 40 degrees. The camera used for the assessment photography was a Canon EOS 1200D digital SLR camera; photographs were taken with a focal length equivalent to a focal length of approximately 50mm on a 35 mm SLR camera with a viewing height of 1.5m.

3.0 Policy Context

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This assessment will consider the national, regional and local planning policy which relates to landscape and visual matters and is of relevance to the proposed development at this particular site.

3.2 National Planning Policy Framework 2024

- 3.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The specific policies of the NPPF that relate to issues of landscape character and visual impact are set out below. At section 15 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment' there are paragraphs of the NPPF that identify how development proposals should respond to their location and setting. Those of relevance for this site and development proposal include:

Paragraph 165 - At a national level, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out policy in relation to planning for climate change. Paragraph 165, with respect to the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, states that *"plans should provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, and their future re-powering and life extension, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts)".*

Paragraph 187: Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

Paragraph 188: Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

Paragraph 189: Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.

3.3 The Local Plan

3.3.1 THE LOCAL PLAN

The current Local Plan is the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted in 2015.

3.3.2 Local Plan policies relevant to landscape and visual matters at this site include:

- *Policy 42: Standalone Renewable Energy Installations*
Proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site specific constraints. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate how impacts on the following factors have been satisfactorily assessed, including any cumulative effects, and taken into account:
 - i. *The landscape, particularly in and around AONBs*
 - ii. *The Western Wiltshire Green Belt*
 - iii. *The New Forest National Park*
 - iv. *Biodiversity*
 - v. *The historic environment including the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting.*
 - vi. *Use of the local transport network*
 - vii. *Residential amenity including noise, odour, visual amenity and safety.*
 - viii. *Best and most versatile agricultural land.*

Of greatest relevance to this proposal are items i, iv, v and vii.

- *Policy 50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity*
All development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species and habitats throughout the lifetime of the development.
 - i. *Biodiversity enhancement*
All development should seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity. Major development in particular must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to restore, enhance and create valuable habitats, ecological networks and ecosystem services.
 - ii. *Local sites*

Sustainable development will avoid direct and indirect impacts upon local (biodiversity) sites through sensitive site location and layout, and by maintaining sufficient buffers and ecological connectivity with the wider environment.

- *Policy 51: Landscape*
Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures. Proposals should be informed by and sympathetic to the distinctive character areas identified in the relevant Landscape Character Assessment(s) and any other relevant assessments and studies. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures: Development or land-use changes likely to have an adverse effect, either directly or indirectly, on:
 - 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 and the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the urban fringe.*
 - iv. Visually sensitive skylines, soils, geological and topographical features.*
 - v. Landscape features of cultural, historic and heritage value.*
 - vi. Important views and visual amenity.*
 - vii. Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*
 - viii. Landscape functions including places to live, work, relax and recreate.*
- *Policy 58: Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment.*
Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment. Designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance, including:
 - i. Nationally significant archaeological remains*
 - ii. World Heritage Sites within and adjacent to Wiltshire*
 - iii. Buildings and structures of special architectural or historic interest*
 - iv. The special character or appearance of conservation areas*
 - v. Historic parks and gardens*
 - vi. Important landscapes, including registered battlefields and townscapes.*
Distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved, and where possible enhanced.

3.4 The Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape

- 3.4.1 The site is within the National Landscape Area and development within it is guided by the Cranbourne Chase National Landscape Partnership Plan 2025-2030.

An area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), now known as a National Landscape is land protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act). It protects the land to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. The Partnership Plan 2025-2030 states (at 4.1) the special characteristics and features that make the National Landscape special, with regards to landscape are:

- *A peaceful, tranquil, deeply rural area; largely ‘unspoilt’ and maintained as a living agricultural landscape.*
- *The scale of the landscape is often grand and dramatic with the ‘intensity’ of landscape character almost palpable.*
- *The open downland offers wide expansive skies, dominant skylines, dramatic escarpments and panoramic views.*
- *Unity of the underlying chalk expressed in the distinctive and sometimes dramatically sculpted landforms, open vistas, escarpments and coombes.*
- *A rich land use history with many ancient hilltop forts and barrows.*
- *A bountiful mosaic of habitats playing host to a myriad of wildlife.*
- *Overlain by a woodland mosaic – including the eye-catching hill-top copses, veteran parkland trees and avenues, extensive areas of wooded downland and ancient forest together with more recent game coverts.*
- *Three major chalk river valleys with their individual distinctiveness.*
- *Distinctive settlement pattern along the valleys and vales, and small Medieval villages along the scarp spring line.*
- *Local vernacular building styles include the patterns of knapped flint, brick, cob, clunch, clay tiles and straw thatch.*
- *Strong sense of place and local distinctiveness represented by the use of local building materials and small-scale vernacular features such as the sunken lanes and distinctive black and white signposts.*
- *Strong sense of remoteness.*
- *Expanse of dark night skies and ability to see the Milky Way.*

The Ambition for the landscape within the NL is stated as: *The unique character, tranquillity and special qualities of the landscapes in the Cranborne Chase National Landscape are conserved and enhanced for future generations. There will be a widespread understanding of the area’s special qualities, and informed decision-making will strengthen these qualities. When change happens, it is to be consistent with the character of the landscape and the setting of the area. Everyone will take opportunities to restore landscape features that require it.*

3.4.2 Policies on Planning and Development of relevance to this type of development include:

- *Landscape: Policy LAN2*
Proposals that are likely to impact on, or create change in, the landscape of the National Landscape must seek to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape with reference to key documents such as the 2024 Cranborne Chase National Landscape Integrated Landscape Character Assessment, the 2018 Chase and Chalke Landscape Character Assessment, the 2008 Historic Landscape Characterisations and National Landscape Partnership guidance documents:
 - *There should be a presumption against the loss of key characteristics identified in the landscape character assessments.*

- *Degraded distinctive landscapes and landscape features should be restored.*
 - *Positive landscape change should be promoted to landowners, managers, government and all those with an influence over land.*
 - *Planting and amenity projects should conserve and enhance landscape character.*
 - *Opportunities should be pursued to underground and remove visually intrusive power and telecommunications lines, poles, and masts, and other incongruous features, especially where they detract from the Special Qualities.*
- *Nature Recovery: Policy NE1 Biodiversity in the Cranborne Chase National Landscape should be conserved and enhanced by establishing a coherent and resilient nature recovery network across the designated area and in its setting.*
- *Climate Change: Policy CL1*
Greenhouse gas emissions should be minimised through a range of measures, including (of relevance to this proposal) ;
 - *Generating energy from low carbon sources only in a manner consistent with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the National Landscape designation.*
 - *The document notes at 6.12 - Some technologies, such as large-scale, commercial wind turbines or field scale solar farms, are not appropriate in Cranborne Chase National Landscape. Without sensitive location and good design, their use in the National Landscape may well harm the special character of the area, for example through their scale and through the introduction of extraneous, and industrial elements into the landscape.*
- *Historic and Cultural Heritage: Policy HE3*
Proposals that are likely to impact on the historic environment and cultural heritage of the National Landscape should be compatible with, and seek to further, the conservation and enhancement of these heritage assets and their setting.
- *Planning and Transport: Policy PT1*
All development and transport policies and proposals in the National Landscape and its setting must seek to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area.
- *Planning and Transport: Policy PT4*
A landscape-led approach should be applied to development and transport proposals in the National Landscape and its setting, proportionate to the type and scale of development being proposed, whereby proposals:
 - *Address the natural beauty of the National Landscape as primary consideration at all stages of the development process (including design), from initial conception through to implementation;*
 - *Address all the factors that contribute to the natural beauty of the area;*
 - *Protect and/or enhance key views to and from the National Landscape;*
 - *Address access to natural beauty, including the character of the public rights of way network and its role within wider green infrastructure;*
 - *Reflect and enhance the character of the local area;*

- *Avoid adverse effects where possible and, if adverse effects cannot be avoided, minimise them;*
- *Seek opportunities to enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape; and*
- *Deliver substantially more beneficial effects than adverse effects for the natural beauty of the National Landscape. This landscape-led approach is particularly important for major development.*

3.4.3 Cranbourne Chase AONB Management Partnership Position Statement 9 – FIELD SCALE PHOTOVOLTAIC PANELS (2016).

This statement is still supported by the National Landscape Management Partnership and is a document of relevance for this application. The document gives further clarity on what the management plan means when it states that ‘Field Scale’ development is of concern.

Scale

‘Field scale’ means hectares are committed to PVs rather than just a couple of dozen panels mounted on the ground. Furthermore, field scale PVs usually mean the output is in the ‘power station’ range of megawatts rather than kilowatts. The AONB view is, therefore, that a proposal of that scale should be treated in the way any power station in the countryside would be treated.

It seems to the AONB that the primary use of a field that is covered with PVs is no longer agriculture but power generation. There is, therefore, an additional concern that the field could then be regarded as in an ‘industrial’ use and hence able to move to other industrial uses under permitted development rights.

Appearance

In terms of small-scale ground mounted PV panels, the appearance can be an issue; the glassy or glossy ‘slate roof’ appearance from the front, and the rather utilitarian, industrial, side and back views that look a bit like temporary stadium seating. Neither integrates well with our local landscapes although they do have the benefit of being considerably lower than wind turbines.

The unnatural appearance of the glassy mass of field scale PV panels is readily perceived over 10km way. When viewed from a hilltop some PV 2 Field Scale Photovoltaic Panels arrays on low ground can give an appearance of a river or lake. However, those on a hillside can appear as an unusual but consistent shine and be particularly out of place, incongruous, and intrusive.

Manufacturers and developers assert glint, glare, and shine should not be a major issue with good quality PVs, although there may be some when they are wet and the angle of the sun is low. However, the experience of this AONB’s professional staff is that if a field scale array is not fully screened it can be visible as an incongruous glassy intrusion in the rural scene from distances well in excess of 10km. The overall ‘glassiness’ or ‘blackness’ of the ‘front’ of a field of PVs all year round is another visual concern, along with the unmitigated industrial appearance of the structure of the arrays. The connection to the electricity grid, and the associated converter / substation buildings, may entail additional visually intrusive poles / pylons.

Conclusions

*The purpose of AONB designation is ‘conserving and enhancing natural beauty’, and AONBs ‘have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty’. Those are significant and weighty criteria to balance against the general aspiration for renewable energy, particularly as applications for development proposals should consider developing outside the designated area or meeting the need in some other way [NPPF paragraphs 115 & 116]. In short, PVs on roofs of agricultural buildings, **yes** [subject to the usual Conservation Area / Listed Building caveats]; however, for field scale PVs the AONB Partnership’s position is a basic presumption **against** them.*

3.4.4 Cranbourne Chase National Landscape Management Partnership report – Sustaining Landscape Character (June 2025)

This is a simplified guide to the use of landscape character assessment in the planning process; it states:

The Landscape Character Assessment helps identify Key Characteristics, local distinctiveness, and sense of place. This information helps tailor policies and the assessment of development proposals to the characteristics of locations and areas. Not everyone is familiar with the process or use of landscape characterisation, so this booklet seeks to provide both an introduction and sufficient details to identify, and work with, the landscapes of this National Landscape.

The landscape character types and areas are then given in simplified form, however this report will use the full Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB – Integrated landscape Character Assessment (2024).

3.5 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

A National Landscape (AONB) is land protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It protects the land to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Section 85 states:

In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority (other than a devolved Welsh authority) must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

3.6 The Neighbourhood Plan:

3.6.1 The site is within the parish of Stourton with Gasper. The Wiltshire Council website was accessed on 28.08.2025 and the parish was not listed in the ‘Made Plans’ section of the Council’s planning web site for having a current Neighbourhood Plan.

4.0 Baseline Conditions

4.1 Site Context

4.1.1 The site is situated 0.5km to the south west of the village of Stourton in Wiltshire. The village hosts much of the visitor infrastructure for Stourhead Gardens, including the visitor centre, café and car parks. These occupy an extensive area between the site and the village. To the north and west of the site are the Gardens themselves , however extensive woodland to the southern

edge of the gardens borders the visitor area and site. To the south the land is gently undulating and rural with a former airfield now decommissioned and planted with extensive areas of woodland. The land rises gently to the east before rising abruptly at the scarp of White Castle and White Sheet Down. A chalk ridge and part of the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape. The area is more built up to the south where at around 3km there is the A303 and a string of small towns and villages along it such as Mere, Wolverton and Bourton. It is a rural and tranquil location, particularly away from the A303. The location of the site is shown in drawing **SPP01 Site Location Plan**, in Appendix 1 Figures and Plans.

4.1.2 The immediate site environs include:

- The visitor reception facilities for Stourhead Gardens and the Gardens themselves.
- Extensive low undulating and wooded land to the west.
- The downland ridge to the east.
- The gently undulating farmland all around and between the higher areas.
- The B3092 to the east and the A303 to the south.

4.2 Site Assessment



Figure 1 - General view across the site facing north east.

4.2.1 The site consists of a single grass field managed by cutting, and with native species field hedges on its north and east boundaries. The south and west sides have a post and wire fence boundary, but beyond these is new woodland tree planting and mid-distance hedges. A small power transmission line passes across it from east to west and a public footpath STGA7 from south west to north east.

The site slopes gently to the south east with an AOD of 186m in the north west and 180m to the south east. Views from the site include the higher ground of White Sheet Downs to the east, and a few, more distant higher points to the south and east, but otherwise the site is well enclosed at lower levels by the surrounding hedges and trees. Future growth of the new woodland planting around the site is likely to close these off even further.

4.2.2 The opportunities and constraints of the site:

Constraints upon the site include its relative proximity to Stourhead Gardens and the visibility it may have to garden visitors and users of footpath STGA7 which passes through it. Opportunities include the relative isolation of the site away from close residential receptors and the potential for screening that the extensive new woodland planting around it will provide.

4.3 The Landscape Baseline

4.3.1 The methodology for establishing the landscape baseline is described in section 2.2. The landscape resources are shown on plan **SPP02 and 03 Landscape Appraisals**, in the appendices.

4.3.2 National Landscape Character

Natural England (formerly The Countryside Agency) carried out an assessment, published in 1999, to value all England's landscapes and group their characters at a macro level.

The site falls within **Character Areas 133 – Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour**. The key characteristics of the area are:

- A complex mosaic of mixed farming: undulating, lush clay vales dissected by a broken limestone ridge and fringed by Upper Greensand hills and scarps.
- Small irregular and rectilinear pasture fields with hedgerow oak trees and many scattered small broadleaved woodlands.
- Fragmented semi-natural habitats comprised mostly of damp, small grasslands and scrub, and often relict areas of common.
- Predominantly clay surface geology (soils) leading to seasonally high-water table with standing water in fields; many ditches and streams.
- Wooded Upper Greensand scarps and outliers, some with historic houses and parks.
- Broken low limestone ridges with shallow valleys, and steeper valleys around the margins of the area.
- Small villages and hamlets forming nuclei within a patchwork of fields, hedges, woods and trees, mostly derived from medieval settlement and land use.
- Many villages at the foot of the scarps, at river crossing points, on the Greensand spring line, along the limestone ridge and at strategic sites.
- A wide variety of local building materials and techniques, including half timbering, thatch, tile, Todber Freestone and Upper Greensand.
- The Vale of Wardour, characterised by complex geology, rolling topography and a landscape of irregular assarted fields and open late 18th- and early 19th-century large arable fields on the Upper Greensand and dip slope terraces.
- Figure 2: National Landscape Character Type

4.3.3 Statements of Environmental Opportunity of relevance to the site include:

SEO 1: Protect, manage and enhance the diverse but coherent pastoral landscape character of the clay vales, limestone ridge and Greensand hills, their semi- natural grasslands and their woodland and characteristic wildlife, and manage the simple patterns of land use maintained by the long history of agriculture.

For example, by (of relevance):

- *Restoring and strengthening the matrix of connecting landscape and habitat features within a functional farmed environment, such as hedgerows, copses, thickets, streams and ditches, to increase permeability and migratory opportunities for wildlife.*
- *Conserving the pattern of field boundaries with ancient and veteran trees, avoiding further loss, restoring hedgerows and establishing a new generation of hedgerow trees.*
- *Avoiding development that detracts from the character, natural beauty and tranquillity of the NCA and, in as many cases as possible, identifying alternative approaches that enhance and reinforce them.*

SEO 3: Work with the local farming and land management community to maintain the distinctive landscape and natural beauty of the area, enhancing ecosystems and ecosystem services.

For example, by (of relevance):

- *Working with owners and managers of both large and small estates to ensure that the significant positive influence they exert on the landscape is maintained while enabling them to continue adapting to changing economic and farming developments and societal expectations.*
- *Collaborating on measures, at all types and scales of land use, to cope with the impacts of a changing or less predictable climate and weather patterns associated with it.*

4.3.4 These characteristics are fairly ‘broad brush’ assessment of a large area of landscape with many being typical in the study area.

4.3.5 **Local Landscape Character**

The Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB – Integrated landscape Character Assessment (2024) identifies the landscape as falling into eight character types which are then further sub-divided into character areas. Each of the Landscape Character Types has a distinct and relatively homogeneous character that share broadly similar patterns of physical and cultural attributes in terms of geology, topography, drainage patterns, land cover, ecology and historic evolution. They may occur repeatedly in the study area, or in just one place. The site falls at the boundary between Character Type 6 Greensand Terrace and Character Type 7 Greensand Hills.

Character Type 6: Greensand Terrace

The Greensand Terrace landscape types corresponds to the level terraces that lie between the greensand hills and chalk escarpments. The geology has given rise to rich brown earths, and these soils support arable crop production. The large rectangular arable fields which dominate the terrace landscapes are characteristic of Parliamentary enclosure of a probable late 18th/early 19th century date. Calcareous subsoils tend to be found on the edge of the landscape type, closer to the foot of the chalk escarpment and it is here that mixed woodland typically marks the transition and edge of the terrace. The wooded copses provide valuable nesting and feeding habitat for a range of typical farmland bird species, a declining bird group within the UK. Coniferous blocks, planted as game coverts, are typical features of the terrace landscape. Low density, scattered farmsteads characterise settlement and built character. There are two Greensand Terraces within the AONB, the Fovant Terrace and the Kilmington Terrace.

Character Type 7: Greensand Hills

The transition from the clay lowlands to the elevated chalk beyond is marked by a series of greensand hills. These run along the north and south sides of the Vale of Wardour (8A) and along the north-western boundary of the AONB between Penselwood and Warminster. Although composed of Upper Greensand, tributaries of the major rivers have eroded the Greensand to expose underlying older deposits. These hills are characterised by tight valleys, sunken lanes and are typically covered in woodland. The patterns of settlement are also distinctive. Villages are hidden among these hills, focused on the spring line at the junction of the Chalk and Greensand, tucked into the valleys. The hills have historically provided desirable locations for siting large houses and parklands as well as providing strategic sites for fortified settlements and buildings

where they have commanding views over the adjacent lowlands. Views vary between enclosed and framed to open and panoramic.

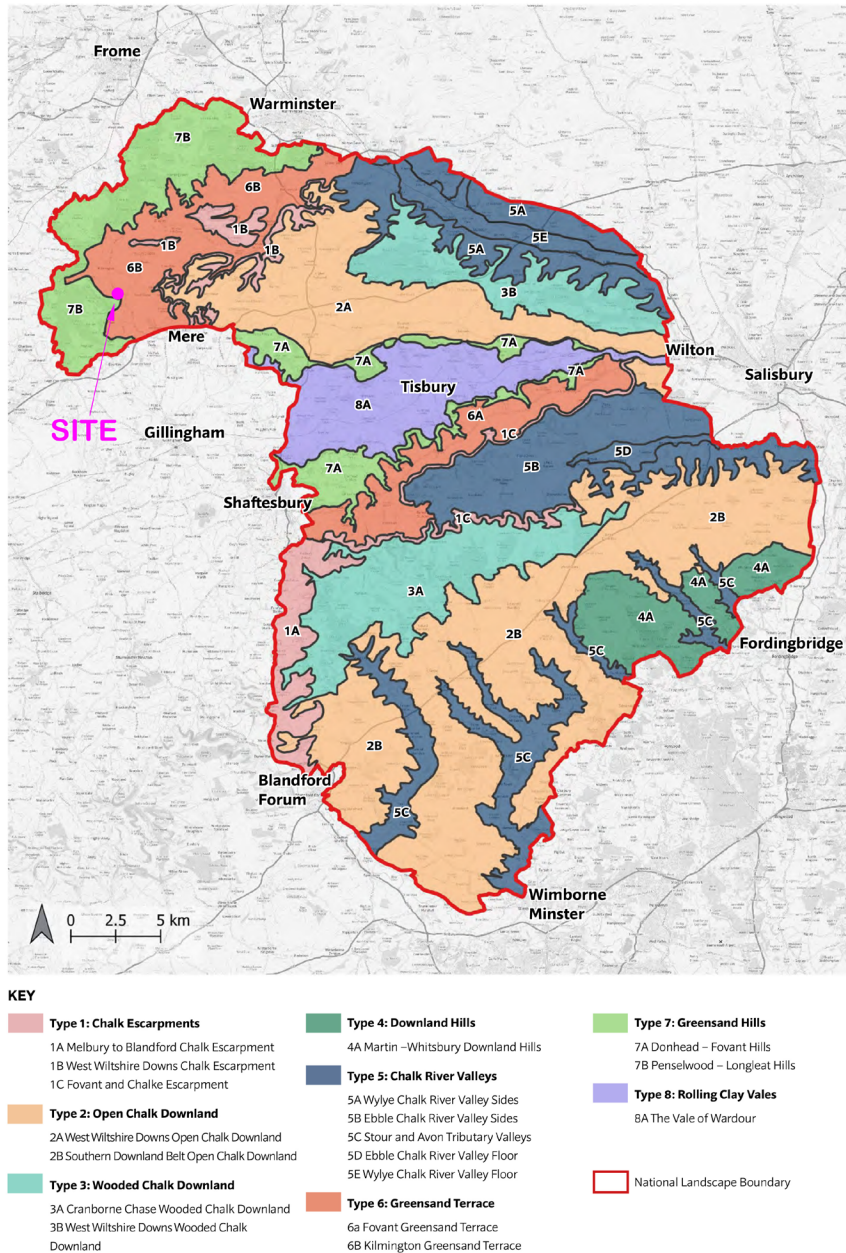


FIGURE 3.1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES AND AREAS

Figure 2 – Landscape Character Types & Areas

4.3.6 Landscape Character Areas: Figure 2 above lists below each landscape character type the landscape character areas within the National Landscape. Each Landscape Character Area has a distinct and recognisable local identity and sense of place.

The site falls on the boundary of character area 6B Kilminster Greensand Terrace and 7B Penselwood Longleat Hills.

4.3.7 Wiltshire Character Area 6B – Kilminster Greensand Terrace

The Kilminster Greensand Terrace (6B) is an open, largely treeless landscape dominated by arable crop production. The character of this landscape is well defined by its relationship with the adjacent West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Escarpment (1B) forming a prominent backdrop, and with the Penselwood – Longleat Greensand Hills (7B) providing a more wooded backdrop to the northwest. This is a simple landscape, appearing uncluttered and offering few distinguishing features – the large-scale regular field units reinforcing the sense of openness and big skies. Settlement is a key feature – the attractive nucleated settlements of the Deverills villages for example found towards the east of the area clustered along the upper Wylfe valley.

Key Characteristics:

- *Gently undulating and shelving terrace of Upper Greensand in the north-west of the National Landscape.*
- *The chalk escarpment to the south-east provides a dramatic backdrop to the terrace, which is also framed by the Greensand Hills to the north and west.*
- *Brown earths have a high agricultural value and support arable crop production.*
- *Medium to large scale field units reflect intensive farming of arable crops. Some smaller fields characterise remaining areas of (largely improved) pasture.*
- *Absence of tree cover contributing to the sense of openness.*
- *Presence of Bronze Age round barrows close to the River Wylfe reflect the survival of remnant areas of pasture.*
- *Medieval settlements including the deserted medieval village at Yarnfield.*
- *Upper reaches of the River Wylfe cross the Greensand terrace, following the line of two geological faults.*
- *Settlement is focused around the River Wylfe (The Deverills and Sutton Veny).*
- *Well served by transport routes with the main A350 and a number of secondary roads crisscrossing the terrace.*

4.3.8 Evaluation – The document states:

'Strength of Character - *the strength of character of the Kilminster Greensand Terrace is perceived to be **moderate**. This is a simple landscape offering few distinctive features due to the extensive coverage of arable crop production which has diluted the landscape structure, though it has some settlement with a stronger character.'*

Current Condition - *This character area has retained its landform features and its intensively farmed character means there are few areas of underused or derelict land. The extent of arable farming has led to the loss of biodiversity and cultural value. For example, there are few semi-natural habitats, many sections of hedgerow have been lost or replaced with post and wire fencing, and there is a general absence of prehistoric earthworks. Settlement, however, is in good condition and is integrated through the consistent use of stone, brick, clay tiles and thatch. Overall landscape condition is judged to be **moderate**.*

Past and Present Change

- *The previous loss (through field enlargement for arable farming) and continued decline*

- *of hedgerow boundaries in places has diluted the field pattern across the terrace.*
- *Over maturity and non-replacement of old tree stock (evident within the hedgerows) has resulted in the loss of trees as landscape features.*
- *The intensity and expansion of arable farming has reduced ecological value and resulted in the loss of archaeological features.*
- *Loss of semi-natural woodland where the terrace meets the scarp, plus creation of new coniferous plantations on the terrace has resulted in a change in visual and ecological character.*

Possible Future Trends

The evolving, post Brexit, Environmental Land Management schemes accessible to farmers will support continued environmental management of the landscape. Future pressure for linear expansion along the Wylve Valley may result in merging of villages and loss of settlement identity. Overall, future trends imply that, although landscape character may change, landscape condition is likely to be stable in the future.

- 4.3.9 Management objectives stated for development and of relevance to this application include:
The overall management strategy should conserve the open farmed character of the terrace with its distinct pattern of settlement and the contrast with the adjacent escarpment. Restoration of lost and/or declining features such as field boundaries and woodland will improve condition, quality and visual integrity of the landscape as well as its ecological value.

Objectives of relevance:

- *Where appropriate to landscape character improve the condition and character of hedgerow boundaries by thickening and replanting where lost and denuded to increase the distinctiveness of the field pattern.*
- *Replace hedgerow trees where overmature and dying.*
- *Conserve the open character of the terrace and retain the concentrated character of the settlement by resisting linear growth along transport routes such as has occurred between Longbridge Deverill and Hill Deverill.*
- *Encourage new native woodland planting at the base of the slopes to mark the transition between the arable terrace and pastoral escarpment. Habitats should be managed and enhanced in line with the emerging Cranborne Chase Nature Recovery Plan.*

4.3.10 Wiltshire Character Area 7B – Penselwood Longleat Hills

The Penselwood - Longleat Hills (7B) is a landscape with a steeply undulating landform - it is a landscape of secretive valleys and exposed hills where the sunken lanes and high proportion of woodland cover contribute to an enclosed character. Picturesque villages lie sheltered by landform where mature oaks and stone walls provide a sense of history and permanence. Views vary between enclosed and framed to panoramic views with open skies. Extensive woodland, forestry operations and designed parkland provide a unifying feature across the area and form a strong contrast to the open character of adjacent farmed landscapes. This area remains peaceful and rural despite the large number of visitors that are accommodated within its bounds.

Key Characteristics:

- *A series of eroded Upper Greensand hills creating a sinuous escarpment containing some deep valleys.*
- *Fluvial erosion of the Frome and Stour tributaries has exposed older rocks.*
- *The hills are clothed in deciduous woodland and coniferous plantations.*

- Neatly laid hedges, tree clumps, avenues and grazing animals associated with private estates contribute to the scenic beauty of the area.
- Fields are predominantly small and of an irregular form - indicative of early enclosure.
- Extensive landscaped parks surrounding large country houses at Longleat and Stourhead.
- A wide range of habitat types including wet woodland, unimproved chalk grassland and ancient woodland, with five designated nationally important wildlife sites.
- Pockets of dense development occur in the shelter of the deep valleys that cut through the Upper Greensand.
- Earthworks and ruins of hill forts and castles are strategically located on the hill tops.
- Landscape parks and historic estates provide important recreation attractions including Centre Parcs Holiday Village, Longleat Estate and National Trust properties.
- A peaceful landscape with great variety at the small scale, but with an overall unified character.

4.3.11 Evaluation – The document states:

'Strength of Character - This is a landscape of **strong** character as a result of its distinct and recognisable pattern of elements - the rounded knolls, ancient woodland and designed parkland landscapes. It is an instantly recognisable landscape that is popular for recreation and forms a contrast to the adjacent open chalk landscapes.

Current Condition - The overall condition of the landscape is perceived to be good. The landscape possesses a high degree of intactness with good survival of historic earthwork features, early enclosure patterns and ancient broadleaved woodland. There are few areas of underused land and built features are in a good state of repair. The estates are well managed, and this has an influence on the condition of the wider landscape. However, the replanting of native woodlands by blocks of conifers has eroded the ecological condition of some of the native woodlands.

Past and Present Change

- The principal issues affecting the Penselwood-Longleat Hills in the past have related to forestry, the loss of ancient woodland and the landscape impacts of felling and replanting large areas.
- Large numbers of visitors have exerted pressures on the landscape, bringing traffic and requirement of services, facilities and accommodation. The presence of visitor traffic has resulted in road improvements including widening, signage, and lighting.
- There has been a gradual decline in traditional woodland management techniques as skills have been lost and forestry has concentrated on coniferous species.
- Invasion of exotic species from parkland landscapes into the native woodlands is evident in some areas.
- Wetland habitats on valley floors have been lost in the past.

Possible Future Trends

The main land uses in this area are commercial forestry and tourism. Although forestry has affected the landscape in the past and felling of large coupes will continue, there is unlikely to be further change in landscape condition as a result of such operations. If anything, changes are likely to be positive with the planting of more native species and softening edges of plantations. Heavy use of Public Rights of Way can result in erosion by walkers and pressure for visitor

*facilities in the open landscape. Visitor management, particularly in the aftermath of increased local usage and ‘staycations’ that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be a priority. There may be further pressure for new built development because of the area’s proximity to local towns such as Warminster, Frome and Wincanton, and the abundance of tourism infrastructure in this area. Overall, future trends imply that landscape condition is likely to be **stable** in this area.*

4.3.12 Management objectives stated for development and of relevance to this application include:

The overall management objective should be to conserve the woodland, parkland and the mosaic of pastures and meadows that characterise the landscape. Woodland conservation and management is key in this wooded landscape.

Objectives of relevance:

- *Resist urbanisation of the country lanes or excessive signage that detracts from the rural character of the area. Consider the use of signage that fits with the rural character of the landscape.*
- *Ensure that new development does not affect the character of hamlets and villages and that it does not impinge upon the setting of Stourhead and Longleat.*
- *Monitor the effects of incremental, small-scale change in the built environment. Encourage management of parkland and designed landscapes that are characteristic of the area.*
- *Promote sustainable management of recreation.*

4.3.13 The Extent of Landscape Character Attributes Present on Site:

The Swan Paul methodology has made an assessment of the site to examine the strength and extent to which published landscape character features are actually present on the site. The immediate site attributes have been described at the start of this chapter at sections 4.1 and 4.2. A basic scoring system is detailed below:

- 1** A unique characteristic of the LCA that is present on site and is fundamental to defining the character.
- 2** A representative characteristic of the LCA that is present on the site but is not a particularly rare attribute.
- 3** A representative characteristic of the LCA that is present in the setting or visual context of the site but is not found within it.
- 4** A characteristic or feature of the LCA description that is not found on the site or within its visual context and setting.

Table 1A: Extent of Character Area 6B – Kilmington Terrace

Landscape Characteristic	Extent of presence on site
<i>Elevated Gently undulating and shelving terrace of Upper Greensand in the north-west of the AONB.</i>	3
<i>The chalk escarpment to the south-east provides a dramatic backdrop to the terrace.</i>	3
<i>Brown earths have a high agricultural value and support arable crop production.</i>	3
<i>Medium to large scale field units reflect intensive farming of arable crops. Some smaller fields characterise remaining areas of (largely improved) pasture.</i>	3
<i>Absence of tree cover contributing to the sense of openness.</i>	4
<i>Presence of Bronze Age round barrows close to the River Wylye reflect the survival of remnant areas of pasture.</i>	4
<i>Medieval settlements including the deserted medieval village at Yarnfield.</i>	4
<i>Upper reaches of the River Wylye cross the Greensand terrace, following the line of two geological faults.</i>	4
<i>Settlement is focussed around the River Wylye (The Deverills and Sutton Veny).</i>	4
<i>Well served by transport routes with the main A350 and a number of secondary roads criss-crossing the terrace.</i>	4

Table 1B: Extent of Character Area 7B – Penselwood Longleat

Landscape Characteristic	Extent of presence on site
<i>A series of eroded Upper Greensand hills creating a sinuous escarpment containing some deep valleys.</i>	3
<i>Fluvial erosion of the Frome and Stour tributaries has exposed older rocks.</i>	3
<i>The hills are clothed in deciduous woodland and coniferous plantations.</i>	3
<i>Neatly laid hedges, tree clumps, avenues and grazing animals associated with private estates contribute to the scenic beauty of the area.</i>	3
<i>Fields are predominantly small and of an irregular form - indicative of early enclosure.</i>	2
<i>Extensive landscaped parks surrounding large country houses at Longleat and Stourhead.</i>	2

<i>A wide range of habitat types including wet woodland, unimproved chalk grassland and ancient woodland, with five designated nationally important wildlife sites.</i>	4
<i>Pockets of dense development occur in the shelter of the deep valleys that cut through the Upper Greensand.</i>	4
<i>Earthworks and ruins of hill forts and castles are strategically located on the hill tops.</i>	3
<i>Landscape parks and historic estates provide important recreation attractions including</i>	2
<i>Centre Parcs Holiday Village, Longleat Estate and National Trust properties.</i>	4
<i>A peaceful landscape with great variety at the small scale, but with an overall unified character.</i>	3

4.3.14 It is evident from the tables that the site does contain some features representative of the Character Areas:

Area 6B Kilmington Greensand Terrace: The site and its immediate context display few of these characteristics and are restricted to: ‘medium to large scale field units’ (not the site itself), and Arable crops’. The edge of the chalk ridge is 2-3km to the east around White Sheet Down and Mere Down. None of the key characteristics are presented on the site itself. Aside from the chalk ridge, these are fairly general characteristics.

Area 7B Penselwood Longleat Hills: The site and its immediate context display some of these characteristics and displayed on the site are: ‘greensand hills’ (below the chalk ridge), ‘woodland and coniferous plantations’ (on estate lands to the west), ‘small fields’ (of the site) and ‘landscaped parks’. The remaining characteristics occur in the site context.

4.3.15 National Landscape Designations

Plan SPP02.1 in Appendix 1 ‘Figures and Plans’ shows the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape surrounding the site. There are also a number of SSSI’s including Heath Hill farm SSSI 2km to the west, North Brewham Meadows SSSI 3.5km to the north west and Dead maid Quarry SSSI 2.5km to the south east.

4.3.16 Local Plan Designations

Plan SPP03 in Appendix 1 Figures and Plans shows some key elements from the Wiltshire Planning Explorer map (accessed on 01.09.2025), it includes a Special Landscape Area 2km to the south and the Stourton Conservation Area which includes much of the core of Stourhead Gardens but excludes the site.

4.3.17 Habitats

The habitats are shown on Drawing SPP04 Habitats Assessment in the appendices. There is a pattern of land use and habitats within the study area including UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats associated with deciduous woodland and ancient and replanted woodland occurring in the Stourhead lands to the north and west. This area also includes large areas of wood pasture and parkland BAP. There are also grassland habitats, principally to the west and south. The site itself is not within a habitat designation although it should be noted that there is much new woodland and orchard planting in the fields immediately surrounding it.

Whilst the pattern of habitats in the local area provides a context in which to consider the potential wider landscape impacts, the nature of the development is not predicted to compromise their reason for designation. The impact on specific habitats will therefore not be considered further in this assessment.

4.3.18 Historic Landscape Elements

This assessment seeks to concentrate on impacts to heritage assets that affect them as landscape and visual receptors – visual receptors being people at the receptor, not the receptor itself. At listed private dwellings it has not been possible to gain access to assess visual impacts. The heritage value of the structure itself is not within the remit of the landscape and visual assessment as this only seeks to assess how the landscape and visual setting of the heritage feature aid its understanding within the landscape.

There are scattered structures of heritage value throughout the study area and clustered within Stourton 0.5km to the north east and Stourhead Gardens to the north, which is also a Grade 1 listed Park and Garden on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in England.

The historic designations are shown on Drawing SPP05 Heritage Assessment in Appendix 1 Figures and Plans.

4.3.19 Stourhead Gardens

Historic England list entry no 1000471 – Grade 1 Park and Garden.

The site lies just outside the southern boundary of the park listed area. This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.

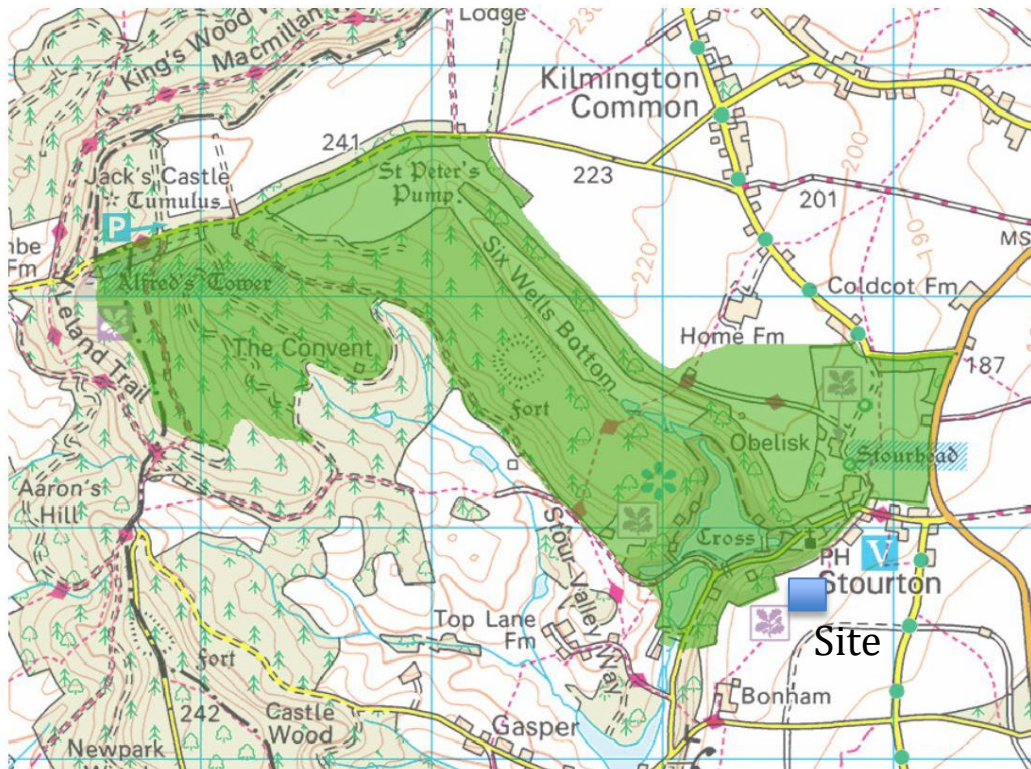


Figure 3 – Stourhead Gardens listing map.

The southern edge of the Park is heavily wooded and there are no opportunities to view the site from within the gardens. The adjacent gardens car park has some visibility through hedge gaps and the site field and adjacent field to the east are open to use by site visitors for dog walking and recreation by the public.

4.4 The Visual Baseline

4.4.1 The methodology for establishing the visual baseline is described in section 2.3.

4.4.2 A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) plan and Viewpoint Location Plan has been created and is used to establish potential viewpoints from where the development may be visible, and this is shown on Drawing SPP06. For this visual impact assessment, a ZTV study area of a 5km radius was used.

4.4.3 Within the ZTV there are some Viewpoint locations where the development site cannot be seen due to intervening vegetation, structures or other factors, such as high roadside hedge banks and these are shown in red on drawing SPP06. The selected viewpoints are shown in blue and demonstrate a field of visibility from close surrounding locations and from high ground to the east; with a visual envelope that extends from a few metres to around 5km at its furthest extent in the east.

4.4.4 Perception of the Proposal

More emphasis is placed on where a higher density of people (receptors) is likely to view the site, for example from the adjacent footpaths and roads and whether these people are mobile or static. The most extensive and intrusive viewpoints are generally chosen to illustrate the worst potential impact of the proposed development.

- WHO - Visual receptors in the study area will be workers at local businesses and users of public roads and rights of way; Residents in private property surrounding the site may also have views of the development.
- WHERE - For this study Swan Paul has concentrated on publicly accessible viewpoints and site assessment has found these to be users of the car parks at Stourhead Gardens and public rights of way in the study area. The closest point of visibility occurs from the public right of way STGA7 which runs through the centre of the site.
- HOW - The nature of the views and visual amenity in the area is dominated by the nature of the undulating greensand terrace below the chalk scarp; and the visual foil and screening provided by the many hedges and tree groups in the locality. It is also important to consider the reasons for visual receptors being in the area. Receptors will therefore be in adjacent private property, on local roads moving from A to B, or on local footpaths and at Stourhead Gardens specifically for the enjoyment of the landscape and views.

4.4.5 Skylines

The skylines from within the site are provided by distant, low ridges around it to the east and south east. In all other directions the skylines are restricted to close to the site by surrounding hedges and woodland.

4.4.6 Scenic Quality

The immediate local area has a distinctive scenic quality with wooded character close to the site on its northern edge and the parkland presence of Stourhead Gardens and its visitor infrastructure. To the south is a disused airfield which has been extensively planted with young trees and will present as woodland in due course. Further south and east the locality is rural farmland with large arable fields with low level views restricted by hedges and trees. The chalk escarpment of White Sheet Down and mere Down rises to the east and south east providing an attractive back drop. The overall scenic quality is assessed as **'good'**.

4.4.7 Public Rights of Way

Public footpath STGA7 passes through the site to the east and path STGA16 passes from Bells Lane to the corner of the Stourhead car parks before turning north. There is a good network of public footpaths in the study area, particularly the river valleys and hills to the east.

4.5 Landscape Value

4.5.1 The Study Area:

For the purposes of this study the landscape sensitivity and hence the value of the receptor landscape is considered to include the site and the visible context within 2-5km. The above assessment of the landscape character and baseline resources of the study area has shown that it displays few of the Wiltshire Landscape Character Area 6B – Kilmington Terrace attributes (see section 4.3 table 1A and 1B). For Character Area 7B – Penselwood Longleat there is a little more representation with the chalk ridge to the east and the landscaped park to the north being notable features but not present on the site. The study area is therefore representative in the wider context.

4.5.2 The Site:

Site level analysis has also considered the qualities that can contribute to the consideration of value in undesignated landscapes and outlined in the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21 (TGN 02/21) where the following points can be distilled from site notes:

- **Natural Heritage:** The site has no notable geomorphological or physiographic interest which contributes uniquely to the landscape. It is, however within and part of the National Landscape.
- **Cultural Heritage:** The site is just outside the Historic England boundary of Stourhead Gardens and close to the site car parks.
- **Landscape Condition:** The site is in a reasonable physical state with rough grassland cover and good perimeter hedges.
- **Associations:** The site is not connected with notable people, events or the arts.
- **Distinctiveness:** At a site level the desktop and site-based analysis has established at Table 1A and 1B that the site makes a slight contribution to local landscape character, and the scarp edge is distinctive in its context.
- **Recreation Associations:** The site is associated with Stourhead Gardens and is occasionally used for recreation and dog walking from footpath STGA7.
- **Perceptual (Scenic) Aspects:** The site performs no scenic function in the local landscape and will ultimately be surrounded by tree planting with little visibility in or out.
- **Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquillity) Aspects:** The site is not wild but is tranquil.

- Functional qualities: The site functions as an adjunct to Stourhead Gardens, performing various temporary visitor needs.

In consideration of the base-line attributes of the site and its context the value is considered to be **'average'**.

4.6 Baseline Conclusion: The susceptibility of the site to this type of change

- 4.6.1 The susceptibility of the site to change is derived from the inherent landscape and visual sensitivities, when considered against the specific baseline qualities of the site and the type of development being proposed. This ranges from a high susceptibility to change, typical for the most sensitive landscapes with more attributes of value; through medium, low and finally negligible susceptibility to change for landscapes of low sensitivity and value. Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change arising from development types or land management practices, without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value.
- 4.6.2 The site is in a transitional location between the Stourhead Gardens landscape to the north and the farmed landscape to the south and east. This is further complicated by the presence of the disused airfield immediately to the south, which is now largely planted with young woodland. Much of the study area falls within the National Landscape and it is a landscape with a good level of landscape character compliance with some special features such as Stourhead Gardens and the chalk ridge to the east. However, the site itself displays few of the key landscape characteristics. This is due to its small size and its position close to the visitor infrastructure of Stourhead Gardens, meaning that it performs functions associated with the gardens, rather than those associated with the surrounding farmed landscape.

Overall, the scenic qualities are considered to be **'good'** (4.4.6) with the value considered to be **'average'** (4.5.2).

- 4.6.3 With these qualities for reference, it is considered to have a **low/ medium** susceptibility to this type of change.

5.0 Potential Sources of Impact and the Mitigation Proposals

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This section describes the main aspects of the proposed development which could potentially affect landscape and/or visual amenity. It also identifies features of the proposals which will assist in mitigating adverse landscape and visual impacts.

5.2 The Development Proposal and Potential Sources of Impact

- 5.2.1 The proposal is for the development of a solar electricity scheme covering 1.48 hectares within a single field of a total area of 3 hectares, and centred approximately 0.5km south west of the

village of Stourton in Wiltshire. The layout of the proposal is included as part of the landscape mitigation plan, Plan SPP06 in Appendix 1 Figures and Plans . The planning period of the development is for 25 years, after which it will be dismantled and the land returned to its base-line state.

5.2.2 Details of the proposed solar arrays are provided on the application drawings. The panels will be arranged in four rows with a maximum height of 2.9m. In addition, there will need to be a number of site buildings and structures, including:

- A distribution cabin 2.0 x 1.0 x 1.8m high.
- Perimeter deer fence – wooden post and wire 2.4m high.
- 4 x CCTV cameras at 4.0m high.

The post and wire deer style fencing will extend around the perimeter of the arrays for security purposes, with gated access. The fence will be set back from existing hedgerows by around 10m and similar from the existing public right of way (STGA7) which passes through the site and is screened by a proposed hedge. The final submitted site plan is a carefully considered response to the technical requirements and the findings of the landscape and visual assessment.

5.2.3 The main features of the development proposal which could potentially result in landscape and visual impacts are:

- Activities and movement of equipment during the construction period
- Changes to landform, use and pattern
- Loss of existing vegetation
- Access arrangements
- Hard surface areas
- New elements such as lighting, fencing and signage
- New buildings including design and materials selection
- New planting areas

5.3 Proposed Mitigation

5.3.1 There are few development schemes that do not require some mitigation measures to help reduce the perceived landscape and visual impacts and to help assimilate development into the local landscape setting. Some mitigation measures can also bring landscape and conservation benefits to a site. Mitigation varies in scale depending on the location and nature of development. In this case, the scale of development requires a small level of mitigation to assist with assimilation into the landscape setting, and mitigation measures can be summarised as follows:-

During construction:

- Protect existing vegetation in accordance with BS: 5837 'Trees in relation to construction'.
- Ensure construction operations do not conflict with conservation interests such as archaeology, or the seasonal requirements of flora and fauna.
- Vehicle movements will be agreed with the Local Authority to follow particular routes or times, to cause minimum local disruption, if required.

During Operation:

- The existing hedges to the north and east boundaries will be maintained at a minimum of 3-4m high to retain good screening from these directions.
- New hedges are proposed of approximately 135m length to the north side of the development and screening it from the footpath STGA7; together with a 70m hedge to the west side.
- New areas of habitat gain with modified grassland around the PV arrays.

5.3.2 It should also be noted that there is significant new woodland planting to the south and west sides of the development that will give excellent screening in time. This is on land outside the control of the applicant and has been carried out by the Forestry Commission.

5.3.3 These objectives have been focused on specific mitigation suggestions for this particular proposal on this site and these are shown in the appendix in plan SPP07 Mitigation Plan.

6.0 The Landscape and Visual Analysis – Assessment of Effects

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 This section will examine the potential impacts and effects that **may** be expected as a result of the development. This will take the form of an assessment of the viewpoint photographs to assess the potential visual effects, followed by an assessment of the landscape resources identified in the baseline studies, to determine the potential landscape effects. In line with GLVIA 3 it will not examine every possible effect that could be envisaged but will instead focus on those that are reasonable and proportional to the type of development, and would be large enough to cause a definitive change to the baseline conditions.

6.1.2 Public Perception to Change:

The perception of change is linked to the visibility of the site at the receptor and the visual sensitivity, landscape value and whether a particular element or feature can be accommodated without unacceptable consequences for the maintenance of the baseline (existing) conditions.

6.2 The Visual Effects

6.2.1 The visual effects will be examined from a series of representative viewpoints taken within the study area and have been selected using the Zone of Theoretical Visibility map as a tool to establish sites of potential visibility. They range from the site edge centre at Footpath STGA7 and up to 4km to the east, this being the extent of the visual envelope. Photos were taken to illustrate the site and its appearance in publicly available views. The photographs were taken in September 2025, therefore late summer in relation to vegetation density.

6.3 Viewpoint Photographs Analysis

6.3.1 The viewpoint photograph sheets can be found in the appendices; however, all relevant text and analysis is given below, rather than on the sheet itself. Some potential viewpoints within the ZTV were checked and found to have no views of the site; these have been marked with a red symbol on drawing SPP06 Viewpoint Locations.

6.3.2 **Viewpoint 1 – Field south of the visitor car park – north edge**

0.25km from site; 182m AOD

This view is on the boundary of the listed park and garden, looking south west towards the site with the existing dense hedge at the site's east perimeter. The track to the right of the view connects the car parks of Stourhead Gardens and footpaths STGA16 and STGA7. The view to the site is direct but the hedge obscures much of it. Visual receptors are likely to be recreational users of the site.

Sensitivity: The viewpoint is from a track with good levels of tranquillity, on the edge of the listed park and from a landscape assessed as having an 'good' landscape value.

The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium/ high**.

Receptors

Walkers and recreational users.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The hedge obscures the site but there may be limited visibility in winter.

Effects During Construction;

During construction there will be movement of equipment and construction activity on the site, which may be experienced by the receptors in this location. Some structures may have more visibility in winter. The effects are temporary for the duration of the works.

The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **LOW** Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE adverse**

Effects During Occupation and with Mitigation – At approximately 10 years;

The movement of construction machinery would cease, and tranquillity be restored. The hedge will remain, filtering views into the site and future maintenance will ensure it remains at a minimum of 3-4m high, ensuring a continuity of screening. There will be minimal change from the base line view, however in winter there may be glimpses of structures through the hedge. The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE** Impact: **SLIGHT adverse**

6.3.3 Viewpoint 2 – Site Field from the north east

0.13km from site; 184m AOD

This view is from the public right of way STGA7 that runs through the centre of the site. The PV arrays and fencing will be visible to each side, with views direct and obvious. The existing overhead power line will remain visible. Visual receptors are likely to be recreational users of the footpath and site.

Sensitivity: The viewpoint is from a public right of way with good levels of tranquillity, on the edge of the listed park and from a landscape assessed as having an 'good' landscape value. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium/ high**.

Receptors

Walkers and recreational users.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The change to the PV arrays will be large.

Effects During Construction;

During construction there will be movement of equipment and construction activity on the site, which will be experienced by the receptors in this location. This activity is well contained within the small site field. The effects are temporary for the duration of the works.

The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **HIGH** Impact: **MODERATE/ SUBSTANTIAL adverse**

Effects During Occupation and with Mitigation – At approximately 10 years;

The movement of construction machinery would cease, and tranquillity is restored. The modified grassland around the arrays and path will provide wildlife benefits. The arrays and PV infrastructure will remain visible until the new hedge on the north side has reached a height of 2-3m. This will be at around 4 to 5 years.

The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH**

Magnitude: **LOW**

Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE
adverse**

6.3.4 Viewpoint 3 – Site field from the west

0.06km from site; 183m AOD

This view is from the public right of way STGA7 that runs through the centre of the site. The PV arrays and fencing will be visible to the right side, with views direct and obvious. The existing overhead power line will remain visible. Visual receptors are likely to be recreational users of the footpath and site.

Sensitivity: The viewpoint is from a public right of way with good levels of tranquillity, on the edge of the listed park and from a landscape assessed as having an ‘good’ landscape value. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium/ high**.

Receptors

Walkers and recreational users.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The change to the PV arrays will be large.

Effects During Construction;

During construction there will be movement of equipment and construction activity on the site, which will be experienced by the receptors in this location. The activity is well contained within the small site field. The effects are temporary for the duration of the works.

The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH**

Magnitude: **HIGH**

Impact: **MODERATE/
SUBSTANTIAL adverse**

Effects During Occupation and with Mitigation – At approximately 10 years;

The movement of construction machinery would cease, and tranquillity is restored. The modified grassland around the arrays will provide wildlife benefits. The arrays and PV infrastructure will remain visible until the new hedge on the north side has reached a height of 2-3m. This will be at around 4 to 5 years. The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH**

Magnitude: **LOW**

Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE
adverse**

6.3.5 Viewpoint 4 – Field west of the site

0.23km from site; 183m AOD

This view is from the public right of way STGA7 that runs towards the site. The route of the path is channelled through new woodland planting on either side, with the PV site possibly visible at the end of the path and to the right as it enters it and across the young planting to the right in the view. The existing overhead power line passes to the north with woodland planting restricted around its route. Visual receptors are likely to be recreational users of the footpath and site.

Sensitivity: The viewpoint is from a public right of way with good levels of tranquillity, on the edge of the listed park and from a landscape assessed as having an 'good' landscape value. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium/ high**.

Receptors

Walkers and recreational users.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The change to the PV arrays will be large and will be visible until views are closed by the woodland planting.

Effects During Construction;

During construction there will be movement of equipment and construction activity on the site, which will be experienced by the receptors in this location. The effects are temporary for the duration of the works.

The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **MEDIUM** Impact: **MODERATE adverse**

Effects During Occupation and with Mitigation – At approximately 10 years;

The movement of construction machinery would cease, and tranquillity is restored. The PV site will remain in views until the surrounding woodland planting restricts this and the hedge to the west side of the development grows, and this will likely be around 4 to 5 years. Very limited visibility is expected once the vegetation closes off views and the west hedge will further screen winter views.

The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **LOW** Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE adverse**

6.3.6 Viewpoint 5 – The field north of the site

0.16km from site; 185m AOD

This view looks south along PROW STGA7 where it passes through a gap in the north boundary hedge of the site. This hedge is quite tall and dense and provides good screening of the site from the viewpoint.

Sensitivity: The viewpoint is from a public right of way with good levels of tranquillity, on the edge of the listed park and from a landscape assessed as having an 'good' landscape value. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium/ high**.

Receptors

Walkers and recreational users.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The hedge obscures the site but there may be visibility in winter.

Effects During Construction;

During construction there will be movement of equipment and construction activity on the site, which will be experienced by the receptors in this location, but the developed part of the site is at some distance from the viewpoint. The effects are temporary for the duration of the works. The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **MEDIUM** Impact: **MODERATE adverse**

Effects During Occupation and with Mitigation – At approximately 10 years;

The movement of construction machinery would cease, and tranquillity be restored. The hedge will remain, and alongside the new hedge on the north side of the development will filter views into the site and future maintenance will ensure they remain at a minimum of 3-4m high, ensuring a continuity of screening. There will be minimal change from the base line view, however in winter there may be glimpses of structures through the hedges. The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE** Impact: **SLIGHT adverse**

6.3.7 Viewpoint 6 – Field south of the visitor car park – east edge

0.33km from site; 173m AOD

This view is close to the boundary of the listed park and garden looking west towards the site with the existing dense site hedge at the site's east perimeter to the mid distance. The field is used to access Stourhead visitor parking in the airfield to the south and for general visitor recreation. The view to the site is direct but the hedge obscures much of it. Visual receptors are likely to be recreational users of the site.

Sensitivity: The viewpoint has good levels of tranquillity, is on the edge of the listed park and from a landscape assessed as having a 'good' landscape value.

The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium/ high**.

Receptors

Walkers and recreational users.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The hedge obscures the site but there may be limited visibility in winter.

Effects During Construction;

During construction there will be movement of equipment and construction activity on the site, which may be experienced by the receptors in this location. Some structures may have limited visibility in winter. The effects are temporary for the duration of the works. The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **LOW** Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE adverse**

Effects During Occupation and with Mitigation – At approximately 10 years;

The movement of construction machinery would cease, and tranquillity be restored. The hedge will remain, filtering views into the site and future maintenance will ensure it remains at a minimum of 3-4m high, ensuring a continuity of screening. There will be minimal change from the base line view, however in winter there may be glimpses of structures through the hedge. The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE** Impact: **SLIGHT adverse**

6.3.8 Viewpoint 7 – Field south of the visitor car park – north east edge

0.36km from site; 180m AOD

This view is close to the boundary of the listed park and garden looking west towards the site with the existing dense site hedge at the site's east perimeter to the mid distance. This point is at the junction of PROW STGA16 where it changes direction, turning north. The field is used to access Stourhead visitor parking in the airfield to the south and for general visitor recreation. The view to the site is direct but the hedge obscures much of it. Visual receptors are likely to be recreational users of the site.

Sensitivity: The viewpoint has good levels of tranquillity, is on the edge of the listed park and from a landscape assessed as having an 'good' landscape value. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium/ high**.

Receptors

Walkers and recreational users.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The hedge obscures the site but there may be limited visibility in winter.

Effects During Construction;

During construction there will be movement of equipment and construction activity on the site, which may be experienced by the receptors in this location. Some structures may have limited visibility in winter. The effects are temporary for the duration of the works. The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **LOW** Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE adverse**

Effects During Occupation and with Mitigation – At approximately 10 years;

The movement of construction machinery would cease, and tranquillity be restored. The hedge will remain, filtering views into the site and future maintenance will ensure it remains at a minimum of 3-4m high, ensuring a continuity of screening. There will be minimal change from the base line view, however in winter there may be glimpses of structures through the hedge. The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM/ HIGH** Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE** Impact: **SLIGHT adverse**

6.3.9 Viewpoint 8 – White Sheet Castle

2.92km from site; 230m AOD

This elevated view looks east across the landscape. The block of woodland to the right of the view is Stourhead Gardens, with the site location to its left edge. The site field is obscured by the hedge to its east edge, and the newly planted woodland field is just visible above this. (detail more apparent with binoculars). The viewpoint is open access land, a SSSI and Scheduled Monument with Neolithic to Iron Age structures and ecology interest.

Sensitivity: The receptors at this viewpoint will be users of the access land who will be at this location for the enjoyment of views and the landscape. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **high**.

Receptors

Users of the access land.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The site is quite difficult to pick out in the view, and the hedge to its east side obscures most of it and detail is difficult to pick out without binoculars.

During construction;

Activity on the site is unlikely to be visible from this location.

The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **HIGH**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE**

Impact: **NEGLIGIBLE adverse**

During Operation;

The completed site is unlikely to be visible from this location. Surrounding young woodland will also completely obscure it over time.

The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **HIGH**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE**

Impact: **NONE**

6.3.10 Viewpoint 9 – Cross Dykes, just off the Mid Wiltshire Way

2.92km from site; 249m AOD

This elevated view looks east across the landscape. The block of woodland to the right of the view is Stourhead Gardens, with the site location to its left edge. The site field is obscured by the hedge to its east edge, and the newly planted woodland field is just visible above this. (detail more apparent with binoculars). The viewpoint is open access land and a SSSI with Neolithic to Iron Age structures and ecology interest.

Sensitivity: The receptors at this viewpoint will be users of the access land who will be at this location for the enjoyment of views and the landscape. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **high**.

Receptors

Users of the access land.

Visual Effects

Magnitude of change: The site is quite difficult to pick out in the view, and the hedge to its east

side obscures most of it and detail is difficult to pick out without binoculars.

During construction;

Activity on the site is unlikely to be visible from this location.

The effects will be direct, short term and negative.

Sensitivity: **HIGH**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE**

Impact: **NEGLIGIBLE adverse**

During Operation;

The completed site is unlikely to be visible from this location. Surrounding young woodland will also completely obscure it over time.

The effects will be direct, long term and negative.

Sensitivity: **HIGH**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE**

Impact: **NONE**

6.3.11 **Other Viewpoints**

Current guidance on landscape assessment suggests that ZTV software should make an analysis of potential visibility that is a 'bare ground' analysis. This uses only terrain data to establish the visibility with no additional screening from elements such as vegetation or structures considered. In order to establish a more complete picture of the potential visibility of this development Swan Paul undertook to visit a wide selection of locations to test the ZTV calculations. The Viewpoint locations drawing SPP06 therefore not only shows a representative selection for detailed discussion (Viewpoints 1 to 9), but also some that were visited but were found to have no view of the site (and was unlikely to be changed by winter conditions). These locations are marked with a **red** symbol on the Viewpoints Location Plan.

6.4 The Landscape Effects

6.4.1 The effects are identified by establishing and describing the changes resulting from the different components of the development and the resulting effects on landscape receptors described in the landscape baseline analysis. The baseline identified the Scenic Quality as **good** and the Landscape Value as **average**. The potential effects will be considered as follows:

- Type of effect: Scale, Direct, Indirect, Secondary or Cumulative.
- Duration of effect: Short (up to 5 years), medium (5-10 years) or long-term (15 years +).
- Reversibility: Can the development be easily reversed?
- Nature of effect: Permanent or temporary and neutral, positive or negative
- The extent to which the key characteristics and special qualities of a stated area are conserved or enhanced by the proposals.

6.4.2 Landscape Character Effects – **National Landscape Character Area 133 – Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour**

There are some elements of the characterisation that are displayed on the site itself such as *‘small rectilinear fields’*, *‘many, scattered broadleaved woodlands’*, but much of the rest of the key characteristics are in the wider setting and study area. These are representative and the sensitivity is considered to be **medium**.

Landscape Effects

The changes at the site are reversible and they cover a very small part of the whole Character Area and the developing woodland around it will make it difficult to experience in a landscape context along with the National Landscape. The change will be temporary and different in terms of perception from the base-line conditions; however, the existing hedge pattern and grassland cover is retained.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE**

Impact: **SLIGHT adverse**

6.4.3 Landscape Character Effects – **Wiltshire Character Area 6B – Kilmington Greensand Terrace**
The character document states the strength of character as ‘moderate’ and its current condition as ‘moderate’. Table 1A shows the assessed extent to which these character traits are displayed on site, and in the site context. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium**.

Landscape Effects

The site is currently making little contribution to this local landscape character type with characteristics present only in the site context. This includes the undulating greensand terrace on which it sits and the chalk ridge to the east which is visible from the site. The site itself displays a ‘medium size field unit’. The change at the site would be temporary and the scale of the development is moderate in comparison to the overall extent of the LCA.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE**

Impact: **NEGLIGIBLE/ SLIGHT adverse**

6.4.4 Landscape Character Effects – **Wiltshire Character Area 7B – Penselwood Longleat Hills**
The character document states the strength of character as ‘strong’ and its current condition as ‘good’. Table 1A shows the assessed extent to which these character traits are displayed on site,

and in the surrounding study area. The sensitivity is therefore considered to be **medium**.

Landscape Effects

The site is currently making little contribution to the local landscape character with characteristics present including a small field size with hedged boundaries. The site context includes the parkland landscape to the north of which it contributes intermittently as part of the visitor management infrastructure. The hedge pattern would remain, and its contribution to the National Landscape character would be altered. However, the change at the site would be temporary and the scale of the development is moderate in comparison to the overall extent of the LCA.

Sensitivity: **MEDIUM**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE/
LOW**

Impact: **SLIGHT adverse**

6.4.5 Effects on the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire National Landscape

The site is within the north western portion of the National Landscape, towards the West Wiltshire Downs. As a nationally designated resource it is considered to have a **high** sensitivity.

Effects

The effects upon the National Landscape are both landscape and visual and are considered in the context of its 'special characteristics' (3.4.1) and how the development is considered to impact upon them:

- *A peaceful, tranquil, deeply rural area; largely 'unspoilt' and maintained as a living agricultural landscape.*
The development will have some adverse impacts upon tranquillity during the construction phase, but this is brief and tranquillity will return at operation. The land use will come out of its current 'rural' condition for the planning period, but it should be noted that it is next to the visitor infrastructure for Stourhead Gardens and could not be considered 'deeply rural'.
- *The scale of the landscape is often grand and dramatic with the 'intensity' of landscape character almost palpable.*
This statement is considered more relevant for the high downland of the NL. The site is a small field enclosed by hedges and will soon be enclosed by woodland. It is considered intimate and not at all 'dramatic'.
- *The open downland offers wide expansive skies, dominant skylines, dramatic escarpments and panoramic views.*
Viewpoints 8 and 9 from the downland show that the site is very well screened behind the existing hedgerows and cannot be seen.
- *Unity of the underlying chalk expressed in the distinctive and sometimes dramatically sculpted landforms, open vistas, escarpments and coombes.*
The site is on the Greensand Plateau and has no interaction with any underlying chalk geology.
- *A rich land use history with many ancient hilltop forts and barrows.*

The site has an historic land use as grazing with hedges still intact and undisturbed. No hilltop archaeology is impacted by the development. The site changes are temporary and its grazing land use remains.

- *A bountiful mosaic of habitats playing host to a myriad of wildlife.*
Any existing habitats such as hedges and grassland are retained, with mitigation enhancing and improving them.
- *Overlain by a woodland mosaic – including the eye-catching hill-top copses, veteran parkland trees and avenues, extensive areas of wooded downland and ancient forest together with more recent game coverts.*
The site is on the edge of woodland and parkland at Stourhead Gardens but is minimally visible from them, causing no significant harm to their character.
- *Three major chalk river valleys with their individual distinctiveness.*
The site is on the Greensand Plateau and does not impact upon chalkland valleys.
- *Distinctive settlement pattern along the valleys and vales, and small Medieval villages along the scarp spring line.*
The nearest settlement is Stourton which is heavily influenced by its association with Stourhead Gardens but is has no visibility of the site in its context. Other settlement is 2km distant at least and has no visibility of the site in its context.
- *Local vernacular building styles include the patterns of knapped flint, brick, cob, clunch, clay tiles and straw thatch.*
This has no relevance to the development.
- *Strong sense of place and local distinctiveness represented by the use of local building materials and small-scale vernacular features such as the sunken lanes and distinctive black and white signposts.*
The site is not on a route between such vernacular elements and so cannot be seen in their context. Some may exist in the study area but are minimally affected by the development.
- *Strong sense of remoteness.*
The site is on the edge of a large car park and busy visitor attraction and is not in a 'remote' location.
- *Expanse of dark night skies and ability to see the Milky Way.*
The proposals are not lit and will have no regular night time staff presence (other than emergencies). The contribution it makes to dark skies will therefore remain unchanged from the baseline.

All these effects are temporary for the duration of the planning period.

The development is therefore not considered to substantially affect the National Landscape or its purposes and objectives as described in the Management Plan. Ultimately the rural nature of

the land will be changed for the duration of the planning period, but it is a small field that is well screened and the other 'special characteristics' are minimally present. The magnitude of change is considered **low** in this context.

Sensitivity: **HIGH**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE/
LOW**

Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE
adverse**

6.4.6 Effects on the Landscape Designations

Other landscape receptors identified include a number of SSSI's at 2-3.5km distant, a Special Landscape Area 2km to the south and the Stourton Conservation Area. As nationally designated resources they are considered to have a 'high' sensitivity.

Landscape Effects

The proposals are not expected to affect the SSSIs in a way that would undermine their reasons for designation. The Special Landscape Area is also unlikely to be experienced in association with the site, and any visibility will diminish further as the surrounding woodland matures. Although the Stourton Conservation Area lies nearby, intervening hedges, vegetation and the Stourhead Gardens car parks limit views of the site and reduce sensitivity to built elements. Overall, the magnitude of change is considered low in this context.

Sensitivity: **HIGH**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE/
LOW**

Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE
adverse**

6.4.7 Effects on the Heritage Designations

The heritage receptors include Stourhead Gardens and its many listed structures, together with the listed buildings and structures within the Stourton Conservation Area. As a nationally recognised heritage designations the sensitivity rating is 'high'.

Landscape Effects

The site is outside the boundary of Stourhead Gardens and the Stourton Conservation Area and as such will only affect their settings. The integrity of both designations is maintained by the presence of heavy vegetation cover to the north of the site which will prevent their experience of the site in the same context. The transition between the two is also marked by the visitor infrastructure including the reception buildings, café, shop and car parks; meaning there would be no abrupt change between the heritage elements and the PV structures. The change will be temporary and reversible.

Sensitivity: **HIGH**

Magnitude: **NEGLIGIBLE/
LOW**

Impact: **SLIGHT/ MODERATE
adverse**

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 This report has followed accepted good practice in trying to make an objective assessment as far as possible of the potential landscape and visual impacts of the proposal.
- 7.1.2 At 4.5 the baseline qualities of this site have been discussed, and the landscape and visual qualities of the site have led to a conclusion that it has a value of **‘average’** and a **‘low/ medium’** susceptibility to this type of change. This has modified the magnitude of change considerations accordingly.

7.2 Mitigation

- 7.2.1 The mitigation measures are aimed at trying to assimilate the development by maximising the benefits of the natural resources and setting of the site. For this development there is an extensive amount of existing young woodland surrounding the development that will combine with any on-site mitigation. The mitigation proposal is therefore a hedge to the north and west sides of the development to give greater screening from footpath STGA7, with other directions well screened by the existing young woodland in the area. There will also be meadow overseeding with seed collected from across the Stourhead estate and will add additional habitat benefits to the site. The mitigation measures are summarised at 5.3.1 and they will help the development do this.
- 7.2.2 Although not a form of mitigation per-se the temporary planning period is an important consideration. The residual effect of this is that after this period the land will be returned to its original condition and any effects will cease.

7.3 Policy Compliance

- 7.3.1 The proposal meets with some of the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 as described in clause 3.2 in that it meets the climate change agenda of the UK Government whilst causing minimal landscape impacts (6.4.5) (Para 165); and it improves biodiversity in the mitigation landscaping (Para 188).
- 7.3.2 The proposal meets some of the requirements of the Local Plan in that it:
- Proposes to retain and improve hedgerows through long term maintenance regimes and to improve habitats – Policy 50.
 - Does not harm any heritage assets – Policy 58.
 - It does not harm any local nature reserves, wildlife or geological sites – Policy 51.
 - It is of a small scale and design appropriate for its context and will cause minimum long-term harm to the National Landscape, being fully reversible – Policy 42.
- 7.3.3 The proposal in the context of the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape management plan:

- Landscape Character – The analysis of the local landscape character documents – Character Area 6B Kilmington Greensand Terrace and Area 7B Penselwood Longleat Hills (4.3.12/13) found that there were few character attributes on the site itself. Some were in the immediate context such as ‘woodland plantations’, ‘small fields’ and ‘landscaped parks’, but otherwise there was limited representation of local character associated with the site, with more only being found in the wider context. The development is therefore small within the overall context of the National Landscape and will not change its character or tranquillity – Policy LAN2.
- The hedges and grassland management policies will help improve landscape character and ecological networks in its locality to a small extent – Policy LAN2, NE1.
- No heritage assets are affected by the development such that the reason for their protection is compromised – Policy HE3.
- It is a modest form of renewable energy generation, meeting climate change objectives that is in a well screened site and is appropriate in its scale for this location – Policy CL1.
- In its approach the development meets many of the ‘landscape led’ criteria for development. The design is modest and well-integrated into its ‘small field’ location, being well enclosed by hedges and seeking to minimise effects by new hedge and wildflower planting – Policy PT4.
- Position Statement 9 SCALE– The scale of the development is very modest, being just 4 banks of panels taking up less than half of the existing 3-hectare field. This leaves room for the existing public footpath STGA7 to pass unchanged on its original route, within grassland meadow as before, and with a screening hedge to the north side of the development. Its scale is therefore definitely not ‘in the power station range’ (3.4.3), being only kilowatts, rather than the typical megawatt range of a power station. As described in the Cranbourne Chase AONB Management Partnership Position Statement 9 – FIELD SCALE PHOTOVOLTAIC PANELS (2016).
As an example, Figure 4 below shows aerial photography of the nearby 303 Interchange buildings at Mere which have a larger footprint than the proposed solar development and also have PV arrays fixed to the roof. This building complex is just on the boundary of the National Landscape but not within it, but it is within the Wiltshire Council Special Landscape Area. The proposal at the site is therefore of a slightly smaller scale than the 303 Interchange arrays but has the benefit of being ground mounted and therefore is well hidden by hedges and vegetation.
- Position Statement 9 DESIGN - Whilst it is a fact that some early designs of photovoltaic panels have a reflective finish and could be more apparent in views, the newer designs aim to absorb light and have a matt finish. They are therefore more recessive in views and in this well screened location will be difficult to see.



Fig 4 – Example of nearby PV Scale

- 7.3.4 In terms of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the proposal demonstrates a small improvement to some qualities of the AONB/NL in the form of additional hedging and wildflower habitats. All other impacts have been kept as low as possible and are not considered to be 'substantial'. All effects are also temporary for the 25-year planning period.

7.4 Visual Impacts – Conclusion

- 7.4.1 The site is not prominent or visible in the surrounding landscape, and there are many areas where visibility is less than the Zone of Theoretical Visibility would suggest. This includes limited visibility from the south and south west, together with significant screening by close woodland to the north. Other directions have greater visibility, but this can be restricted by features such as high hedge banks and vegetation. Areas of greater elevation to the east have more prominent views, however the site is very distant and obscured by its perimeter hedges.
- 7.4.2 Close views are obtained from the public right of way (STGA7) and include Viewpoints 2 and 3 from where the change at the site is most evident, however the new hedge to its north and west sides will lessen this. Other close views are more screened by local hedges and tree planting, for example from the paths in the fields just south of the Stourhead Gardens car parks (VP1,4, 5,6 and 7). Within 1 to 3km the flat valley bottom landscape is crossed by many hedges and blocks of woodland and these screen views to the development. From a greater distance there is visibility from the high ground to the east at White Sheet Downs, where the site location can just be made out, but is mostly hidden by the hedge on its east side. There is also no visibility from the undulating, but lower hills to the south and west, due to intervening vegetation.

7.4.3 The proposals are a large visual change from the existing site conditions, although the existing grassland cover will remain around the PV arrays and will be managed for improved species richness and biodiversity.

7.4.4 The effects of the visual change at the site can therefore be considered as construction phase and operational phase.

Construction Phase Visual Effects are summarised as:

- The creation of a temporary site access for construction. This may involve the removal of a small section of hedge close to Viewpoint 5 which will be replaced.
- Planting of a screen hedges to the north and west sides of the development.
- Site construction activity and noise.

Some of these effects will be temporary and for the duration of the construction period only.

7.4.5 Operational Phase Visual Effects are summarised as:

- The insertion of the development into the site including the PV arrays, fencing and CCTV cameras and approach track.
- The growth of the mitigation planting, including the new hedges and the long-term management of the modified wildflower grassland.

These effects will be permanent but have been assessed as occurring to visual receptors in close proximity to the site.

7.4.6 On the one hand the position of the site within the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape raises the sensitivity of the visual receptors within it. On the other, the site and its immediate context displays few of the qualities of the National Landscape and is more visually associated with the visitor infrastructure at Stourhead Gardens. This includes elements such as car parks, signage, buildings etc and helps lower the sensitivity of receptors to infrastructure type development.

The site is within the National Landscape which has resulted in visual sensitivities (to this type of development) of medium to high, however in most viewpoints it is the case that hedges and the nearby woodland planting will restrict views of the site infrastructure considerably.

The greatest level of change is from the close public footpath STGA7 where the site will be close and visible, particularly in the construction stages. And impacts from VP's 2 and 3 are considered to be 'moderate/substantial adverse'. However, the growth of the northern screen hedge reduces this to 'slight/moderate adverse' over time.

All other viewpoints, even those from elevation and within the National Landscape experience limited visibility of the site due to the existing perimeter hedges, and the growth of surrounding new woodland over time. Here the construction stage impacts are 'moderate adverse' or 'slight/moderate adverse', reducing to 'slight/moderate adverse' or 'slight adverse' at the operational stage.

7.4.7 The development is a large change from the baseline conditions and impacts are therefore considered to be 'adverse'. When the mitigation measures are taken into account, the impacts were considered to be reduced, and the visual change is therefore not considered to be substantially adverse in the longer term from all viewpoints.

There are no visual effects that remain 'substantial' after operation, and at the end of the planning period the site will be returned to grassland.

7.5 Landscape Impacts – Conclusion

- 7.5.1 The landscape impact of the development will include the change of landscape cover on the site to the PV arrays, hard-standings, fencing and new planting measures. This is a temporary and reversible change from the baseline.
- 7.5.2 The site is in the National Landscape and at 6.4.5 this report has considered how well it displays the ‘special characteristics’ as stated in the National Landscape Management Plan and it was found that very few are present. The National Landscape is considered to have a ‘high’ sensitivity although the changes at the site only affect a very small part of it. The effects are therefore ‘negligible/low’ in magnitude. This has resulted in an impact of ‘slight/ moderate adverse’.
- 7.5.3 Other landscape resources identified in the baseline include the SSSI’s and Stourhead Gardens (listed Grade 1) and none of these are predicted to have any substantial, detrimental change to their current condition as a result of the development.
These nationally designated receptors have a ‘high’ sensitivity although the changes at the site cause them minimal disruption, such that their reasons for designation are compromised. The effects are therefore ‘negligible/low’ in magnitude. This has resulted in an impact of ‘slight/ moderate adverse’.
- 7.5.3 For landscape character effects the National Landscape Characterisation (NCL133 – Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour) have some presence in the site context, with few features evident such as:
- *‘Small rectilinear fields’,*
 - *‘Scattered broadleaved woodlands’.*
- However, most of the National Characteristics are in the setting of the site and not within it or its immediate context, making them representative. Mitigation measures will not enhance these greatly, but they are not considered to be substantially altered by the development in the wider context of the National designation. The character area is very large, and the site occupies a small part of it and the development is temporary and fully reversible. The magnitude of change is therefore considered ‘negligible’. Effects upon this receptor are therefore ‘slight/ moderate adverse’.
- 7.5.4 For landscape character effects the **Area 6B – Kilmington Greensand Terrace** have little presence on the site and in its context.
Structural landscaping and mitigation help to reduce impacts a little but change at the site will not substantially alter the landscape characteristics and they can be well absorbed for the 25year duration, with a magnitude therefore at ‘negligible’. The receptor is considered to have a sensitivity of ‘medium’, and this has resulted in impact assessments of ‘negligible/ slight adverse’.
- 7.5.5 For landscape character effects the **Area 7B – Penselwood Longleat Hills** have some presence in the site context, with features evident such as:
- *‘Small fields of irregular form’, and*
 - *an association with the ‘landscaped park’ at Stourhead.*

Generally, they are more in the site context and not within it, with the site being a small part of the whole character area. Mitigation measures are considered to enhance some of these, with the field pattern remaining. The receptor is considered to have a sensitivity of '*medium*' and the magnitude of change considered '*negligible/low*'; this has resulted in impact assessments of '*slight adverse*'. The Character Area is not considered to be substantially altered by the development.

7.5.6 The effects of the landscape change at the site can therefore be considered as construction phase and operational phase.

Construction Phase Landscape Effects are summarised as:

- An increase in construction activity and vehicles on the site leading to a potential reduction in the tranquillity of the area in what is a tranquil location, this will change the baseline condition temporarily.
- The erection of the new structures, hard standings and access and an immediate change from the landscape baseline.
- Planting of mitigation landscaping, changing the very local cover of a small part of the site.

Some of these effects will be temporary and for the duration of the construction period only.

7.5.7 Operational Phase Landscape Effects are summarised as:

- The insertion of structures into the landscape which are a permanent change, altering the cover of the landscape at a very local level.
- The growth of mitigation planting, which will add to the local range of habitats, and habitat linking across the site and provide good screening.
- Continued maintenance and recovery of surrounding hedges to improve the structure and longevity of the hedgerow pattern.

These effects will be temporary for the duration of the planning period and may ultimately be reversed. They have been assessed as having impacts at a very local level.

7.5.8 There will be small landscape changes at the site level, but these are considered to be well contained and screened within the existing field pattern, and they are closely associated with the adjacent tourism infrastructure for Stourhead Gardens. The wider landscape context remains little affected and there are no landscape effects that are '*substantial*' during the operational period.