Botley West Solar Farm

Planning Supporting Statement inc Green Belt Case

Other Documents

7.1

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Term	Meaning
The Applicant	SolarFive Ltd
The Project	The Botley West Solar Farm (Botley West) Project

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
DCO	Development Consent Order
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ES	Environmental Statement
NGET	National Grid Electricity Transmission
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPS	National Policy Statement
NSIP	Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project
PEIR	Preliminary Environmental Information Report
PINS	The Planning Inspectorate
PV	Photovoltaic
PVDP	Photovolt Development Partners GmbH
AGD	Above Ground Development
VSC	Very Special Circumstances

Units

[Include all units used in the document in the table below. The units included in the table below are examples – delete if they are not relevant to this document and add those used.]

Unit	Description
%	Percentage
km^2	Square kilometres
kWh	Kilowatt hour
MW	Megawatt
MWe	Megawatt electrical
MWh	Megawatt hour

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this Report

1.1.1 This Planning Supporting Statement (PSS) has been prepared by RPS on behalf of PhotoVolt Development Partners GmbH (PVDP) for the Applicant, SolarFive Ltd. (SolarFive). SolarFive is a licence holder under the Electricity Act 1989 and is a company registered in England and Wales (company no. 12602740).

1.1.2 This Planning Statement supports the application seeking a Development Consent Order (DCO) for the Botley West Solar Farm (the Project, hereafter referred to as 'Botley West') which is the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a solar farm utilising ground-mounted photo-voltaic (PV) panels with an electrical output of 840MWe and will include the creation of access roads and habitat.

1.1.3 The PSS is intended to provide the Examining Authority (the 'ExA') and interested parties with an understanding of the Applicant's position in regard to the extent to which the proposed development complies with relevant planning policy.

1.1.4 This PSS is one of a suite of documents that accompany the DCO application, including an Environmental Statement [EN010147/APP/6.3] and the associated surveys and assessment work. The PSS should be read alongside these documents and will, where appropriate, summarise them when drawing conclusions on policy compliance.

1.1.5 This PSS also incorporates a Green Belt Statement, provided at Appendix 8, which has been prepared to explain the very special circumstances which support the inclusion of those parts of the Project that fall within the Oxfordshire Green Belt.

1.2 Overview of the Project

1.2.1 The UK Government has legislated to commit the country to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and to de-carbonising electricity by 2035. These commitments mean the UK urgently needs more renewable forms of electricity to be produced. The reliance on fossil fuels as part of the UK's energy mix will have to be displaced by cleaner and more secure sources of energy, resulting in greatly increased renewable electricity demand. Already, all coal-fired power stations in the UK have closed, many conventional gas-fired power stations have closed and many of our older nuclear power stations will no longer be generating to support the nation's energy needs.

1.2.2 Botley West is a solar farm located in parts of the administrative areas of West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC), Cherwell District Council (CDC) and Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC) and is within the county of Oxfordshire. Its renewable electricity generation output will be critical in helping deliver the Government's commitments.

1.2.3 The Project has a total area of approximately 1,418 ha (see Volume 2, Figure 1.1 – 'Site Location and Order Limits' **[EN010147/APP/6.4]**, with the

installation of solar panels across approximately 839 ha. The site location and size emerged following a site search undertaken by the Applicant, itself influenced by a number of planning, environmental, commercial and engineering factors. These factors are set out in Chapter 5 of the Environmental Statement and elsewhere in this PSS.

1.2.4 For ease of description, the Applicant has broadly divided the Project into three main sites, linked together by common electrical infrastructure, including electrical cabling: the Northern Site Area, the Central Site Area and the Southern Site Area (see Figure 1.2 **[EN010147/APP/6.4]**). The Project will be connected to a new National Grid Sub-station located at the southern end of the Project site, providing secure and clean energy of an equivalent level to meet the needs of approximately 330,000 homes.

1.2.5 The Project extends from an area of land in the north, situated between the A4260 and the Dorn River Valley near Tackley and Wootton (Northern Site Area), through a central section, situated broadly between Bladon and Cassington (Central Site Area), and connecting to a section further south near to Farmoor Reservoir and north of Cumnor (Southern Site Area), where the Project will connect to the National Grid transmission network (the Site Areas, as shown in Figure 1.2 (doc. ref)). The majority of the land proposed for the Project is currently used for arable crops, the majority of which is grown as livestock feed, or is otherwise down to pasture.

1.2.6 The Applicant will retain an agricultural land use beneath the solar arrays, between the power converter stations and substations, and on areas of the Site that will remain undeveloped, such as the water meadows adjoining the River Evenlode. This continued agricultural use will be in the form of low density sheep and cattle grazing – sometimes referred to as conservation grazing. The Applicant also proposes to make available land for horticultural production areas, for use by community food growing groups, and an area for a building to be used for educational purposes.

1.2.7 The continued agricultural use of the land will be managed in a way that will support the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. The oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project.

1.2.8 An area of up to 30 hectares is being provided for community food groups within the areas shown as providing ‘opportunities for enhancement’ on the Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**.

1.2.9 Similarly, a building for educational use can be in the form of a covered facility with parking and other amenities, so that local schools and other interested parties, can have a base to meet and learn about the local area, local ecology and the landscape.

1.2.10 The land to be made available for horticultural use and the land and building for educational use forms part of the Project and is identified in the outline Operational Management Plan (oOMP) **[EN010147/APP/7.6.2]**, be delivered via the detailed Operational Management Plan (OMP). The OMP will facilitate

the selection of a suitable site(s), their design and layout and where relevant set out operational and management controls.

1.2.11 The Project as submitted has evolved and been refined since it was conceived in 2019. During the pre-application stage the Applicant has ensured that the local community and key stakeholders have been informed about and consulted upon the proposals. A formal programme of consultation has been undertaken in accordance with the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)**,** as agreed with the relevant host authorities. Informal consultation was held between 3rd November and 22nd December 2022, with a statutory consultation stage held from 30th November 2023 to 8th February 2024, and a further two targeted consultations on adjustments to the red line boundary from 14th June to the 28th July 2024, and then again from 15th August to the 15th September 2924. Full details of the community consultation can be found in the Consultation Report **[EN010147/APP/5.1]**.

1.2.12 The Applicant's Project is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) as the generation capacity of Botley West exceeds 50 MWe. The Applicant therefore seeks development consent, under the Planning Act 2008 (PA 2008), to construct, operate and maintain, and decommission a solar farm and associated infrastructure. The consent being sought is temporary, for 42 years from the date of any DCO consent granted for the Project. At the end of this period, all above ground infrastructure (excluding the NGET substation) and equipment will have been removed, along with the cables beneath the main solar arrays, with the land continuing in agricultural use. Cables located beneath the public highway are not proposed to be removed following the end of the period of consent.

1.2.13 The project will connect to a new National Grid 400kV substation to be located adjacent to the existing National Grid 400kV power line that runs between Cowley, in Oxford westwards to Walham in Gloucestershire. Discussions have been ongoing with NGET regarding location and design for their substation, based upon their own assessment and evaluation work. Whilst, at the time of writing this statement, a final decision has yet to be taken by NGET, it is likely that the NGET substation will be located in one of two possible locations:

1. On land within the Applicant's control, at its Southern Site, at the western most extremity, south of the Farmoor Reservoir; or

2. On land near the Applicant's Southern Site, to the west of that site, south of the Farmoor Reservoir.

1.2.14 NGET is likely to make a final decision shortly but, in the interim and for assessment purposes, the Applicant assumes that the NGET substation will be within the Applicant's site, as described in Option 1 above, and powers will be taken to consent that substation as part of the Applicant's DCO.

1.2.15 If NGET decides not to locate their substation within the Applicant's site, then PVDP has cumulatively assessed:

- an alternative location for the NGET substation, assumed to be close to the Southern Site at its western end, with NGET seeking consent via the Town and Country Planning Act 1990; and

- the substitution of solar panels for the substation on the land referred to in Option 1 above.

1.2.16 The area required to be set aside for the NGET substation amounts to approximately 3.8ha.

1.3 The Applicant

1.3.1 The Applicant, SolarFive, is the 'special purpose vehicle' (SPV) for the Project and has been awarded a generation licence by Ofgem and offered a grid connection by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) from October 2026. SolarFive is a company registered in England and Wales (company no. 12602740) and is a licence holder under the Electricity Act 1989.

1.3.2 PVDP is jointly owned by the two founders of PVDP, a Berlin-based developer of solar farms. PVDP has been building solar assets in Europe and Japan for the last 18 years, with 1.0GW built to date.

2 Legislative & Policy Context

2.1 Legislative Context

2.1.1 The statutory framework for determining applications seeking development consent is provided by the Planning Act 2008 (the 'Act'). Section 104 (2) of the Act (as Amended) states that:

(2) "In deciding the application the Secretary of State must have regard to—

a) any national policy statement which has effect in relation to development of the description to which the application relates (a "relevant national policy statement"),

aa) the appropriate marine policy documents (if any), determined in accordance with section 59 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009;

b) any local impact report (within the meaning given by section 60(3)) submitted to the Secretary of State before the deadline specified in a notice under section 60(2),

c) any matters prescribed in relation to development of the description to which the application relates, and

d) other matters which the Secretary of State thinks are both important and relevant to the Secretary of State's decision."

2.1.2 In this respect, Section 104 (3) provides that the Secretary of State (SoS) must decide applications for development consent in accordance with any National Policy Statement (NPS) except to the extent that the SoS is satisfied that one or more of the following exceptions apply:

- that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would lead to the United Kingdom being in breach of any of its international obligations;
- that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would lead to the Secretary of State being in breach of any duty imposed on the Secretary of State by or under enactment;
- that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would be unlawful by virtue of any enactment;
- that the Secretary of State is satisfied that the adverse impact of the proposed development outweighs its benefits; and

2.1.3 The relevant National Policy Statements (NPSs) to which the SoS must have regard in accordance with Section 104 (2) and 104 (3) of the PA 2008 are considered to be:

- Overarching National Policy Statement for energy (NPS EN-1)
- National Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure (NPS EN-3)
- National Policy Statement for electricity networks infrastructure (NPS EN-5)

2.1.4 NPS EN-1 sets out national policy for energy infrastructure, including solar (Paragraph 3.3.61 to 3.3.63);

"The need for all these types of infrastructure is established by this NPS and a combination of many or all of them is urgently required for both energy security and Net Zero, as set out above.

Government has concluded that there is a critical national priority (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure. Section 4.2 states which energy generating technologies are low carbon and are therefore CNP infrastructure.

Subject to any legal requirements, the urgent need for CNP Infrastructure to achieving our energy objectives, together with the national security, economic, commercial, and net zero benefits, will in general outweigh any other residual impacts not capable of being addressed by application of the mitigation hierarchy. Government strongly supports the delivery of CNP Infrastructure and it should be progressed as quickly as possible."

2.1.5 When considering proposed development, particularly when weighing adverse impacts against benefits, the SoS should take into account:

- Potential benefits including contribution to meeting the need for energy infrastructure, job creation, reduction of geographical disparities, environmental enhancements, and any long-term or wider benefits
- Potential adverse impacts, including on the environment, including any long-term and cumulative adverse impacts, as well as any measures to avoid, reduce, mitigate or compensate for any adverse impacts, following the mitigation hierarchy (Paragraph 4.1.5)

2.1.6 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance, for England, has been taken into account within the energy NPSs where appropriate (Paragraph 4.1.11)

2.1.7 Where there is conflict between a Development Plan document and an NPS, the NPS prevails for the purpose of the SoS decision making given the national significance of the infrastructure (Paragraph 4.1.15)

2.1.8 The SoS should consider the guidance in the NPPF, the Planning Practice Guidance: Use of Planning Conditions or any successor documents, where appropriate (Paragraph 4.1.17).

2.1.9 The NPPF confirms at Paragraph 5 that it does not contain specific policies for NSIPs, and that they are determined in accordance with the PA 2008 decision-making framework and relevant national policy statements for major infrastructure, as well as any other matters that are relevant, which may include the NPPF.

2.2 Relevant National Policy

International and National Policy Context

2.2.1 The justification for the Project is set within the context of legislation, policy and guidance and renewable energy targets set at international and national

government levels. These are material considerations in the determination of a planning application. During a recognised climate emergency, there has been a focussed effort both to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to secure renewable sources for the generation, and secure supply of, electricity to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels to produce energy.

2.2.2 There has been extensive renewable energy and climate change legislation, policy and guidance documents at an international and national level, which support the pressing need for decarbonisation. That started with the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, through to The UK Renewable Energy Roadmap in 2011; the Paris Agreement 2016; UK Government Net Zero 2050 and UK Climate Emergency in 2019; the National Infrastructure Strategy and Energy White Paper in 2020, and more recently the British Energy Security Strategy in April 2022 and Powering Up Britain Energy Security Plan in March 2023.

2.2.3 Whilst the Applicant does not intend to make detailed reference to the above documents in this PSS (as the key outcomes have now been captured in recent publications), it is pertinent to note that the most recent of the above documents, Powering Up Britain Energy Security Plan, 2023 (Table: Next Steps: Power Generation, page 20), makes the following statement;

" *Solar has huge potential to help us decarbonise the power sector. We have ambitions for a fivefold increase in solar by 2035, up to 70GW, enough to power around 20 million homes. We need to maximise deployment of both ground and rooftop solar to achieve our overall target. Ground-mount solar is one of the cheapest forms of electricity generation and is readily deployable at scale. Government seeks large scale solar deployment across the UK, looking for development mainly on brownfield, industrial and low/medium grade agricultural land. The Government will therefore not be making changes to categories of agricultural land in ways that might constrain solar deployment. Government is seeking widespread deployment of rooftop solar in commercial, industrial and domestic properties across the UK. To support our solar ambitions, we are accepting the recommendation from the Independent Review of Net Zero to set up a taskforce to deliver on this ambition."*

2.2.4 There are currently six designated energy National Policy Statements (NPSs), EN-1, EN-2, EN-3, EN-4, EN-5 and EN-6. The 2023 revised NPSs (EN-1 to EN-5) came into force on 17 January 2024.

2.2.5 The Energy NPSs are specific in terms of which energy generation technologies they cover. In relation to a ground-mounted photovoltaic solar farm, the most relevant NPSs are Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (NPS EN-1) and National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (NPS EN-3). National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure (NPS EN-5) is also relevant in relation to the proposed development due the delivery of a new National Grid substation and other electrical infrastructure.

Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1)

2.2.6 NPS EN-1 sets out the general principles and the impacts to be taken into account for all types of energy NSIP development, covered by the other Energy NSPs. For such applications this NPS, combined with any technology specific

energy NPS where relevant, provides the primary policy for decisions by the Secretary of State. EN-1 states that, amongst other types of generation capacity, large scale renewable energy projects are needed in order to meet the demand for electricity generation in the UK, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from electricity generation in order to meet the Government's decarbonisation targets.

2.2.7 Part 4 of EN-1 sets out the general principles that should be applied in the assessment of development consent applications across the range of energy technologies. Part 5 of EN-1 sets out policy on the assessment of impacts which are common across a range of these technologies (generic impacts). These include:

- Air quality and emissions (section 5.2)
- Greenhouse gas emissions (section 5.3)
- Biodiversity and geological conservation (section 5.4)
- Civil and military aviation and defence interests (section 5.5)
- Dust, odour, artificial light, smoke, steam and insect infestation (section 5.7)
- Flood Risk (section 5.8)
- Historic environment (section 5.9)
- Landscape and visual (section 5.10)
- Land use including open space, green infrastructure and green belt (section 5.11)
- Noise and vibration (section 5.12)
- Socio-economic impacts (section 5.13)
- Traffic and transport (section 5.14)
- Resource and Waste management (section 5.15)
- Water quality and resources (section 5.16)

2.2.8 The above factors have been taken into account when producing the documents to accompany the DCO application. Table 2 at Appendix 1 details the key paragraphs from NPS EN-1 relevant to the Project, together with the Applicant's response in respect of compliance with policy.

2.2.9 In summary, there is overwhelming policy support for renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project complies with NPS EN-1.

2.2.10 In respect of Green Belt policy, the Applicant has set out an analysis of how the project affects the five purposes of Green Belt, how it affects openness, and identifies and explains its Very Special Circumstances (VSC) case (See Appendix 8). On balance, the Applicant concludes that whilst there is conflict with the purposes of Green Belt and some harm to openness, these are considered to be limited, temporary and reversible. On that basis, and the considerable weight attributable to the VSC case, the Applicant is of the view

that harm caused by inappropriateness, and any other harm is not so great to prevent the application of VSC. In the opinion of the Applicant, the VSC case outweighs the harm to Green Belt so rendering the Project application acceptable in the planning balance.

National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)

2.2.11 NPS EN-3 taken together with the NPS EN-1, provides the primary policy for decisions by the Secretary of State on applications they receive for nationally significant renewable energy infrastructure defined at section 1.6 of EN-3, including solar schemes greater than 50MW.

2.2.12 The policies set out in NPS EN-3 are additional to those on generic impacts set out in EN-1. Applicants are required to show how their application meets the requirements in EN-1 and EN-3, applying the mitigation hierarchy, as well as any other legal and regulatory requirements. This includes the assessment principles as set out in Part 4 of EN-1, and the consideration of impacts as set out in Part 5 of EN-1. Table 3 at Appendix 2 details the key paragraphs from NPS EN-3 relevant to the Project, together with the Applicant's response in respect of compliance with the policy.

2.2.13 In summary, there is in principle overwhelming policy support for renewable energy development in NPS EN-3. The Applicant has assessed the environmental effects likely to arise as a result of the Project, and whilst some adverse effects are predicted these are temporary and/or not considered to be significant in the overall planning balance. Nothing in the assessment will lead to unacceptable effects such that permission should be refused. The design and layout of the Project has evolved having proper regard to relevant environmental constraints. In the planning balance, the Applicant considers that the Project complies with the requirements of NPS EN-3.

National Policy Statement for Electricity Works Infrastructure (EN-5)

2.2.14 EN-5, taken together with the NPS EN-1, provides the primary policy for decisions taken by the Secretary of State on applications it receives for electricity networks infrastructure. This NPS should also be read in conjunction with NPS EN-3. Table 4 at Appendix 3 details the key paragraphs from NPS EN-3 relevant to the Project, together with the Applicant's response in respect of compliance with the policy.

2.2.15 In summary, policy supports, in principle, renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project complies with NPS EN-5.

2.3 Other Material Considerations

Relevant Development Plan Documents

2.3.1 As set out in Paragraph 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 above, section 104 (b) of PA 2008 also requires the SoS to have regard to any local impact report submitted to the SoS. It is expected that any local impact report will contain an analysis on how or to what extent the local authorities consider the Project accords with the provisions of the Development Plan.

2.3.2 Section 104 (d) of PA 2008 also requires the SoS to have regard to other matters which the SoS thinks are important and relevant to the decision. Turning back to NPS EN-1, Paragraph 4.1.12 considers that *"Other matters that the Secretary of State may consider both important and relevant to their decision-making may include Development Plan documents or other documents in the Local Development Framework."*

2.3.3 Whilst it is important to recognise that the provisions of the Development Plan Documents may be matters to which the SoS may have regard, there is no legal requirement to determine this NSIP application in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan Documents. Whilst section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the 'PCP Act') states *"if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise,"* this is not applicable for application for a Development Consent Order.

2.3.4 The Project lies within three separate District administrative areas; West Oxfordshire District Council (WoDC), Cherwell District Council (CDC) and the Vale of the White Horse District Council (VoWH). The Project also falls within Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). All four are therefore 'host authorities' for the purposes of section 42 (Duty to consult) of the PA 2008. Consequently, the relevant documents of the Development Plan in accordance with section 38 (3) of the PCP Act are:

- West Oxfordshire: West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 (adopted 2018) (WOLP), the 'made' Neighbourhood Development Plans for Woodstock (2023), Eynsham (2020) and Cassington (2023).
- Cherwell: Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) (adopted 2015), including saved policies from the Local Plan 1996 and its Partial Review, adopted in 2020;
- Vale of White Horse: Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Parts One (adopted 2016) and Two (adopted 2019), the 'made' Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan (2021); and
- Oxfordshire: The Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (adopted 2017) and saved policies of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (adopted 1996)

2.3.5 The policies of each Development Plan that may be considered relevant to the Project are set out in Appendices 4 to 6 and the degree to which compliance is achieved is set out by the Applicant in those appendices.

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

2.3.6 The WOLP was adopted in September 2018 and sets out the overall planning framework for the District from 2011 to 2031.

2.3.7 The Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP) will guide the future delivery of Salt Cross; a proposed new village located north of the A40, near Eynsham. Once adopted, the AAP will be used alongside the WODC Local Plan and Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan to determine future development

proposals. Following receipt of the Inspectors report into the examination of the Salt Cross Garden Village AAP in March 2023, which concluded that subject to a number of Main Modifications, the APP was considered to be 'sound,' a legal challenge was submitted which focused on the conclusions reached by the Inspector in relation to the soundness of AAP Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon Development. Following a hearing in the High Court in November 2023, a written judgement was handed down on 20 February 2024 and a subsequent agreed draft order dated 4 March 2024 confirmed that the Inspector's report and proposed Main Modifications are quashed insofar as they relate to Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon Development. Subsequently, an examination has been re-opened to consider the submission draft version of Policy 2. As of 18th October 2024, in a letter from WODC to the Planning Inspectorate, WODC have confirmed that they are not yet in a position to be able to submit the proposed policy modifications and supporting evidence in relation to Policy 2. Therefore, the re-examination of Policy 2 of the Salt Cross Area Action Plan has not yet taken place and the AAP has not been formally adopted by WODC.

2.3.8 Whilst not directly adjacent to the Project order limits, the AAP would have some relevance due to its scale and proximity to the Central Site of the Project, and its possible cumulative impacts, including on landscape and connectivity. The status of the Salt Cross Garden Village AAP will continue to be monitored throughout the DCO process.

2.3.9 The majority of both the Northern and Central Sites of the Project are located within the administrative area of WODC with a large proportion of the Central Site located within the Oxford Green Belt. A Regulation 10A review, as required by the Town and Country Planning Act, of the WOLP was undertaken in September 2023 to determine whether they required updating or otherwise, since the WOLP was adopted in September 2018 and had subsequently turned 5 years old. The majority of the policies were considered to be broadly consistent with national policy, and it does not appear that any policies have been updated in light of the review, however the forthcoming Local Plan 2041 will implement changes.

2.3.10 Core Objective CO14 of the WOLP seeks to "Conserve and enhance the character and significance of West Oxfordshire's high quality natural, historic and cultural environment – including its geodiversity, landscape, biodiversity, heritage and arts – recognising and promoting their wider contribution to people's quality of life and social and economic well-being both within the District and beyond." Equally, Core Objective CO18 of the WOLP seeks to "Minimise the use of non-renewable natural resources and promote more widespread use of renewable energy solutions."

2.3.11 Table 5 at Appendix 4 sets out the most relevant planning policies from the WOLP in relation to the Project, together with the Applicant's response.

2.3.12 In summary, there is no policy, in principle, that prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicant considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the WOLP.

Emerging Development Plan Documents

2.3.13 WODC are in the process of preparing a new Local Plan 2041, to cover the period up to 2041. WODC have completed an initial scoping consultation, in August – October 2022 and a focused consultation on draft plan objectives, pattern of development and call for ideas, opportunities and sites, in August – October 2023. A preferred options consultation (Regulation 18) was due to take place in October 2024, however, no such consultation appears to have taken place. The current timetable for the Local Plan 2041 anticipates a Regulation 19 consultation on the publication pre-submission draft of the Local Plan to take place in March 2025, followed by submission for examination in June 2025 with subsequent examination and adoption anticipated in 2026.

2.3.14 Whilst still at a very early stage, the focused consultation addressed Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency with Objective 1 seeking *"To minimise the impact we are having on our changing climate by reducing carbon emissions across all sources, with a particular focus on transport, housing, industry and energy."* This includes the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy (approved 2018) the aim of which is to achieve a *"50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 and net zero by 2050"* as per UK law (See Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire, (PaZCO) 2021) Additionally, WODC's own Climate Change Strategy (2021 – 2025) commits WODC to *"working in partnership with Oxfordshire councils and partners to support the transition to ultra-low emission transport and active travel, a zero-carbon economy and clean energy supply".* Additionally, Objective 2 of the focused consultation seeks *"To facilitate the roll out of clean, renewable energy at a range of different sites in suitable, appropriate locations across the District."* Again, PaZCO has highlighted the *"need to increase local renewable electricity generation in response to an expected doubling of electricity demand due to the electrification of heating, transportation and high population growth".* The Council Plan (2023 – 2027) also *"seeks to encourage renewable energy generation at appropriate sites in the District, improving local energy and economic resilience and supporting the community benefits that this resilience will bring".*

West Oxfordshire District Council Neighbourhood Plans

Woodstock

2.3.15 The Woodstock Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) was 'made' on the 23rd January 2023 and covers the period 2020-2031, to coincide with the expiry of the adopted WOLP. An area of approximately 10 ha within the Northern Site falls within the WNP designated area.

2.3.16 The WNP states it "has a singular focus on the protection of green and open spaces within the plan area'. It has secured this protection through the designation of five 'Local Green Spaces'" (Paragraph 1.4), including areas of allotments, water meadow, woodland and nature reserve. No Local Green Spaces are designated within the Project site boundary.

2.3.17 Since there are no Local Green Spaces designated within the Project site boundary, there are no relevant policies of the WNP which are relevant to the Project.

Eynsham

2.3.18 The Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan (ENP) was 'made' on 6th February 2020 and covers the period 2018-2031, again to coincide with the expiry of the adopted WOLP. An area of approximately 8 ha falls within the ENP designated area which are currently cable route options.

2.3.19 The ENP states its vision is "for the Parish of Eynsham at the end of the plan period is that both new and existing residents will be enjoying the same benefits of living in the village as current residents do and that the area will be an even more attractive community in which to live and work." (Page 9)

2.3.20 Whilst no policies specifically cover the cable route option areas, the Project site boundary is adjacent to the eastern boundary of a designated Local Green Space. Policy ENP12: Local Green Space designates LGS4: Hazeldene Close Open Space, an area of open central grassed area with young trees and orchard planting as a Local Green Space. Relevant policies of the ENP are detailed in Table 6 at Appendix 4 together with the Applicant's response.

2.3.21 In summary, there is no policy, in principle, that prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the Plan.

Cassington

2.3.22 The Cassington Neighbourhood Development Plan (CNDP) was 'made' on 26th June 2023 and covers the period 2021-2041, which will coincide with the expiry of the new Local Plan currently being prepared by WODC. A small area of the Project falls within the CNDP designated area.

2.3.23 The CNP seeks to, *inter alia,* protect and improve the multi-functional value and connectivity of the green infrastructure assets for nature recovery and mitigating the effects of climate change; create and integrate a safe and convenient walking and cycling network; to conserve the special heritage assets and the village's landscape setting; and to manage housing growth.

2.3.24 The CNP designated area includes the areas of Ancient Woodland at Burleigh Wood and Bladon Heath which lie adjacent to the Central Site boundary. Additionally, the CNP also considers the rail line that cuts through the parish as a potential wildlife corridor. The rail line is adjacent to a number of field boundaries located within the Central Site. Relevant policies of the CNP are detailed in Table 7 at Appendix 4, together with the Applicant's response.

2.3.25 In summary, there is no policy, in principle, that prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the Plan. In addition, the Applicant proposes an environmental enhancement to ease the intermittent flooding the village experiences. They propose a water storage body, ditch widening, and bunding north of Cassington which seeks to avoid or minimise future flooding events going forward. This measure is not required as part of the Projects' impacts,

but is proposed to provide a betterment to surface water runoff and this is discussed in the Conceptual Drainage Strategy for the site within Appendix 10.2: Conceptual Drainage Strategy **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**. Its location is dictated by surface water modelling undertaken in this location.

2.3.26 Whilst this feature happens to coincide with Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land, on balance the Applicant sees an overall benefit accruing to the residents of the village and promotes its inclusion in the Project.

Wootton by Woodstock

2.3.27 The Neighbourhood Plan Area for the parish of Wootton was designated on 14 July 2023. A small area of the Project site would fall within the Wootton Neighbourhood Plan Area. The Wootton Neighbourhood Plan survey was launched on 7 September 2024 to help inform the Wootton Neighbourhood Plan.

Cherwell District Council (CDC)

2.3.28 The Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2021 (Part 1) was formally adopted in July 2015 and contains strategic policies for development the use of land.

2.3.29 A Regulation 10A review of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) was conducted in February 2023 and showed that nearly all policies were generally consistent with government policy and/or local circumstances, with the exception of Policy BSC1: District-Wide Housing Distribution.

2.3.30 The 'saved' policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 also remain part of the statutory Development Plan alongside the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) Partial Review – Oxford's Unmet Housing Need, which was formally adopted as part of the statutory Development Plan in September 2020. The Partial Review provides the strategic planning framework and sets out strategic site allocations to provide Cherwell District's share of the unmet housing needs of Oxford to 2031.

2.3.31 As detailed above, fields on the eastern fringes of the Northern and Central Sites are located within the administrative area of CDC.

2.3.32 Strategic Objective 11, Ensuring Sustainable Development seeks "to incorporate the principles of sustainable development in mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts including increasing local resource efficiency (particularly water efficiency), minimising carbon emissions, promoting decentralised and renewable or low carbon energy where appropriate and ensuring that the risk of flooding is not increased."

2.3.33 The following policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2021 (Part 1), the 'saved' policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 are detailed at Appendix 5, together with the Applicant's response.

2.3.34 In summary, there is no policy in principle that prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the Plan.

Emerging Development Plan Documents

2.3.35 CDC are producing a new Local Plan, the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2040, to meet Cherwell's needs, protect its environment and secure sustainable development. CDC have completed two Community Involvement Papers, taking place between July 2020 – September 2020 and September 2021 – November 2021 respectively and have undertaken a Regulation 18 consultation on the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2040 Consultation draft, between September and November 2023. Currently, responses are being considered alongside other technical work to develop a proposed Plan, which is indicated to be made available to comment in 2024. The latest Local Development Scheme suggests adoption of the new Local Plan in December 2025, which will replace the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2021 (Part 1) and the 'saved' policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996.

2.3.36 Whilst at an early stage and subject to change, and therefore only attracting very limited weight in the planning process, the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2040 Regulation 18 consultation contained three themes, the first of them being *"Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change and Ensuring Sustainable Development."* This theme is seen throughout the consultation document, with the Vision of the Cherwell Local Plan Review also stating that: *"The Cherwell Local Plan Review will ensure that by 2040: (inter alia) We achieve our climate action targets. Our energy production will be sustainable and new developments are built to high energy efficient standards."* The Cherwell Local Plan Review 2040 is likely to advance through the plan-making process during the DCO application timeframe; therefore, the weight to be given to the Local Plan Review 2040 may increase in accordance with Paragraph 48 of the NPPF as the review reaches more advanced stages. The Applicant will continue to monitor its status and report as necessary during the Examination process.

Cherwell District Council Neighbourhood Plans

2.3.37 There are no 'made' neighbourhood plans in CDC which will be affected by the Project at the time of writing.

2.3.38 It is noted that a Neighbourhood Plan Areas has been designated for the Parish of Shipton on Cherwell and Thrupp. The two most southern fields of the Northern Site fall within the proposed Neighbourhood Plan Area. At the time of writing, it is not known that any further progress has been made in regard to the Neighbourhood Plan, with the latest update provided via the Parish Council's website on 30th March 2020, highlighting the delay on work on the Neighbourhood Plan, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Applicant will continue to monitor its status and report as necessary during the Examination process.

Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWH)

2.3.39 The VoWH Local Plan 2031 Part 1 was adopted in December 2016 whilst the Local Plan Part 2 was adopted in October 2019. Local Plan 2031 Part 1 sets out the spatial strategy and strategic policies for the district, identifies the number of new homes and jobs to be provided whilst making provision for

retail, leisure and commercial development, and the infrastructure required to support these. Local Plan 2031 Part 2 sets out policies and locations for housing for VoWH's proportion of Oxford's housing need up to 2031 and also contains detailed development management policies to complement the Part 1 plan, along with housing allocations.

2.3.40 A Regulation 10A review of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 was approved in December 2021 and showed that together with Local Plan 2031 Part 2, these documents continue to provide a framework for development that is in overall conformity with government policy.

2.3.41 The whole of the Southern Site lies within the administrative area VoWH, alongside the southern part of the cable routes.

2.3.42 The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 contains a number of Strategic Objectives covering the topics of 'Building healthy and sustainable communities,' 'Supporting economic prosperity,' 'Sustainable transport and accessibility' and 'Protecting the environment and responding to climate change.' Strategic Objective 12 seeks to *"Minimise greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution (such as water, air, noise and light) across the district and increase our resilience to likely impacts of climate change, especially flooding."*

2.3.43 The following policies of the VoWH Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and 2 are detailed at Table 9, Appendix 6 together with the Applicant's response.

2.3.44 In summary, there is no policy in principle, that prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the Plan.

Emerging Development Plan Documents

2.3.45 VoWH in conjunction with South Oxfordshire District Council are working on a Joint Local Plan 2041, which will guide new housing and job creation as well as developing planning policies which will help address the climate emergency, restore nature and meet the needs of residents, up until 2041. To date, an Issues Consultation took place in May 2022 and a Preferred Options (Regulation 18) consultation has closed in February 2024. From 1 October to 12 November 2024, VoWH, in conjunction with South Oxfordshire District Council, are undertaking a Regulation 19 Consultation on the Joint Local Plan 2041. The latest Local Development Scheme, adopted in September 2023, suggests that the Joint Local Plan 2041 will be adopted in December 2025.

2.3.46 Whilst at an early stage and subject to change, and therefore only attracting very limited weight in the planning process, the Joint Local Plan 2041 Publication Version, which is currently subject to a Regulation 19 consultation, includes Policy CE5 – Renewable Energy which encourages proposals for renewable energy schemes and community-led initiatives and sets criteria detailing where the schemes and associated infrastructure will be supported. The policy also recognises the location of such schemes must also be suitable and a renewable energy spatial strategy assessment (informed by a renewables landscape sensitivity assessment), which forms part of the Net Zero Carbon Study, was commissioned. The Net Zero Carbon Study identified

potentially suitably broad locations for renewable energy schemes in the districts which are shown on the Policies Map.

2.3.47 The policy supports applications for renewable energy developments within these broad areas, helping to secure their development in accordance with national policy. However, the authority also state in the supporting text that being located in a potentially suitable area does not make the proposal automatically acceptable.

2.3.48 The Joint Local Plan 2041 will advance through the plan-making process during the DCO application timeframe; therefore, the weight to be given to the Joint Local Plan 2041 is very limited. That may change going forward, in accordance with Paragraph 48 of the NPPF, as the review reaches more advance stages. The Applicant will continue to monitor its status and report as necessary during the Examination process.

Vale of White Horse District Council Neighbourhood Plans

Cumnor

2.3.49 The Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan was 'made' on 18th May 2021 and covers the period 2021 to 2031. The entirety of the Southern Site lies within the Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan Area.

2.3.50 The Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan seeks to, *inter alia*, protect and enhance green and blue infrastructure; support opportunities for local employment; ensure infrastructure supports the needs of new and existing residents; maintain and enhance the character of the Parish and provide a well-balanced mix of housing to meet identified needs. The relevant policies from the Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan are detailed at Table 10, Appendix 6 together with the Applicant's response.

2.3.51 In summary, there is no policy that in principle prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the Plan.

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)

2.3.52 The adopted Minerals and Waste Local Plan covering Oxfordshire is the Part 1: Core Strategy, adopted by OCC in September 2017 which sets out the vision, objectives, spatial planning strategy and policies for meeting development requirements for the supply of minerals and the management of waste in Oxfordshire over the period to 2031.

2.3.53 Additionally, 16 'saved' policies from the Minerals and Waste Local Plan (1996), adopted in July 1996 also remain in use for the purposes of development management, pending the adoption of the new Minerals and Waste Local Plan, discussed below. An assessment undertaken in September 2017 on the remaining 16 polices considered that all the 'saved' policies were either fully, or partly consistent with the NPPF and NPPG at that time, however both the NPPF and NPPG have been subject to several updates since.

2.3.54 A MSA for sharp sand and gravels has been identified within the Project area. In accordance with local planning policy a Mineral Resource Assessment

(MRA) has been undertaken that demonstrates that although sand and gravel deposits of potential commercial interest are present sporadically beneath part of the Central Site area, the Project will not result in the permanent sterilisation of these resources. The MRA is presented as Appendix 11.14 [EN010147/APP/6.5].

2.3.55 The most relevant policies of the Part 1: Core Strategy of the adopted Minerals and Waste Local Plan and the 'saved' polices of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan (1996) are detailed at Table 11, Appendix 6 together with the Applicant's response.

2.3.56 In summary, there is no policy in principle, that prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the Plan.

Emerging Development Plan Documents

2.3.57 OCC are in the process of developing a new Minerals and Waste Plan for Oxfordshire, up to 2042. The most recent Local Development Scheme, approved by OCC in December 2022 details the decision and timetable to pursue a Minerals and Waste Plan, which would combine parts 1 and 2 of the current Local Plan, into a new Minerals and Waste Plan. The LDS seeks for adoption of the new Minerals and Waste Plan in March 2026 however as of February 2024, no consultations have as yet taken place and therefore the new Minerals and Waste Plan is behind the proposed trajectory.

2.3.58 Despite the delay to the new Minerals and Waste Plan, work has stopped on the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 2: (Site Allocations Document). This cessation means this has no weight in planning decisions. As with other emerging Development Plan Documents, the new Minerals and Waste Plan is still at an early stage, is likely to advance through the plan-making process during the DCO application timeframe; therefore, the weight to be given to the new Minerals and Waste Plan may increase in accordance with Paragraph 48 of the NPPF as the review reaches more advance stages.

2.3.59 Other material considerations include and are detailed in turn below:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), December 2023
- OxLEP/Future Oxfordshire Partnership
- Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, 2018
- OCC Climate Action Framework

2.4 NPPF, December 2023

2.4.1 First published in 2012 and subsequently updated, most recently in December 2023, the NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. However, the NPPF does not contain specific policies for NSIPs, and as such, they will be determined in accordance with the relevant NPSs as well as any other matters which are considered material, which may include the NPPF.

2.4.2 As detailed at Paragraph 7 of the NPPF, the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, which *"at a very high level … can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* Achieving this means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, interdependent of one another but need to also be pursued in mutually supportive ways, allowing opportunities to secure net gains across each objective. The three overarching objectives are detailed at Paragraph 8, and state:

- *"an economic objective - to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure.*
- *a social objective - to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*
- *an environmental objective - to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy."*

2.4.3 The paragraphs of most relevance to the DCO application are summarised in Table 12 at Appendix 7 together with the Applicant's response.

2.4.4 In summary, there is no policy that in principle prevents renewable energy development, and the Applicants considers that the Project is substantially in accordance with the NPPF.

2.4.5 In terms of Green Belt, most elements of solar farms do not fall within any forms of development detailed at Paragraphs 154 and 155 of the NPPF, and therefore, by definition, some parts of the Botley West Solar Farm are considered as inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

2.4.6 This PSS considers the Project's location within the Oxford Green Belt and an assessment of the Project's impact upon the Green Belt is provided at Appendix 8. Whilst there is some conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt and some effect upon openness, these are considered to form low or limited harm, and do not prevent the consideration of a VSC case. The Applicant has advanced its VSC case in Appendix 8. It considers that the harm caused by inappropriate development and any other harm, is low, limited and reversible, and is outweighed by the considerable benefits accruing from the Project.

2.5 Oxfordshire wide strategies

OxLEP / Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, 2018

2.5.1 The OxLEP Board and Growth Board approved the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy in late 2018 and prepared following an invitation from BEIS for each LEP to work with their local partners to prepare strategies which responded to the energy priorities in their localities.

2.5.2 The objectives of the strategy include:

- Securing smart, modern, and clean energy infrastructure
- including increased grid capacity to support the planned housing, industrial and commercial growth, and changing energy requirements.
- Reducing countywide emissions by 50% as compared to 2008 levels by 2030, leading nationally and internationally while paving the pathway to achieving zero carbon growth by 2050.
- Enhancing energy networking and partnership working across Oxfordshire to focus on low carbon energy challenges and funding opportunities created through the Clean Growth Strategy and the Oxfordshire Industrial Strategy.

2.5.3 These objectives are further explained below:

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
Objective 1: Delivering an energy strategy for clean growth	Oxfordshire planned growth is set to add 100,000 new homes between 2016 and 2031, alongside a period of innovation and disruptive technological change. The objective is aimed at fortifying and improving the energy infrastructure, by developing new working partnerships with Distribution System Operators (DSOs) [Transitioning to Distribution Network Operators (DNOs)] and Ofgem.	The Applicants believes its Project will compliment and support the aim of this policy.
Objective 2: Reducing emissions - increasing local generation, reducing energy demand and increasing energy efficiency	Oxfordshire will aim at delivering affordable, clean energy locally to meet local demand aiding the transition to a low carbon county, help meeting the carbon emission reduction targets and keeping up to £1.1 billion within the county's economy every year. The objective sets out the county's aim to meet 56% of the electricity demand and 40% of the heat demand through renewable forms of technology, by the year 2030.	The Applicants believes its Project will compliment and support the aim of this policy.
Objective 3: A networked Oxfordshire – collaboration and partnership working	Oxfordshire is one of 11 LEPs (Local Economic Partnerships) that make up the Greater South-East Energy Hub (GSEEH). The need for high-level coordination forms the	The Applicants believes its Project will compliment and support the aim of this policy.

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
	foundation of the Energy Strategy, to oversee the multiplicity of energy interests and opportunities across the county. This would enable the county to align and implement, policies and initiative that may be required to move towards a zero-carbon growth model.	

OCC Climate Action Framework

2.5.4 The Climate Action Framework sets out guiding principles and how Oxfordshire County Council will mobilise to tackle these challenges via two connected roles:

- Transforming the organisation
- Enabling a zero-carbon Oxfordshire

2.5.5 These are considered further below:

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
Guiding Principles	**Evidence-Based Decisions** • An open and smart approach to data gathering and sharing to accelerate the ability to re- • prioritise investment • Work in collaboration with world class universities within Oxfordshire to develop evidence to inform decisions **Maximise Oxfordshire Benefits** • Supporting the growth of low-carbon jobs • Supporting communities to own energy projects and retain the benefits locally **Recognise a Role for Everyone** • Seeking everyone to participate including Council staff, communities, suppliers, businesses, partners and national government • Build partnerships to tackle systemic challenges	The Applicants believes its Project will compliment and support the aim of this principle. The Project will generate low carbon jobs, will offer discounted electricity process to local residents via a Community Benefits Package and will also provide an annual fund to local groups to support local initiatives. It is therefore consistent with OCC's guiding principles.
Infrastructure and Systems	The section sets out the following: *"Through our strategic planning and economic development roles, and working as a regional partner we will*	The Applicants believes its Project will compliment and support the aim of this principle.

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
	develop policy, support others, take part in innovation projects and channel our investment for: • *Smart, flexible, local renewable generation that enhances local resilience identified in strategic planning* • *Good design that favours zero-carbon connectivity and low-impact living from the outset* • *Enabling electric charging infrastructure accessible for all residents* • *Community ownership of energy generation and storage assets."*	The Project will generate low carbon jobs and acknowledge and welcome that the Project will offer discounted electricity process to local residents via a Community Benefits Package and that the project will also provide an annual fund to local groups to support local initiatives. It is therefore consistent with OCC's guiding principles

3 The Applicant's Case

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The UK's energy security and net zero obligations will only be delivered if we can enable the development of new low carbon sources of energy at speed and scale. This is Government policy (NPS EN-1 para 4.2.2). Wind and solar are the lowest cost ways of generating electricity, helping reduce costs and providing a clean and secure source of electricity supply (as they are not reliant on fuel for generation). Government analysis shows that a secure, reliable, affordable, net zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar (NPS EN-1 para 3.3.20). If consented, Botley West will play a vital role in this respect.

3.1.2 The largest solar developments are listed on the PINs website and an analysis of their capacity and status can be found at Annex A [**EN010147/APP/6.4**]. However, even if all of these are consented, built and connected before 2035, this would only add approximately 15.2GW to the 15.8GW of installed capacity reported in the House of Commons briefing paper from May 2024 i.e. a total potential capacity of 31.0GW. This includes the potential contribution of Botley West of with an anticipated 840MW, and which has the benefit of a confirmed grid connection offer. The Government goal of 70GW by 2035 of solar development is therefore, and for the foreseeable future, significantly behind meeting this target, by approximately 39GW.

3.1.3 The scale of the problem of meeting net zero and to deliver clean, reliable and secure energy to the UK, is immense; the scale of the solution needs to mirror the scale of the problem.

3.2 Principle of Development

3.2.1 All planning policy at all levels support the provision of renewable energy projects. The need for all these types of infrastructure, including solar, is established by NPS EN-1 (paragraph 3.3.61 - 3.3.64) and a combination of any or all of them is urgently required for both energy security and Net Zero.

3.2.2 Government has concluded that there is a critical national priority (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure. Section 4.2 of NPS EN-1 states which energy generating technologies are low carbon and are therefore CNP infrastructure.

3.2.3 Subject to any legal requirements, the urgent need for CNP Infrastructure to achieving the Government energy objectives, together with the national security, economic, commercial, and net zero benefits, will in general outweigh any other residual impacts not capable of being addressed by application of the mitigation hierarchy. Government strongly supports the delivery of CNP infrastructure, and it should be progressed as quickly as possible.

3.2.4 The policy analysis contained in Appendices 1 to 6 demonstrate that the Project accords with NPS EN-1, 3 and 5, and either accords or is in substantial accordance with relevant local plan policy.

3.2.5 The environmental acceptability of the Botley West Solar farm is assessed within the Environmental Statement accompanying the draft DCO. This is also summarised below.

3.3 Environmental Acceptability

3.3.1 The following section advances the case in support of the proposed development in terms of the matters which are the main national energy policy considerations in relation to determining the proposed development:

- Historic Environment
- Landscape and Visual Impact
- Ecology and Nature Conservation
- Hydrology and Flood Risk
- Ground Conditions
- Traffic and Transport
- Noise and Vibration
- Climate Change
- Socio-economics
- Human Health
- Agricultural Land and Public Rights of Way
- Waste and Resources
- Cumulative Effects and Inter-Relationships

3.3.2 Although NPS EN-1 provide the primary basis of determining the applications, this section also provides an appraisal of the proposed development against the relevant Development Plan Policies to establish what regard should be had to these matters in the balance of considerations.

Historic Environment

Applicants Assessment

3.3.3 Chapter 7 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** addresses the impacts arising from the Project on heritage assets. Tables 7.19 and 7.20 of that chapter summarises the environmental effects.

3.3.4 Information on the historic environment within the study areas was collected through desk-based assessment, site visits and geophysical surveys.

3.3.5 Table 7.19 in that chapter presents a summary of the potential impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to the historic environment. The impacts assessed include:

- Loss of, or harm to, significant buried archaeological remains;
- Loss of, or harm to, less significant buried archaeological remains;

- Harm to the significance of the Blenheim Palace WHS as a result of change within its setting;
- Harm to the significance of designated heritage assets as a result of change within their setting; and
- Harm to the character of the historic landscape.

3.3.6 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases.

3.3.7 Table 7.19 in that chapter presents a summary of the potential cumulative impacts, mitigation measures and residual effects. The cumulative impacts assessed include:

- Harm to the significance of the Blenheim Palace WHS as a result of change within its setting;
- Harm to the significance of designated heritage assets as a result of change within their setting; and
- Harm to the character of the historic landscape.

3.3.8 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no significant cumulative effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

3.3.9 No potential transboundary impacts have been identified in regard to effects of the Project.

Landscape and Visual Impact

Applicants Assessment

3.3.10 Landscape and visual effects are assessed and reported in Chapter 8 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.

3.3.11 A summary of the effects is contained in Tables 8.24 and 8.25.

3.3.12 The Project is located within multiple landscape character areas / types, as derived from the available local authority landscape character assessment(s). There would be a Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) significance of effect upon those landscape character areas as a whole within which the Project is located. At a local level, landscape characterising effects upon the Project site, within a small part of the LCA(s) is considered to be Moderate adverse (not significant).

3.3.13 The assessment has taken account of the landscape baseline situation, with the essential landscape structure in terms of existing vegetation being retained, protected and enhanced as part of the Project.

3.3.14 No likely significant effects are predicted during construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning of the Project on landscape character areas within the 5 km study area.

3.3.15 No likely significant effects are predicted during construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning of the Botley West Project on nationally designated landscapes, including the Cotswolds National Landscape.

3.3.16 Of the 55 Representative Viewpoints assessed as part of the Environmental Statement, it is concluded that there will be 12 Major adverse (significant) visual effects at winter Year 1 (following the Construction phase of the Project) only, from views available at Representative Viewpoints 5b, 5c, 13, 17, 25, 26, 32, 33, 38, 39, 50 and 54 arising from the Project during the operation and maintenance phase. These effects would diminish other time, with no likely residual significant visual effects predicted at summer Year 15.

3.3.17 In accordance with the LVIA methodology, landscape and visual effects has been assessed at winter Year 1 and summer Year 15. Although 12 significant effects have been identified, as detailed above, by Year 15 these are anticipated to be not significant. However, it is reasonable to assume that these effects would start to diminish by year 5. As it is anticipated that new hedgerow planting, planted at a height of 60-90 cm, would achieve a growth rate of approximately 30 cm per year. Therefore, by year 5 of the Project, it is anticipated that newly established hedgerows, suitably manged, would have achieved a height of approximately 2 to 3 metres and therefore screen views to much of the Project.

3.3.18 The cumulative assessment has considered the addition of the Botley West Project to 13 consented and / or planned Tier 1 schemes, refer to Table 8.26 below. It is concluded that there will be no likely significant cumulative effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

3.3.19 A total of 12 likely significant effects, detailed above, have been identified. Of the remaining 43 Representative Viewpoints, no other likely significant effects have been identified.

3.3.20 On balance, it is considered that the quality and character of the landscape and visual resources would largely be maintained and would have the capacity to accommodate the Project without significant effects beyond hose identified at a very local level or where it would be difficult to entirely mitigate visual effects. In addition, proposed planting would have a longer term benefit reinforcing the landscape character of the local landscape.

Ecology and Nature Conservation

Applicants Assessment

3.3.21 Ecology and nature conservation impacts and effects are reported in Chapter 9 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.

3.3.22 Tables within the chapter present a summary of the potential impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to ecology. The impacts assessed include:

- The impact of temporary and permanent habitat loss;
- The impact of habitat disturbance;
- The impact of pollution caused by accidental spills/contaminant;
- The impact of Invasive and Non-native Species (INNS);
- The impact of habitat creation;

- The impact of dust generation; and
- The impact of vehicle emissions; and
- The impact of habitat severance.

3.3.23 Overall, it is concluded that there will be likely significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases, all of which are beneficial:

- Habitat creation during construction on Nationally Designated Sites;
- Habitat creation during construction on Locally Designated Sites;
- Habitat creation during construction on Ancient Woodland;
- Habitat creation during construction on Hedgerows HPI;
- Habitat creation during construction on Waterbodies HPI;
- Habitat creation during construction on GCN;
- Habitat creation during construction on bat species assemblage; and
- Habitat creation during construction on dormice;

3.3.24 The Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**. The oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project.

3.3.25 The chapter presents a summary of the potential cumulative impacts, mitigation measures and residual effects. The cumulative impacts assessed include:

- The impact of temporary and permanent habitat loss; and
- The impact of habitat disturbance.

3.3.26 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no likely significant cumulative effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

3.3.27 No potential likely significant transboundary impacts on the ecology of an EEA State have been identified in regard to effects of the Project.

Hydrology and Flood Risk

Applicants Assessment

3.3.28 Chapter 10, Hydrology and Flood risk identifies and assesses relevant environmental effects.

3.3.29 Information on hydrology and flood risk within the study area was collected through desk review, a site-specific FRA and conceptual drainage strategy see Volume 3 Appendix 10.1 Flood Risk Assessment and Volume 3 10.2 Conceptual Drainage Strategy [**EN010147/APP/6.5**]. As well as hydraulic modelling exercise for the Central Site Area see Volume 3 Appendix 10.2 Hydraulic Modelling Report [**EN010147/APP/6.5**] and a Surface Water

Modelling Report for Cassington in Volume 3 Appendix 10.5 Surface Water Modelling Report [**EN010147/APP/6.5**].

3.3.30 Table 10.34 in the chapter presents a summary of the potential impacts and residual effects in respect to hydrology and flood risk. The impacts assessed include:

- The impact of increased flood risk arising from additional surface water runoff
- The impact of deterioration of water quality within surface and groundwater body receptors
- The impact of increased flood risk arising from damage to existing flood defences
- The impact of damage to existing field drainage
- The impact of damage to existing water supply and wastewater drainage infrastructure

3.3.31 It is concluded that there will be no likely significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases.

3.3.32 Table 10.35 presents a summary of the potential cumulative impacts and residual effects. The cumulative impacts assessed include:

- The impact of increased flood risk arising from additional surface water runoff
- The impact of deterioration of water quality within surface and groundwater body receptors
- The impact of increased flood risk arising from damage to existing flood defences
- The impact of damage to existing field drainage
- The impact of damage to existing water supply and wastewater drainage infrastructure

3.3.33 It is concluded that there will be no likely significant cumulative effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

3.3.34 No potential transboundary impacts have been identified in regard to effects of the Project.

Ground Conditions

Applicants Assessment

3.3.35 Chapter 11 of the ES, Ground Conditions (**EN010147/APP/6.3**), identifies and assess likely significant environmental effects arising from the Project

3.3.36 Information on Ground Conditions within the study area was collected through desktop review, and consultation with Oxfordshire County Council Minerals Department, the Environment Agency (Thames area), Environmental Protection & Enforcement Department of Cherwell District Council, Minerals

and Waste Local Plan Principal Officer, Oxfordshire County Council and the Senior Contamination Officer, Publica Group on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council.

3.3.37 Table 11 in the chapter presents a summary of the potential impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to Ground Conditions. The impacts assessed include:

- Ground contamination of groundwater;
- Ground contamination on surface water;
- Ground contamination on future site users; and
- Ground contamination on off-site human health receptors.

3.3.38 The assessment has considered potential impacts on the underlying aquifers, surface watercourses, human health (construction workers and future site users), land instability and mineral resources. The significance of effect ranges from temporary minor/moderate adverse effects with regard to off-site human health, to no change during the operational phase, which are not considered significant.

3.3.39 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no likely significant cumulative effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

Traffic and Transport

Applicants Assessment

3.3.40 Chapter 12 in the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** considers transport and transportation effects arising from the Project.

3.3.41 Information on traffic and transport within the traffic and transport study area was collected through desktop reviews, site specific surveys, scoping and consultation.

3.3.42 Table 12.40 in the chapter presents a summary of the potential impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to traffic and transport. The impacts assessed include:

- Driver delay including delays to public transport services (as part of that driver delay)
- Severance
- Non-motorised user delay
- Fear and intimidation (non-motorised user amenity)
- Road safety
- Abnormal Individual Loads.

3.3.43 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no likely significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases.

3.3.44 Table 12.41 presents a summary of the potential cumulative impacts, mitigation measures and residual effects. The cumulative impacts assessed include:

- Driver delay including delays to public transport services (as part of that driver delay)
- Severance
- Non-motorised user delay
- Fear and intimidation (non-motorised user amenity)
- Road safety
- Abnormal Individual Loads

3.3.45 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no likely significant cumulative effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

3.3.46 No potential transboundary impacts have been identified in regard to effects of the Project.

3.3.47 There is potential for inter-related effects from transport with noise and vibration (Volume 3, Chapter 8: Noise and vibration of the ES), air quality (Volume 3, Chapter 9: Air quality of the ES) and human health (Volume 1, Annex 5.1: Human health of the ES). The construction phase has the highest likelihood of receptor-led effects. However, these effects would be managed through measures set out in the CoCP. Further details of inter-related effects are provided in Volume 4, Chapter 3: Inter-relationships of the ES.

Noise and Vibration

Applicants Assessment

3.3.48 Chapter 13 considers noise and vibration effects **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.

3.3.49 The information on noise and vibration within the study areas was collected through desktop reviews of the Project Site and surrounding area, consultation with the relevant local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate and a baseline sound survey.

3.3.50 Information on noise and vibration within the study areas was also collected through a desk-top study of the Project Site using available mapping and aerial photography, a site survey with noise baseline noise measurements, and consultation with the relevant Local Planning Authorities.

3.3.51 Table 13.32 presents a summary of the potential environmental impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to Noise and Vibration. The impacts assessed include:

- Noise and vibration impacts from construction and decommissioning activities; and
- Noise and vibration impacts from the operation of the Project.

3.3.52 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no likely significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases.

3.3.53 Table 13.33 presents a summary of the cumulative environmental impacts, mitigation measures and residual effects. The cumulative impacts assessed include:

- Noise and vibration impacts from construction and decommissioning activities; and
- Noise and vibration impacts from the operation of the Project.

3.3.54 It is concluded that there would be no significant cumulative effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

Climate Change

Applicants Assessment

3.3.55 Chapter 14 in the ES (EN010147/APP/6.3) considers climate change effects.

3.3.56 Climate change information within the study area was collected through desktop review.

3.3.57 The potential impact of GHG emissions arising from to the Project on the global atmospheric GHG concentration that contributes to climate change, has been assessed and reported in this chapter.

3.3.58 Table 14.18 presents a summary of the potential impacts and residual effects on climate change. The impacts assessed include:

- The impact of GHG emissions arising from the manufacturing and installation of the Project during construction.
- The impact of GHG emissions arising from the operation of the Project.
- The impact of GHG emissions arising from the decommissioning of the Project.

3.3.59 It is concluded that overall there will be likely significant positive effects arising from the Project during the operation and maintenance, and decommissioning phases periods of the Project, with emissions over the construction that would be typical of any construction activity of this scale, as summarised below:

- Construction phase: Considered embedded mitigation committed to as part of the Project, emissions from the manufacturing and installation of the Project would result in emissions of up to 717,006 tCO2e. This would be a minor adverse effect which is not significant in EIA terms with a residual effect of minor adverse. The construction phase must also be evaluated in terms of whole life time emissions from the Project.
- Operations and maintenance stage: The operational phase of the Project would enable the generation renewable electricity and thereby assist in the displacement of fossil fuels as a generation source. This would result in a positive GHG impact. When considering the avoided emissions, and accounting for GHG emissions arising due to maintenance of the Project

during this phase, the operational impact results in the order of approximately -7,012,809 tCO2e savings over the Projects 37.5 year operational lifetime (under the current grid average scenario). This would result in a beneficial effect which is significant in EIA terms.

- Decommissioning phase: Emissions from the decommissioning of the Project would, result in emissions of up to -249,793 tCO2e. This would result in a beneficial effect which is significant in EIA terms.

3.3.60 Despite the GHG emissions resulting from the construction-stage of the Project, the magnitude of avoided emissions resulting from the operational and decommissioning stages of the development allows the Project to enable avoided emissions from year 6 of operation (carbon payback period).

3.3.61 Over the lifetime of the Project, it would result in -6,545,595 tCO2e of avoided emissions (under the current grid average scenario).

3.3.62 Consideration of the Project's net emissions performance can be considered with the following contextualisation:

- It would contribute to reducing carbon budget expenditure at a national level; and
- It would contribute towards meeting UK energy and climate policy goals.

3.3.63 The Project is in line with the NPS EN-3's principle of supporting new renewable and low carbon energy developments, in addition to their associated infrastructure, in order to contribute to reductions in GHG emissions.

3.3.64 Further, the Project is supported by national energy and climate change policy (including the National Infrastructure Strategy, Sixth Carbon Budget, and Net Zero Strategy) which highlight the need for an end to the use of unabated fossil fuel generation, whilst also significantly ramping up electricity generation capacity in order to meet the demands of increased electrification of transport, heat and industry. As such, government policy recognises that large-scale deployment of renewable energy generators such as the Project is necessary in order to meet GHG reduction targets.

3.3.65 By enabling the expansion of renewable energy supply by providing additional renewable energy generation capacity, the Project would assist the UK Government's target of achieving a fully decarbonised power system by 2035 as well as the aim to become net zero by 2050.

3.3.66 As is detailed within the IEMA (2022) GHG in EIA Guidance all developments that emit greenhouse gas (GHG) have the potential to impact the atmospheric mass of GHGs as a receptor, and so may have a cumulative impact on climate change irrespective of geographic location. Consequently, cumulative effects due to other specific local development projects cannot be individually identified and assessed in accordance with the IEMA GHG in EIA Guidance (IEMA, 2022). When evaluating the impact of the Project the atmospheric mass of GHGs has been defined as a high sensitivity receptor.

3.3.67 When considering the potential magnitude of GHG emissions associated with Option 2 and embedded mitigation measures associated with the Project, alongside mitigation measures committed to by NGET in relation to the NGET

substation, such as commitment to provide a substation which is SF6 free, the magnitude of impact on the high sensitivity receptor would result in minor adverse construction-stage effect, which is not significant in EIA terms.

3.3.68 No potential transboundary impacts have been identified in regard to effects of the Project.

Socio-economics

Applicants Assessment

3.3.69 Chapter 15 (**EN010147/APP/6.3**) contains the assessed socio-economic effects of the Project.

3.3.70 The information on socio-economics within the Study Area was collected and informed by a review of relevant evidence sources, including scientific literature, baseline data, policy and legislation and EIA scoping.

3.3.71 Table 15.26 presents a summary of the potential impacts and residual effects in respect to socioeconomics. The impacts assessed include:

- Unemployment;
- Economic Output;
- Skills & Qualifications;
- Agricultural Output;
- Changes to Visitor Economy;
- Disruption to Travel Patterns.

3.3.72 It is concluded that there will be no significant adverse effects on socioeconomics during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases of the Project.

3.3.73 The impact of employment generation on unemployment rates in the Study Area is assessed to be moderately beneficial at construction and decommissioning phases and minor beneficial at the operational and maintenance phase. The impact of providing education and skills benefits as part of a targeted employment and skills plan is assessed to have minor beneficial impacts at construction and operation phases. In addition, the direct investment is assessed to have a minor beneficial impact across all phases of the Project.

Human Health

Applicants Assessment

3.3.74 Human health effects arising from the Project are assessed in Chapter 16 of the ES (**EN010147/APP/6.3**).

3.3.75 Human health information within the study area was collected by a review of relevant public health evidence sources, including scientific literature, baseline data, health policy, local health priorities and health protection standards with reference to corresponding chapters as set out in section 16.2.

3.3.76 Table 16.29 in the chapter presents a summary of the potential impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to human health. The impacts assessed include:

- diet and nutrition;
- open space, leisure and play;
- transport modes, access and connections;
- community identity, culture, resilience and influence;
- education and training;
- employment and income;
- climate change and adaptation;
- air quality;
- noise and vibration;
- radiation; and
- wider societal infrastructure and resources.

3.3.77 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no likely significant adverse effects on human health during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases of the Project. This is supported by the contribution of the Project in securing new recreational routes, including permissive paths, cycleways and Green Ways, to mitigate potential adverse effects on public health associated with changes in the use of the PRoW network. Additionally, the inclusion of an outdoor educational area and growing spaces offers substantial benefits. These areas provide opportunities for community engagement, environmental education, and access to fresh produce, further enhancing overall well-being and fostering a healthier lifestyle for the local population over time.

3.3.78 The following beneficial effects have been identified (further detail in section 16.9 of the chapter):

- The HIA identified specific PRoW routes for upgrading to full greenways based on criteria such as current usage patterns, connectivity to key community areas, and potential for enhancing active transportation and recreational opportunities (See Table 16.25). By promoting safer and more accessible routes, greenways encourage active transportation and recreational activities, which contribute to improved physical and mental health. Additionally, the inclusion of an outdoor educational area and growing spaces offers further public health benefits. These areas provide opportunities for community engagement, environmental education, and access to fresh produce, further enhancing overall well-being and fostering a healthier lifestyle for the local population over time. The provision of new and enhanced PRoW and permissive routes has the potential to result in moderate beneficial effects for population health, which is significant in EIA terms.
- Education and training in relation to apprenticeships and other training opportunities during construction of the Project, particularly for NEET

populations, has the potential to result in moderate beneficial effects for population health, which is significant in EIA terms.

- Employment and income in relation to temporary construction and decommissioning employment opportunities, particularly for NEET populations, has the potential to result in moderate beneficial effects for population health during construction and decommissioning of the Project, which is significant in EIA terms.
- Climate change and adaptation in relation to renewable energy generation and subsequent reduced greenhouse gas emissions will have a minor beneficial effect for population health during operation and maintenance of the Project, which is not significant in EIA terms.
- Wider societal infrastructure and resources in relation to renewable energy generation will have a moderate beneficial effect for population health, which is significant in EIA terms.

3.3.79 Table 16.28 in the chapter presents a summary of the potential cumulative impacts, mitigation measures and residual effects.

3.3.80 The cumulative impacts assessed include:

- diet and nutrition;
- open space, leisure and play;
- transport modes, access and connections;
- community identity, culture, resilience and influence;
- education and training;
- employment and income;
- climate change and adaptation;
- air quality;
- noise and vibration;
- radiation (public understanding of EMF risk); and
- wider societal infrastructure and resources.

3.3.81 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no significant cumulative or inter-related effects from the Project alongside other projects/plans.

3.3.82 No potential transboundary impacts have been identified in regard to effects of the Project on human health of populations in other states.

Agricultural Land Use and Public Rights of Way

Applicants Assessment

3.3.83 Chapter 17 (**EN010147/APP/6.3**) addresses agriculture, land use and public rights of way (PRoW).

3.3.84 Information on agricultural land use and PRoW within the Study Area was collected through a combination of desk top study, surveys of PRoW and detailed soil and ALC surveys within the Study Area.

3.3.85 Table 17.26 presents a summary of the impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to agricultural land use and PRoW. The impacts assessed include: loss of agricultural land quality; impacts on farm holdings and impacts on PRoW. Overall, it is concluded that there will be no significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases:

- Table 6.28 presents a summary of the potential cumulative impacts, mitigation measures and residual effects. The cumulative impacts assessed include:
- loss of agricultural land quality;
- impacts on farm holdings and impacts on recreational resources.

3.3.86 Whilst BMV land is permanently lost through the project the loss is considered to be small and not significant in EIA terms. In policy terms this loss is largely down to the delivery of the National Grid substation, necessary as part of the upgrading to the electricity infrastructure in this part of Oxfordshire, and to connect this and other renewable energy projects to the National Grid. The choice of location for that substation is driven by the need to be in close proximity to the existing 400kV OHL. No better alternative was available to the Applicant within the Order Limits.

3.3.87 In addition, another area of BMV land loss is due to the betterment that has been created to avoid or minimise the flooding that occurs intermittently in the village of Cassington (not caused by the Project). Here the applicant has proposed a shallow pond, ditch widening and bunding. On balance this betterment was considered to be desirable despite the loss of some BMV land.

3.3.88 To site a Project of this nature elsewhere in the region with a suitable grid connection point was not available to the Applicant (see Chapter 5, Alternatives **[EN010147/APP/6.3].** In any event, land free from being BMV, is very limited in the region – the disposition of BMV can seen on the Predictive Best and Most Versatile Plan at Figure 17.2 **[EN010147/APP/6.4].** At this scale the Project site largely avoids a high or moderate likelihood of impacting BMV land and only subsequent soil testing should the extent of BMV.

3.3.89 In policy terms, therefore, whilst there is some permanent loss of BMV there are compelling reasons for that including:

- The lack of an available site with a suitable grid connection free from BMV land; and
- The need to locate the National Grid Substation (of the size and orientation set out) close to the existing OHL; and
- The desirability of providing a betterment to the residents of Cassington who have hitherto suffered from intermittent flooding, in the form a new water storage solution (and for the Applicant's solution driven by Surface Water Modelling to optimise its location), and

- The containment of the permanent loss of BMV to a small area which is not considered significant in EIA terms**.**

3.3.90 With respect to agricultural land use and PRoW, no transboundary effects are likely to occur during construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning of the Project on the interests of European Economic Area states.

3.3.91 Overall, whilst the Applicant's Project on its own leads to no major adverse permanent effects, it is concluded that, alongside other projects/plans during the construction phase, there will be a cumulative adverse permanent effect on agricultural land.

Waste and Resources

Applicants Assessment

3.3.92 Waste and resources is reported in Chapter 18 of the ES [**EN010147/APP/6.3]**.

3.3.93 The potential impacts with regards to waste and resources are described in **Table 18.6** in that chapter and the receptors are identified in **Table 18.22**. Measures that will be incorporated into the Project are described in **Table 18.24**.

3.3.94 **Table 18.31** presents a summary of the potential impacts and residual effects in respect to waste. The impacts assessed include:

- Reduction to landfill void capacity for inert and non-hazardous wastes
- Reduction to landfill void capacity for hazardous wastes
- Depletion of resources

3.3.95 It is concluded that there will be no likely significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases.

3.3.96 **Table 18.32** presents a summary of the potential cumulative impacts and residual effects. The cumulative impacts assess the same factors as stated above. It is concluded that there will be no likely significant cumulative effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases

Air Quality

Applicants Assessment

3.3.97 **Table 19.46** presents a summary of the potential impacts, measures adopted as part of the Project and residual effects in respect to air quality. The impacts assessed include:

- The potential impact of dust soiling on dust sensitive receptors arising from demolition, earthworks, construction and trackout;

- The impact of an increase in suspended particulate matter on people arising from dust emissions generated by onsite construction and decommissioning activities
- The impact on ecological receptors arising from dust emissions generated by onsite construction activities.
- The impact on human health receptors arising from emissions generated by construction traffic.

3.3.98 Overall, it is concluded that there will be no likely significant effects arising from the Proposed Development during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases. It is also concluded that there will be no significant cumulative effects from the Proposed Development alongside other projects/plans.

3.3.99 No potential transboundary impacts have been identified in regard to effects of the Proposed Development.

Cumulative Effects and Inter-Relationships

Applicants Assessment

3.3.100 Chapter 20 of the ES reports on cumulative and inter-relationship effectsof the Project during the construction and operation and maintenance and decommissioning phases. The cumulative assessment uses a short list of 'other developments' which could result in cumulative effects on the same receptors as the Project.

3.3.101 The chapter concludes that significant effects are not likely in relation to most of the topic areas. Significant effects, however, could occur in relation to permanent loss of BMV agricultural land during construction of the Project and other Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects. Whilst on the Applicants site the extent of the loss is judged to small (less than 20ha), and on that basis not significant, in combination with other projects this loss is judged to be major adverse. No further significant effects are considered likely.

3.4 The Green Belt

Green Belt Harm

3.4.1 Green Belt harm is assessed in detail in Appendix 8 to this report.

3.4.2 The appendix outlines the factors that are relevant in assessing compliance with Green Belt policy. It describes:

- Botley West and its affect upon the Purposes of Green Belt
- Botley West and its affect upon Openness
- Any Other Harm
- The Level of Harm, and
- The VSC case for Botley West

3.4.3 Paragraph 5.11.37 of NPS EN-1 states that VSC is not defined in national planning policy as it is for the individual decision maker to assess each case on its merits and give relevant circumstances their due weight. However, when considering any planning application affecting Green Belt land, the Secretary of State should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering any application for such development, while taking account, in relation to renewable and linear infrastructure, of the extent to which its physical characteristics are such that it has limited or no impact on the fundamental purposes of Green Belt designation. VSC may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewables and other low carbon sources."

3.4.4 Paragraph 153 of the NPPF 2023, states that VSC will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

3.4.5 Harm caused by reason of inappropriateness of the Project has been assessed, as has any other harm caused by the Project. Whilst there is conflict to some of the purposes of Green Belt (to which substantial weight should be attributed), and other harms in terms of the Project's impact upon its receiving environment, they are, on balance, considered to be limited. Impact upon openness of the Green Belt has also been assessed and for reasons set out earlier, the Applicant considers the impacts are limited and reversible.

3.4.6 The Applicant considers that VSC is available to the Applicant as there are significant factors that are considered to weigh heavily in favour of the Project. The Applicant has set out its VSC case that it considers applies to the Project.

3.4.7 On balance, the Applicant considers that the VSC case for the Botley West solar farm outweighs the harm caused by the inappropriateness of the Project, and any other harm.

3.5 Other Material Considerations

Need and Benefits

Need

3.5.1 In NPS EN-1, paragraphs 3.2.6 to 3.2.8 it states that:

"The Secretary of State should assess all applications for development consent for the types of infrastructure covered by this NPS on the basis that the government has demonstrated that there is a need for those types of infrastructure which is urgent, as described for each of them in this Part.

In addition, the Secretary of State has determined that substantial weight should be given to this need when considering applications for development consent under the Planning Act 2008.

The Secretary of State is not required to consider separately the specific contribution of any individual project to satisfying the need established in this NPS. In NPS EN-3 (January 2024; paragraphs 2.10.10 - 2.10.11), the

Government recognises that agricultural land may have to be used to deliver the energy we need."

3.5.2 In policy terms this is the starting point in connection with any need case.

3.5.3 More broadly, the UK faces a series of challenges to the security of its energy system and the climate change impact of its energy generation. The Government, through the Climate Change Act 2008, set legally binding carbon budgets, requiring the UK to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 100% from 1990 levels, known as 'net zero', by 2050. This makes decarbonisation in the UK a legal requirement, and is a matter of global significance. In order to achieve this, the UK must decarbonise its energy system, electrify heating, industry and transport and there is strong legal, policy and industry evidence in support of the urgent need for decarbonisation. Ground mounted solar electricity generation generally, and the Botley West Solar Farm (the 'Project') specifically, will play a key role in meeting the UK's critical strategic needs.

3.5.4 The Government's 'British Energy Security Strategy' (April 2022) sets out the Government's intention to rely upon wind, solar, hydrogen and nuclear in order to replace our reliance upon fossil fuels, to bring energy costs down and, above all, make our supply of energy secure. In respect of solar, whilst only contributing approximately 2.4% of the UK's total electricity generation (DESNZ Energy Trends, Table 1.1) the Government expects a five-fold increase in deployment by 2035. In 2022 the total installed solar capacity in the UK stood at approximately 14GW - a five-fold increase is approximately 70GW of solar power, meaning we still need approximately another 55GW of new solar.

3.5.5 In 'Powering Up Britain Energy Security Plan', (2023), security and lowering of energy prices is noted as a priority. It states that the *"...strategy to increase supply of low-carbon energy is dependent on enhancing our strengths on wind, solar and nuclear power generation alongside hydrogen production and carbon capture, usage and storage. This includes the infrastructure to produce, store and transport low-carbon energy around the country and to capture, transport and store carbon dioxide. We aim to remove barriers and address blockages, whilst developing new options...."* This Plan reaffirms the Government's key commitment of achieving 70GW of solar by 2035.

3.5.6 The challenges that developers face in land assembly, the consenting process, as well as Grid constraints mean this is a challenging target. In the Applicants' view the Government target of 70GW of solar by 2035 cannot be achieved by rooftop solar panels and brownfield sites alone. This is supported by the National Policy Statements (NPSs) which confirm that large-scale ground mounted solar farms have a critical role to play in achieving the Government's aims, and the government has determined that there exists a critical national priority (CNP) for low carbon infrastructure, including large-scale solar farms, because of the decarbonisation, energy security and affordability benefits that they deliver. Large-scale solar projects such as the Project, are required in addition to other technologies to diversify the UK's low-carbon portfolio to meet its legal obligations to achieve net zero by 2050, making best use of scarce Grid connections to help deliver the amount of solar power now required.

3.5.7 According to the Research Briefing Paper on 'Planning for Solar Farms', published by the House of Commons on 20 May 2024, it states that:

"..As of March 2024, the cumulative installed capacity of solar power in the UK was 15.8 GW. The government aims to achieve 70 GW of solar power by 2035.

The Environmental Audit Committee, a Commons Select Committee, said meeting this target would be "challenging given existing barriers and current rates of deployment". The government's advisory Climate Change Committee also said current deployment rates were "significantly off track".

Two of the main barriers to the expansion of solar power they identified were grid capacity and delays in securing grid connections. The Environmental Audit Committee said "upgrading the electricity grid is a crucial prerequisite to the achievement of net zero...".

3.5.8 It is acknowledged by the Applicant that there are many schemes currently in the consenting process. The largest schemes are listed on the PINs website and an analysis of their capacity and status can be found at Annex A . However, even if all of these are consented, built and connected before 2035, this would only add approximately 15.2GW to the 15.8GW of installed capacity reported in the House of Commons briefing paper from May 2024 i.e. a total potential capacity of 31.0GW. This includes the potential contribution of the Project with an anticipated 840MW, and which has the benefit of a confirmed grid connection offer.

3.5.9 At this point therefore, there is still a significant shortfall in the 70GW Government target, of approximately 39GW.

3.5.10 The NPSs explain that the availability of grid connection, suitable irradiance levels and local topography are key inputs to the selection of sites suitable for large-scale solar generation developments. The number of locations within the UK at which large-scale solar generation is suitable is therefore likely to be limited, and this is a material issue when considering how the UK is to meet the urgent need for low-carbon generation as is set out in the NPSs.

3.5.11 Many factors are important in the design of a large-scale solar scheme within the context of a particular location, and flexibility in design is important to allow for the scheme to be designed in to optimise its benefits. Optimising the use of existing and available grid connections is necessary in the next decade to meet the government's aims for a zero-carbon electricity system by 2035.

3.5.12 The Project will connect to the National Grid transmission system via a new National Grid 400kV substation to be located close to the existing National Grid 400kV line that runs between Cowley and Walham. The Applicant has a grid connection offer from National Grid and suitable land for the new substation, if required, which would facilitate further grid connection opportunities. The proposed location of the Project therefore enables the Project to deliver against the urgency of need, in relation to decarbonisation, security of supply and affordability. No adverse grid operability effects are anticipated as a result of connecting the Scheme to the National Electricity Transmission System at the proposed location.

3.5.13 Botley West is a project designed to spearhead the renewable transformation of UK generation. The UK grid is constrained, and the 400 kV overhead line (OHL) network is being reinforced across the country. This means that in many areas no new generation can be connected until 2032 or later. At Botley West, however, the Applicant has an OHL with capacity, land for a new substation, and a substation at Cowley which has already been extended by National Grid. The Applicant has approximately 1418 ha of suitable land available to deliver a large scale solar farm to meet a pressing National need. Also, the Oxfordshire economy is strong and is growing, so there is a demand for more, reliable renewable energy in the county, which Botley West will deliver. The Project will be a critical step in meeting the government's objectives of delivering sustainable development to enable decarbonisation.

Benefits

3.5.14 Other than the policy compliance benefits set out, including meeting the urgent need for such infrastructure, the Project will deliver other benefits that include:

- Renewable energy to power the equivalent of 330,000 homes;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Economic, Educational and Sustainability Benefits;
- Enhanced Landscape and Public Access legacy;
- Community Benefit Fund;
- ~~Discounted electricity prices~~;

3.5.15 The Project is anticipated to deliver enough to power the equivalent of approximately 330,000 homes (based on the Government estimate of annual average household power consumption of 4000 kWh).

3.5.16 During operation the Project will be able to deliver a significant biodiversity net gain compared to what exists on site currently (see oLEMP Ref **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** and Volume 3, Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5].**

3.5.17 The impact of employment generation on unemployment rates in the Study Area is assessed to be moderately beneficial at construction and decommissioning phases and minor beneficial at the operational and maintenance phase. The impact of providing education and skills benefits as part of a targeted employment and skills plan is assessed to have minor beneficial impacts at construction and operation phases. In addition, the direct investment is assessed to have a minor beneficial impact across all phases of the Project.

3.5.18 The Human Health chapter in the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** identified specific PRoW routes to provide greenways based on criteria such as connectivity to key community areas and potential for enhancing active travel and recreational opportunities (See **Table 16.25**). By promoting safer and more accessible routes, greenways contribute to improved physical and mental health.

3.5.19 Additionally, the inclusion of an outdoor educational area and growing spaces offers further public health benefits. These areas provide opportunities for community engagement, environmental education, and access to fresh

produce, further enhancing overall well-being and fostering a healthier lifestyle for the local population over time. The provision of enhanced PRoWs and permissive routes has the potential to result in minor beneficial effects for population health, which are not significant in EIA terms.

3.5.20 Education and training in relation to apprenticeships and other training opportunities during construction of the Project, particularly for NEET populations, has the potential to result in moderate beneficial effects for population health, which is significant in EIA terms.

3.5.21 Climate change and adaptation in relation to renewable energy generation and subsequent reduced greenhouse gas emissions will have a minor beneficial effect for population health during operation and maintenance of the Project, which is not significant in EIA terms.

3.5.22 Wider societal infrastructure and resources in relation to renewable energy generation will have a moderate beneficial effect for population health, which is significant in EIA terms.

3.5.23 Several local food growing companies have expressed interest in food growing initiatives on land within the Project Site. They include the Cherwell Collective. Up to 30ha of land has been set aside within the masterplan for this purpose. Delivery of this initiative will be established once the site has become operational. Agreements in the form of site licenses, will be established with interested organisations. The licenses will facilitate the management and set out controls within which the site should operate i.e. including how the land will be set out, how pedestrian and vehicular will be achieved, and hours of operation and security arrangements. The principle of these food growing area initiatives is set out in the oOMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.2]** and details will be subject to approval of the OMP via a Requirement within the DCO.

3.5.24 During the operational life of the Project and beyond the Project will establish a significant landscape benefit because of the substantial new tree and hedgerow planting that is embedded within the Project alongside management of the land to deliver significant BNG. New public access routes will also be created allowing greater access than has otherwise been available in the area. The oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** and oOMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.2]** are the mechanisms by which the landscape, public access and ecology benefits will be realised and form part of the ongoing legacy for the region.

3.5.25 Once operational the Project will set up a Community Fund which will receive approximately £440,~~200~~,000-00 from SolarFive Ltd every year. That is the equivalent of approximately £16~~7~~,500,000-00 over the lifetime of the Project (expected to be approx. 37.5 years). The Community Fund would be administered by a body comprising representatives from PVDP, The Blenheim Estate and local community leaders. It is expected that grants will be made to local causes and organisations. The Community Fund will be delivered as part of a Community Benefits Package agreed outside the scope of the DCO application, with relevant local authorities.

~~3.5.26 Once consented, the Applicant will establish a new retail electricity company and that company will offer BWSF electricity and green power from other suppliers to all of Oxfordshire. Residential customers within the 2km consultation zone will be offered a 5% discount from the Ofgem price cap.~~

4 Balance of Considerations and Overall Conclusions

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Project was conceived in 2018 and has evolved since that time responding to economic, environmental and planning constraints and opportunities as well as in response to a series of informal and statutory consultation events.

4.1.2 The Applicant considers the Project has responded effectively to all relevant considerations and has now produced a scheme that delivers on the Governments Net Zero obligations and targets for solar development.

4.1.3 The scale of the climate crises is significant. The solutions must respond accordingly. Botley West is part of the solution. Many more similar schemes are urgently needed.

4.1.4 Section 104 (3) of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) provides that the Secretary of State must decide applications for development consent in accordance with any national policy statement except to the extent that the SoS is satisfied that one or more of the following exceptions apply:

- that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would lead to the United Kingdom being in breach of any of its international obligations,
- that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would lead to the Secretary of State being in breach of any duty imposed on the Secretary of State by or under enactment,
- that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would be unlawful by virtue of any enactment,
- that the Secretary of State is satisfied that the adverse impact of the proposed development outweighs its benefits, or
- that the Secretary of State is satisfied that any condition prescribed for deciding an application otherwise than in accordance with a national policy statement is met.

In doing so, the Section 104(2) provides that the SoS must have regard to:

- any national policy statement which has effect in relation to development of the description to which the application relates (a “relevant national policy statement”),
- the appropriate marine policy documents (if any), determined in accordance with section 59 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009,
- any local impact report (within the meaning given by section 60(3)) submitted to the Commission before the deadline specified in a notice under section 60(2),
- any matters prescribed in relation to development of the description to which the application relates, and,
- other matters which the Secretary of State thinks are both important and relevant to its decision.

4.1.5 Of key importance in this decision making framework, Section 104(3) confirms that the SoS should decide applications in accordance with relevant NPSs except to the extent that one or more of the matters set out in section 104 (4) to (8) applies. The Applicant is not aware nor expects any of these factors to prevent a favourable decision being made in respect of the Botley West Project.

4.1.6 In determining this application, the wider benefits of the proposal must be reviewed against local issues and concerns. This balancing exercise must also consider the context of national, UK and European policies and obligations that seek to tackle climate change, deliver security of the UK's energy supply and promote a shift to renewable energy.

4.1.7 Bearing in mind the relatively new concept of CNP infrastructure, coming into force through the latest NPS series (January 2024), and given that solar development qualifies as CNP infrastructure, then the planning policy test is that if:

- The Applicant has demonstrated that the likely significant effects of the project have been assessed and the mitigation hierarchy has been applied, thus avoiding or minimising any residual adverse effects, and that
- Subject to any legal requirements (including under s.104 of the Planning Act 2008), and that
- An acceptable VSC has been set out,

then any harm caused by inappropriate development, and any other harm, is likely to be considered to be acceptable, outweighed by the urgent need for this type of infrastructure.

4.1.8 These factors are considered below.

Environmental Effects

4.1.9 In the opinion of the Applicant, they have demonstrated that the likely significant effects of the project have been assessed and the mitigation hierarchy has been applied, thus avoiding or minimising any residual adverse effects.

4.1.10 The layout and design of the Project has been carefully considered and has continually evolved and been refined leading to the form that it is now presented to the Examining Authority and the Secretary of State.

4.1.11 Chapter 5 of the ES describes in detail how this process unfolded, how this was largely influenced by the desire to ensure it was absorbed as far as possible into the existing landscape structure, avoiding high ground and other sensitive areas; that it protected amenity as far as reasonably possible by imposing buffer distances between the Project and sensitive receptors; and that it responded positively to avoid or minimise adverse effects upon heritage assets, ecology, soils, transport and other important environmental considerations.

4.1.12 The Applicant has described in detail the environmental effects that are likely to arise as a result of the Project and has assessed their significance in EIA

terms **[EN0101477/APP/6.3]**. The design and layout of the Project together with mitigation measures proposed, will avoid or reduce unacceptable environmental effects.

4.1.13 The Applicant has set out in draft DCO, the Works Plans and Management Plans what is intended, how the environment will be protected and key measures controlled and delivered.

4.1.14 The environmental assessment process has also revealed significant beneficial opportunities. Oppurtunites including achieving at least a 70% BNG in habitats, which is unique to the host authorities given the scale of that opportunity, and very positive in policy terms too. There are significant landscape benefits, socio-economic and educational benefits and climate change benefits too.

4.1.15 Some adverse effects are predicted, however, and there is harm to the Green Belt. These have been set out and assessed. The adverse effects arising are not in the opinion of the Applicant of a scale or type to prevent a positive decision being made on this application.

Legal Compliance

4.1.16 The Applicant is not aware nor expects any of the factors arising from section 104 (4) to (8) of the Planning Act 2008 to prevent a favourable decision being made in respect of the Botley West Project.

The VSC made out

4.1.17 The VSC case for Botley West is set out in Appendix 8 of this document. Some harm to the Green Belt is identified and this is carefully assessed.

4.1.18 However, according to NPS-EN-1, paragraph 4.2.16 and 17, the Secretary of State will take as the starting point for decision making that such infrastructure is to be treated as if it has met any tests which are set out within the NPSs, or any other planning policy, which requires a clear outweighing of harm, exceptionality or very special circumstances. This means that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that Critical National Priority Infrastructure will meet a variety of planning of tests, including, where development is within a Green Belt, the very special circumstances test to justify development.

4.1.19 Notwithstanding, the Applicant has undertaken a VSC analysis and concludes that whilst harm is created to some Green Belt purposes, to which substantial weight against the scheme should be applied, the Applicant is of the firm view that this harm is low/limited, temporary and reversible, and the considerable benefits arising from the Project, which amount to VSC individually and together, more than outweigh harm caused by inappropriateness, and any other harm.

4.1.20 Overall, the VSC case is considered to be compelling and offsets identified harms.

4.1.21 This PSS has demonstrated that there is overwhelming national policy support for the Project. It complies with all material aspects on NPS EN-1, NPS EN-3 and to the extent relevant, NPS EN-5.

4.1.22 At local level, the Applicant has made the case that the Project is in accordance, or substantially in accordance with the Development Plan and other plans and considerations. In addition, for all the host authorities, this Project helps address the climate change emergency they have each declared and will advance their own gaols of achieving a low carbon economy.

4.1.23 On balance, whilst the Project is not free from adverse effects, these have been identified, assessed and been avoided or mitigated to a level that makes them acceptable. On balance the substantial weight of policy supporting the Project, clearly outweighs any disadvantages.

4.1.24 The Project benefits from an early Grid connection which will be vital if the Government is to start to deliver the amount of clean, affordable and secure renewable energy that the Country urgently needs. Whilst not directly a planning matter, the scheme will bring other benefits such as a substantial Community Fund for the lifetime of the project. ~~as well as discounted electricity prices for the community surrounding the Project.~~

4.1.25 In accordance with the provisions of the NPSs, the above benefits are of substantial weight in the balance of considerations, and there are no reasons alone or collectively that would indicate that the presumption in favour of the development should not prevail, as the benefits clearly outweigh any limited harm identified. Accordingly, in accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act 2008 and the NPSs, it is concluded that the proposed development is acceptable in planning terms and there is no reason why the draft Development Consent Order should not be granted.

4.1.26 The Applicant respectfully urges the Examining Authority and Secretary of State to support this Project and grant the Development Consent Order sought.

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Appendix 1

NPS EN-1 Compliance Table

Table 114: National Policy Statement for Energy (NPS EN-1), November 2023 Key Paragraphs

Paragraph	Details	Comments
2.2.1	'In June 2019, the UK became the first major economy to legislate for a 2050 net zero Greenhouse Gases ('GHG') emissions target through the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019.'	The delivery of the Botley West is a very important part of ensuring the UK Government meets its legally binding net zero obligations and in meeting its goal of 70GW of solar by 2035.
2.3.3	'Our objectives for the energy system are to ensure our supply of energy always remains secure, reliable, affordable, and consistent with meeting our target to cut GHG emissions to net zero by 2050, including through delivery of our carbon budgets and Nationally Determined Contribution. This will require a step change in the decarbonisation of our energy system.'	The scale of the problem is great; the scale of the solution needs to respond accordingly. Even with the addition of 840MW of renewable energy from the Botley West project, there is still a very significant shortfall of solar projects coming forward to meet the Government's target of 70GW by 2035 (see for example ES Chapter 5, paras 5.1.19 to 5.1.22 ref **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.
2.3.4	'Meeting these objectives necessitates a significant amount of new energy infrastructure, both large nationally significant developments and small-scale developments determined at a local level ....'	See response to paragraph 2.2.1 and 2.2.3 above.
3.2.1	'The government's objectives for the energy system are to ensure our supply of energy always remains secure, reliable, affordable, and consistent with net zero emissions in 2050 for a wide range of future scenarios ....'	See response to paragraph 2.2.1 and 2.2.3 above.
3.2.3	'It is not the role of the planning system to deliver specific amounts or limit any form of infrastructure covered by this NPS. It is for industry to propose new energy infrastructure projects that they assess to be viable within the strategic framework set by government ....'	The investment provided by PVDP and Solar Five Ltd, for the Botley West project is significant and necessary to increase the supply of this type of Critical National Priority infrastructure.
3.2.4	'It is not the government's intention in presenting any of the figures or targets in this NPS to propose limits on any new infrastructure that can be consented in accordance with the energy NPSs. A large number of consented projects can help deliver an affordable electricity system, by driving competition and reducing costs within and amongst different technology and infrastructure types ....'	The scale of the problem is great; the scale of the solution needs to respond accordingly. Even with the addition of 840MW of renewable energy from the Botley West project, there is still a very significant shortfall of solar projects coming forward to meet the Government's target of 70GW by 2035 (see for example Chapter

Paragraph	Details	Comments
		5, paras 5.1.19 to 5.1.22). More renewable energy developments are required, need approval and to be implemented.
3.2.6	**'The Secretary of State should assess all applications for development consent for the types of infrastructure covered by this NPS on the basis that the government has demonstrated that there is a need for those types of infrastructure, which is urgent, as described for each of them in this Part.'**	Some third parties opposing the Project question its need. This statement makes clear that the need has already been demonstrated.
3.2.7	**'In addition, the Secretary of State has determined that substantial weight should be given to this need when considering applications for development consent under the Planning Act 2008.'**	This is noted and welcomed by the Applicant.
3.2.8	**'The Secretary of State is not required to consider separately the specific contribution of any individual project to satisfying the need established in this NPS.'**	This is noted by the Applicant. However, it is important to also note that all host authorities have declared a climate emergency and Botley West coming forward can help positively address that emergency.
3.3.12	Decentralised and community energy systems such as micro-generation contribute to our targets on reducing carbon emissions and increasing energy security. These technologies could also lead to some reduction in demand on the main generation and transmission system. However, the Government does not believe they will replace the need for new large-scale electricity infrastructure to meet our energy objectives. This is because connection of large-scale, centralised electricity generating facilities via a high voltage transmission system enables the pooling of both generation and demand, which in turn offers a number of economic and other benefits, such as more efficient bulk transfer of power and enabling surplus generation capacity in one area to be used to cover shortfalls elsewhere.	Some third parties claim roof top solar can satisfy Government targets in relation to solar (70GW by 2035). However, this statement makes clear that the Government does not believe they will replace the need for new large-scale electricity infrastructure to meet our energy objectives.
3.3.20	'Wind and solar are the lowest cost ways of generating electricity, helping reduce costs and providing a clean and secure source of electricity supply (as they are not reliant on fuel for generation). Our analysis shows that a secure, reliable, affordable, net zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar.'	Noted. The Botley West solar farm will perform a critical role in the delivery of net zero by 2050.
3.3.62	'Government has concluded that there is a critical national priority (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure. Section 4.2 states which energy generating technologies are low carbon and are therefore CNP infrastructure.'	Noted. Solar is one such example of low carbon technology and therefore is CNP infrastructure (see 4.2.5 below).
3.3.63	'Subject to any legal requirements, the urgent need for CNP Infrastructure to achieving our energy objectives, together with the national security, economic, commercial, and net zero benefits, will in general	The weight to attributed to CNP infrastructure in the planning balance is noted and welcome.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	outweigh any other residual impacts not capable of being addressed by application of the mitigation hierarchy. Government strongly supports the delivery of CNP Infrastructure, and it should be progressed as quickly as possible.'	The Applicant is not aware nor expects any legal impediment that would prevent a positive decision being taken by the Secretary of State in respect of the Botley West Project. The Applicant has mitigated significant adverse effects and is left with residual impacts, none of which are considered significant adverse and many of which are beneficial. In the opinion of the Applicant, the planning balance is overwhelmingly in favour of the Project.
3.3.65	'There is an urgent need for new electricity network infrastructure to be brought forward at pace to meet our energy objectives.'	Botley West is likely to be one of the first solar NSIP's to connect to the national grid and start supplying affordable, clean and secure energy into the system. A grid connection offer has already been made to the Applicant and it expected to connect to the national grid in 2028. This is a material consideration in the planning balance.
3.3.83	'Given the urgent need for new electricity infrastructure and the time it takes for electricity NSIPs to move from design conception to operation, there is an urgent need for new (and particularly low carbon) electricity NSIPs to be brought forward as soon as possible, given the crucial role of electricity as the UK decarbonises its economy.'	See response to paragraph 3.3.65 above.
4.1.3	'Given the level and urgency of need for infrastructure of the types covered by the energy NPSs set out in Part 3 of this NPS, the Secretary of State will start with a presumption in favour of granting consent to applications for energy NSIPs. That presumption applies unless any more specific and relevant policies set out in the relevant NPSs clearly indicate that consent should be refused.'	The presumption in favour of CNP infrastructure in the planning balance is noted and welcomed. There is no policy at local or national level that clearly indicates that permission should be refused. Whilst there is some conflict with Green Belt policy, very special circumstances exist that outweigh harm caused by inappropriateness and any other harm - see planning balance conclusion and Appendix 8 in this report. In the opinion of the Applicant, the planning balance is overwhelmingly in favour of the Project.
4.1.5	'In considering any proposed development, in particular when weighing its adverse impacts against its benefits, the Secretary of State should take into account:	Noted. See planning balance conclusion in this report.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	• its potential benefits including its contribution to meeting the need for energy infrastructure, job creation, reduction of geographical disparities, environmental enhancements, and any long-term or wider benefits • its potential adverse impacts, including on the environment, and including any long-term and cumulative adverse impacts, as well as any measures to avoid, reduce, mitigate or compensate for any adverse impacts, following the mitigation hierarchy'	In the opinion of the Applicant, the planning balance is overwhelmingly in favour of the Project.
4.1.7	'Where this NPS or the relevant technology specific NPSs require an applicant to mitigate a particular impact as far as possible, but the Secretary of State considers that there would still be residual adverse effects after the implementation of such mitigation measures, the Secretary of State should weigh those residual effects against the benefits of the proposed development ....'	Noted. Please refer to the planning balance conclusion in this PSS. In the opinion of the Applicant, the planning balance is overwhelmingly in favour of the Project.
Other documents		
4.1.12	'Other matters that the Secretary of State may consider both important and relevant to their decision-making may include Development Plan documents or other documents in the Local Development Framework.'	Noted. These are set out and assessed in this report. The Applicant considers the Project is compliant or substantially in compliance with relevant Development Plans and other policy documents.
4.1.13	"Where the project conflicts with a proposal in a draft Development Plan, the Secretary of State should take account of the stage which the Development Plan document in England or Local Development Plan in Wales has reached in deciding what weight to give to the plan for the purposes of determining the planning significance of what is replaced, prevented, or precluded.'	Noted. This assessment is set out in this report.
4.1.14	'The closer the Development Plan document in England or Local Development Plan in Wales is to being adopted by the LPA, the greater weight which can be attached to it.'	Noted. This assessment is set out in this report.
4.1.15	'In the event of a conflict between these documents and an NPS, the NPS prevails for the purpose of Secretary of State decision making given the national significance of the infrastructure.'	Noted.
Development consent		
4.1.16	'The Secretary of State should only impose requirements in relation to a development consent that are necessary, relevant to planning, relevant to the development to be consented, enforceable, precise, and reasonable in all other respects.'	Noted. The Applicant has devised a list of Draft Requirements which meet these tests.
4.2.2	Ensuring the UK is more energy independent, resilient and secure requires the smooth transition to abundant,	Botley West is likely to be one of the first solar NSIP's to connect to

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	low-carbon energy. The UK's strategy to increase supply of low carbon energy is dependent on deployment of renewable and nuclear power generation, alongside hydrogen and CCUS. Our energy security and net zero ambitions will only be delivered if we can enable the development of new low carbon sources of energy at speed and scale.	the national grid and start supplying affordable, clean and secure energy into the system. A grid connection offer has already been made to the Applicant. The connection date is assumed to be October 2028.
4.2.5	'.... Low carbon infrastructure for the purposes of this policy means: • for electricity generation, all onshore and offshore generation that does not involve fossil fuel combustion (that is, renewable generation, including anaerobic digestion and other plants that convert residual waste into energy, including combustion, provided they meet existing definitions of low carbon; and nuclear generation), as well as natural gas fired generation which is carbon capture ready • for electricity grid infrastructure, all power lines in scope of EN-5 including network reinforcement and upgrade works, and associated infrastructure such as substations. This is not limited to those associated specifically with a particular generation technology, as all new grid projects will contribute towards greater efficiency in constructing, operating and connecting low carbon infrastructure to the National Electricity Transmission System • for other energy infrastructure, fuels, pipelines and storage infrastructure, which fits within the normal definition of "low carbon", such as hydrogen distribution, and carbon dioxide distribution • for energy infrastructure which is directed into the NSIP regime under section 35 of the Planning Act 2008, and fit within the normal definition of "low carbon", such as interconnectors, Multi-Purpose Interconnectors, or 'bootstraps' to support the onshore network which are routed offshore • Lifetime extensions of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure, and repowering of projects.'	Noted. Solar farms fall within the scope of this definition.
4.2.6	'The overarching need case for each type of energy infrastructure and the substantial weight which should be given to this need in assessing applications, as set out in paragraphs 3.2.6 to 3.2.8 of EN-1, is the starting point for all assessments of energy infrastructure applications.'	The need case and weight to be attributed to renewable projects is noted and Botley West benefits from this support.
4.2.10	'Applicants for CNP infrastructure must continue to show how their application meets the requirements in this NPS and the relevant technology specific NPS, applying the mitigation hierarchy, as well as any other legal and regulatory requirements.'	Noted. This document clarifies compliance.
4.2.11	'Applicants must apply the mitigation hierarchy and demonstrate that it has been applied. They should also seek the advice of the appropriate SNCB or other	Noted. This is the approach that is taken in the Environmental Statement. Residual effects are

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	relevant statutory body when undertaking this process. Applicants should demonstrate that all residual impacts are those that cannot be avoided, reduced or mitigated.'	reported in Chapter 21 of the ES, summarised in Table 22.1. These are the effects after adverse impacts have been the subject of avoidance through design and layout and/or the application of relevant and reasonable mitigation measures.
4.2.12	'Applicants should set out how residual impacts will be compensated for as far as possible. Applicants should also set out how any mitigation or compensation measures will be monitored and reporting agreed to ensure success and that action is taken. Changes to measures may be needed e.g. adaptive management. The cumulative impacts of multiple developments with residual impacts should also be considered.'	Noted. This is the approach that is taken in the Environmental Statement.
4.2.13	'Where residual impacts relate to HRA or MCZ sites then the Applicant must provide a derogation case, if required, in the normal way in compliance with the relevant legislation and guidance.'	Noted. There are no residual impacts that relate to HRA or MCZ sites.
4.2.15	"Where residual non-HRA or non-MCZ impacts remain after the mitigation hierarchy has been applied, these residual impacts are unlikely to outweigh the urgent need for this type of infrastructure. Therefore, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely that consent will be refused on the basis of these residual impacts ...."	Noted. The Applicant welcomes this consideration.
4.2.16	'As a result, the Secretary of State will take as the starting point for decision-making that such infrastructure is to be treated as if it has met any tests which are set out within the NPSs, or any other planning policy, which requires a clear outweighing of harm, exceptionality or very special circumstances.'	Noted. This is also the welcomed by the Applicant. See Planning balance and conclusion in this report.
4.2.17	'This means that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the following, non-exhaustive, list of tests: • where development within a Green Belt requires very special circumstances to justify development; • where development within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) requires the benefits (including need) of the development in the location proposed to clearly outweigh both the likely impact on features of the site that make it a SSSI, and any broader impacts on the national network of SSSIs. • where development in nationally designated landscapes requires exceptional circumstances to be demonstrated; and • where substantial harm to or loss of significance to heritage assets should be exceptional or wholly exceptional'	Noted. This is welcomed by the Applicant. See also the Planning balance and conclusion in this report.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
4.3.1	'All proposals for projects that are subject to the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the EIA Regulations) must be accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES) describing the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the project.'	The Applicant has submitted an ES with the Draft DCO.
4.3.3	'The Regulations require an assessment of the likely significant effects of the proposed project on the environment, covering the direct effects and any indirect, secondary, cumulative, transboundary, short, medium, and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects at all stages of the project, and also of the measures envisaged for avoiding or mitigating significant adverse effects.'	Noted. The Environmental Statement has identified and assessed the likely significant effects on the environment. A Mitigation Measures and Commitment Schedule has also been produced [**EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
4.3.4	'To consider the potential effects, including benefits, of a proposal for a project, the applicant must set out information on the likely significant environmental, social and economic effects of the development, and show how any likely significant negative effects would be avoided, reduced, mitigated or compensated for, following the mitigation hierarchy. This information could include matters such as employment, equality, biodiversity net gain, community cohesion, health and well-being.'	Noted. This is the approach that is taken in the Environmental Statement.
4.3.5	'For the purposes of this NPS and the technology specific NPSs the ES should cover the environmental, social and economic effects arising from pre-construction, construction, operation and decommissioning of the project.'	Noted. This is the approach that is taken in the Environmental Statement.
Applicant assessment		
4.3.10	'The applicant must provide information proportionate to the scale of the project, ensuring the information is sufficient to meet the requirements of the EIA Regulations.'	Noted. This is the approach that is taken in the Environmental Statement.
4.3.11	'In some instances, it may not be possible at the time of the application for development consent for all aspects of the proposal to have been settled in precise detail. Where this is the case, the applicant should explain in its application which elements of the proposal have yet to be finalised, and the reasons why this is the case'	Noted. This is the approach taken in the ES – see in particular Chapter 4 – Methodology, and Chapter 6 – Project Description
4.3.12	'Where some details are still to be finalised, the ES should, to the best of the applicant's knowledge, assess the likely worst-case environmental, social and economic effects of the proposed development to ensure that the impacts of the project as it may be constructed have been properly assessed.'	Noted. This is the approach that is taken in the Environmental Statement.
4.3.15	'Applicants are obliged to include in their ES, information about the reasonable alternatives they have studied. This should include an indication of the main reasons for the applicant's choice, taking into account the environmental, social and economic effects	Noted. This is the approach that is taken in the Environmental Statement. See also Chapter 5 – Alternatives and Chapter 6 – Project Description.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	and including, where relevant, technical and commercial feasibility.'	
4.3.17	'Where there is a policy or legal requirement to consider alternatives, the applicant should describe the alternatives considered in compliance with these requirements.'	See response to paragraph 4.3.15.
4.3.24	'The Secretary of State should not refuse an application for development on one site simply because fewer adverse impacts would result from developing similar infrastructure on another suitable site, and should have regard as appropriate to the possibility that all suitable sites for energy infrastructure of the type proposed may be needed for future proposals'.	Noted. Notwithstanding, the Applicant has set out how they came to select the subject site, the design evolution, and has set out the Very Special Circumstances to explain why development of that part of the site within the Green Belt should be allowed.
4.3.27	'Alternative proposals which mean the necessary development could not proceed, for example because the alternative proposals are not commercially viable or alternative proposals for sites would not be physically suitable, can be excluded on the grounds that they are not important and relevant to the Secretary of State's decision.'	Noted.
4.3.28	'Alternative proposals which are vague or immature can be excluded on the grounds that they are not important and relevant to the Secretary of State's decision.'	Noted. This statement may be of relevance to third parties who have sought to suggest alternative sites or approaches to development. Notwithstanding, the Applicant has set out in some detail the site and design evolution of the Project – see Chapter 5 – Alternatives, and Layout and Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]**
4.3.29	'It is intended that potential alternatives to a proposed development should, wherever possible, be identified before an application is made to the Secretary of State (so as to allow appropriate consultation and the development of a suitable evidence base in relation to any alternatives which are particularly relevant). Therefore, where an alternative is first put forward by a third party after an application has been made, the Secretary of State may place the onus on the person proposing the alternative to provide the evidence for its suitability as such and the Secretary of State should not necessarily expect the applicant to have assessed it.'	Noted. The main alternative proposed by third parties during consultation has been roof mounted solar or in some cases wind turbines. The Applicant is a solar developer. Wind turbines are considered to give rise to adverse visual effects over a wide area, and unacceptable effects in terms of the setting of The Blenheim Palace World Heritage site.
Health		
4.4.2	'The direct impacts on health may include • increased traffic • air or water pollution • dust, odour	Noted. Where relevant these matters are addressed in the Human Health Chapter **[EN010147/APP/6.5].**

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	• hazardous waste and substances • noise • exposure to radiation, and • increases in pests'	
4.7.2	Applying good design to energy projects should produce sustainable infrastructure sensitive to place, including impacts on heritage, efficient in the use of natural resources, including land-use, and energy used in their construction and operation, matched by an appearance that demonstrates good aesthetic as far as possible. It is acknowledged, however that the nature of energy infrastructure development will often limit the extent to which it can contribute to the enhancement of the quality of the area	The Applicant has limited influence over design of the electrical infrastructure associated with the Project. The NGET substation will ultimately be designed and laid out to meet relevant technical, engineering and safety parameters. However, parameters have been established for the envelope within which this has been assessed (Chapter 6 – Project Description). Design approval of the solar arrays, and other electrical infrastructure will be agreed with the relevant planning authority via a Requirement in the DCO.
4.7.3	Good design is also a means by which many policy objectives in the NPSs can be met, for example the impact sections show how good design, in terms of siting and use of appropriate technologies, can help mitigate adverse impacts such as noise. Projects should look to use modern methods of construction and sustainable design practices such as use of sustainable timber and low carbon concrete. Where possible, projects should include the reuse of material.	NGET intends to build their substation using Gas Insulated technology rather than Air Insulated technology; this results in a substation that is smaller and quieter than would otherwise be the case, and so is better environmentally in terms of visual impact and noise effects. Siting of other noise generating equipment has been undertaken in a way to be remote from sensitive receptors and/or designed with additional mitigation measures to reduce adverse noise effects (Please also refer to Layout and Design Principles documents **[EN010147/APP/7.7]**.
4.12.9	'In considering an application for development consent the Secretary of State should focus on whether the development itself is an acceptable use of the land or sea, and the impact of that use, rather than the control of processes, emissions or discharges themselves.'	Noted. However, the Applicant has set out a series of Mitigation Measures and Commitments [**EN010147/APP/7.6** onwards**]**, and a series of Management Plans, the purpose of which is to avoid or reduce relevant adverse environmental effects arising from the Project.
5.11.20	'The general policies controlling development in the countryside apply with equal force in Green Belts but there is, in addition, a general presumption against inappropriate development within them. Such development should not be approved except in very	The Applicant has set out the VSC applicable to their Project within this Planning Supporting Statement (refer to Appendix 8)

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	special circumstances. Applicants should therefore determine whether their proposal, or any part of it, is within an established Green Belt and if it is, whether their proposal may be inappropriate development within the meaning of Green Belt policy (see paragraph 5.11.36 below).'	Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
5.11.34	'The Secretary of State should ensure that applicants do not site their scheme on the best and most versatile agricultural land without justification. Where schemes are to be sited on best and most versatile agricultural land the Secretary of State should take into account the economic and other benefits of that land. Where development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality.'	Noted. For full details please refer to Chapter 17 – Agriculture, Landuse and PRoW. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** Whilst some BMV is lost by the Project the areas are small and not significant in EIA terms. It is considered that on balance the benefits arising from the Project outweigh the impact upon BMV land.
5.11.37	'Very special circumstances are not defined in national planning policy as it is for the individual decision maker to assess each case on its merits and give relevant circumstances their due weight. However, when considering any planning application affecting Green Belt land, the Secretary of State should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering any application for such development, while taking account, in relation to renewable and linear infrastructure, of the extent to which its physical characteristics are such that it has limited or no impact on the fundamental purposes of Green Belt designation. Very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewables and other low carbon sources.'	Noted. The Applicant has set out the VSC applicable to their Project within this Planning Supporting Statement. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.

Appendix 2

NPS EN-3 Compliance Table

Table 222: National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (NPS EN-3), November 2023

Key Paragraphs

Paragraph	Details	Comments
General Assessment and Technology Specific Information		
Factors influencing site selection and design		
National designations		
2.3.6	'When considering applications for CNP Infrastructure in sites with nationally recognised designations (such as SSSIs, National Nature Reserves, National Parks, the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Registered Parks and Gardens, and World Heritage Sites), the Secretary of State will take as the starting point that the relevant tests in Sections 5.4 and 5.10 of EN-1 have been met, and any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by the urgent need for this type of infrastructure.'	Noted. The location of the Project does not fall within nationally recognised designations. For compliance see Appendices 1 to 7 and Section 4.0 of this PSS. The Applicant considers the Project is in accordance or substantially in accordance with relevant Development Plans and other policy documents.
2.3.8	'In considering the impact on the historic environment as set out in Section 5.9 of EN-1 and whether the Secretary of State is satisfied that the substantial public benefits would outweigh any loss or harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the Secretary of State should take into account the positive role that large-scale renewable projects play in the mitigation of climate change, the delivery of energy security and the urgency of meeting the net zero target.'	Noted. For full details please refer to Chapter 14 – Heritage **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** and section 4.3 of the PSS. In summary, the Project avoids important underground archaeology, removing development from such areas, and avoids significant adverse effects upon setting through a combination of distance and/or and screening from heritage assets, including The Blenheim Palace WHS. In respect of the latter the Applicant has produced a Heritage Impact Assessment at Appendix 14 of Chapter 9 of the ES.
Other locational considerations		
2.3.9	'As most renewable energy resources can only be developed where the resource exists and where economically feasible, and because there are no limits on the need established in Part 3 of EN-1, the Secretary of State should not use a consecutive approach in the consideration of renewable energy projects (for example, by giving priority to the re-use of previously developed land for renewable technology developments).'	The absence of any limit on need is welcomed as is the avoidance of taking a consecutive approach in the consideration the location of renewables i.e. not giving priority to previously developed land. Please also see Chapter 5 – Alternatives **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** for the explanation and rationale for the Applicants choice of site etc.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
Climate change adaption and resilience		
Solar photovoltaic		
2.4.11	'Solar photovoltaic (PV) sites may also be proposed in low lying exposed sites. For these proposals, applicants should consider, in particular, how plant will be resilient to: • increased risk of flooding; and • impact of higher temperatures.'	Please refer to Chapter 10 - Hydrology and Chapter 15 on Climate Change. No significant adverse effects are predicted.
Consideration of good design for energy infrastructure		
2.5.2	'Proposals for renewable energy infrastructure should demonstrate good design, particularly in respect of landscape and visual amenity, opportunities for co-existence/co-location with other marine and terrestrial uses, and in the design of the project to mitigate impacts such as noise and effects on ecology and heritage.'	This project design evolution is described in Chapter 6, Alternatives. Please also refer to the illustrative masterplans, the Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Plan **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]**, and in the Layout and Design Principles document [**EN010147/APP/7.7]**.
Flexibility in the project details		
2.6.1	'Where details are still to be finalised, applicants should explain in the application which elements of the proposal have yet to be finalised, and the reason why this is the case.'	Please refer to Chapter 6 – Project Description **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** and the list of Requirements within the Draft Order, which refer to plans/measures requiring subsequent approval.
2.6.2	"Where flexibility is sought in the consent as a result, applicants should, to the best of their knowledge, assess the likely worst-case environmental, social and economic effects of the proposed development to ensure that the impacts of the project as it may be constructed have been properly assessed.'	This is the approach that has been taken in the Environmental Statement. For details, please refer to Chapter 4 of the ES, Approach to Assessment [**EN010147/APP/6.3]**
Solar Photovoltaic Generation		
Introduction		
2.10.10	'Solar also has an important role in delivering the government's goals for greater energy independence. The British Energy Security Strategy states that government expects a five-fold increase in combined ground and rooftop solar deployment by 2035 (up to 70GW). It sets out that government is supportive of solar that is "co-located with other functions (for example, agriculture, onshore wind generation, or storage) to maximise the efficiency of land use".'	It is acknowledged by the Applicant that there are many schemes currently in the consenting process. The largest schemes are listed on the PINs website and an analysis of their capacity and status can be found at Annex A. However, even if all of these are consented, built and connected before 2035, this would only add approximately 15.2GW to the 15.8GW of installed capacity reported in the House of Commons briefing paper from May 2024 i.e. a total potential capacity of approximately 31.0GW. This includes the potential contribution of the Project of an anticipated 840MW, and which has the benefit of a confirmed grid connection offer of October 2026 (but for ES purposes is assumed to be October 2028).

Paragraph	Details	Comments
		At this point therefore, there is still a significant shortfall in the 70GW Government target, of approximately 39GW (see DCO Solar Capacity Calculation, Chapter 5, Alternatives, ref **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** The Botley West scheme does not include battery storage; other battery storage facilities are available nearby to help balance the grid. The Botley West Project does retain and support ongoing agricultural use of the land.
2.10.11	'The Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan[81] states that government seeks large scale ground-mount solar deployment across the UK, looking for development mainly on brownfield, industrial and low and medium grade agricultural land. It sets out that solar and farming can be complementary, supporting each other financially, environmentally and through shared use of land, and encourages deployment of solar technology that delivers environmental benefits, with consideration for ongoing food production or environmental improvement.'	See 2.10.10 for urgency to deliver solar farms and other forms of renewables and response to 2.3.9 in respect avoiding a consecutive approach to prioritising specific land use types to locate renewable energy projects. The Applicant will also retain an agricultural use of the land through conservation grazing, make available up to 30 ha of land for local food growing initiatives, and make available land for educational use (refer to Chapter 6 of the ES and the oOMP and oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.2]** and **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]**.
Applicant Assessment		
Factors influencing site selection and designation		
Irradiance and site topography		
2.10.19	'Irradiance will be a key consideration for the applicant in identifying a potential site as the amount of electricity generated on site is directly affected by irradiance levels. Irradiance of a site will in turn be affected by surrounding topography, with an uncovered or exposed site of good elevation and favourable south-facing aspect more likely to increase year-round irradiance levels. This in turn affects the carbon emission savings and the commercial viability of the site'	Irradiance has been an important, but not overriding, factor in optimising the design and layout of the Project. See also the Layout and Design Principles document [**EN010147/APP/7.7]**.
2.10.20	"In order to maximise irradiance, applicants may choose a site and design its layout with variable and diverse panel types and aspects, and panel arrays may also follow the movement of the sun in order further to maximise the solar resource.'	See response to paragraph 2.10.19. The applicant has chosen a fixed rather than rotating scheme.
Network Connection		
2.10.21	'Applicants should consider important issues relating to network connection at Section 4.11 of EN-1 and in EN-5 ....'	The Applicant has been in ongoing discussion with National Grid (NGET) and has the benefit of a grid connection offer from NGET (assumed connection date

Paragraph	Details	Comments
		October 2028). The Applicant has included a new NGET substation within the Order Limits as part of its Draft DCO. See also Chapter 6 for approach to assessment of the NGET substation **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.
2.10.23	'Larger developments may seek connection to the transmission network if there is available network capacity and/or supportive infrastructure.'	Noted – see above.
2.10.24	'In either case the connection voltage, availability of network capacity, and the distance from the solar farm to the existing network can have a significant effect on the commercial feasibility of a development proposal.'	Noted. The Applicants' site selection process has been influenced by network capacity leading them to the Project Site (refer to Chapter 5, Alternatives). The current illustrative layout shows the NGET substation within the Order limits and the customer substation adjacent.
2.10.25	'To maximise existing grid infrastructure, minimise disruption to existing local community infrastructure or biodiversity and reduce overall costs, applicants may choose a site based on nearby available grid export capacity.'	The approach to connection is set out in the ES Chapter 6, and the Applicant already benefits from a Grid Connection offer from NGET. Availability of a suitable connection point has influenced the Project site location (see Chapter 5, Alternatives).
2.10.26	"Where this is the case, applicants should consider the cumulative impacts of situating a solar farm in proximity to other energy generating stations and infrastructure.'	The Applicant has undertaken a cumulative impact assessment should the proposed location of the NGET substation be moved to an adjacent site. In this scenario the Applicant assumes its own infrastructure will replace the current NGET site.
Proximity of a site to dwellings		
2.10.27	'Utility-scale solar farms are large sites that may have a significant zone of visual influence. The two main impact issues that determine distances to sensitive receptors are therefore likely to be visual amenity and glint and glare. These are considered in Landscape, Visual and Residential Amenity (paragraphs 2.10.93-2.10.101) and Glint and Glare (paragraphs 2.10.102 – 2.10.106) impact sections below'	Noted. Recognising that landscape and visual effects are one of the main environmental effects arising from solar farms, the Applicant has adopted a landscape led approach to the design and layout of the Project. Retention and enhancement of the existing landscape character has been one of the central features of the Project (See Landscape and Visual Resources chapter **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** and Layout and Design Principles Document [**EN010147/APP/7.7**].
Agriculture land classification and land type		
2.10.28	'Solar is a highly flexible technology and as such can be deployed on a wide variety of land types'	It is also noted that solar is a CNP, and currently deployment of solar is significantly short of the Government's target of 70GW by 2035 (see for example ES Chapter 5, paras 5.1.19 to 5.1.22 **[EN010147/APP/6.4]**
2.10.29	'While land type should not be a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site	Then Applicant has explained its rational for the selection of the subject site (see

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	location applicants should, where possible, utilise suitable previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land. Where the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to higher quality land avoiding the use of “Best and Most Versatile” agricultural land where possible. ‘Best and Most Versatile agricultural land is defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification’	Chapter 5 of the ES. Effects upon soils/BMV are considered in detail in Chapter 17– Agriculture, Landuse Soils and PROW **[EN010147/APP/6.3].** No significant adverse effects are predicted. Whilst some BMV is lost by the Project the areas are small and not significant in EIA terms. It is considered that on balance the benefits arising from the Project outweigh the impact upon BMV land.
2.10.30	‘Whilst the development of ground mounted solar arrays is not prohibited on Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, or sites designated for their natural beauty, or recognised for ecological or archaeological importance, the impacts of such are expected to be considered and are discussed under paragraphs 2.10.73 – 92 and 2.10.107 – 2.10.126.’	All these impacts are considered within relevant chapters within the ES and at section 4.3 of this PSS. No significant adverse effects are predicted.
2.10.31	‘It is recognised that at this scale, it is likely that applicants’ developments will use some agricultural land. Applicants should explain their choice of site, noting the preference for development to be on suitable brownfield, industrial and low and medium grade agricultural land.’	Then Applicant has explained its rational for the selection of the subject site (See Chapter 5 – Alternatives **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.
2.10.32	‘Where sited on agricultural land, consideration may be given as to whether the proposal allows for continued agricultural use and/or can be co-located with other functions (for example, onshore wind generation, storage, hydrogen electrolysers) to maximise the efficiency of land use.’	The Applicant does propose continued agricultural use – see Chapter 6 – Project Description **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.
2.10.33	‘The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) is the only approved system for grading agricultural quality in England and Wales and, if necessary, field surveys should be used to establish the ALC grades in accordance with the current, or any successor to it, grading criteria and identify the soil types to inform soil management at the construction, operation, and decommissioning phases in line with the Defra Construction Code.’	Soil sampling has been undertaken and has informed the Soil Management Plan and other management plans **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1]**.
2.10.34	‘Applicants are encouraged to develop and implement a Soil Resources and Management Plan which could help to use and manage soils sustainably and minimise adverse impacts on soil health and potential land contamination. This should be in line with the ambition set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan to bring at least 40% of England’s agricultural soils into sustainable management by 2028 and increase this up to 60% by 2030.’	The Applicant has produced a Soils Management Plan **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1]**

Paragraph	Details	Comments
Accessibility		
2.10.35	'Applicants will need to consider the suitability of the access routes to the proposed site for both the construction and operation of the solar farm with the former likely to raise more issues.'	The Applicant has defined and assessed the use of relevant links on the public highway during construction and operation. Full details are contained with Chapter 12– Highways. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. No significant effects are predicted.
2.10.36	'Given that potential solar farm sites are largely in rural areas, access for the delivery of solar arrays and associated infrastructure during construction can be a significant consideration for solar farm siting.'	See response to paragraph 2.10.35 above.
2.10.37	'Developers will usually need to construct on-site access routes for operation and maintenance activities, such as footpaths, earthworks, or landscaping.'	Internal maintenance roads are shown on the illustrative masterplans (see Figure 2.1a to 2.3 inclusive **[EN010147/APP/7.6.4]**. New pedestrian access routes are shown on the Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Plan **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. No significant earthworks are envisaged – of note, however, is a new water storage feature proposed north of Cassington, in order to reduce the effects of flooding that the village currently experiences intermittently. New earth bunds are also proposed in the same location to further assist in diverting water away from the village.
2.10.38	'In addition, sometimes access routes will need to be constructed to connect solar farms to the public road network.'	Four new vehicular access points have been designed to serve the four construction compound areas **[EN010147/APP/7.3.1 and 7.3.6]**. The Applicant has used existing field accesses into the Project site where possible; this will also assist in the continued agricultural use of the site.
2.10.39	'Applications should include the full extent of the access routes necessary for operation and maintenance and an assessment of their effects.	This is the approach taken within the ES.
Public rights of ways		
2.10.41	"Public rights of way may need to be temporarily closed or diverted to enable construction, however, applicants should keep, as far as is practicable and safe, all public rights of way that cross the proposed development site open during construction and protect users where a public right of way borders or crosses the site.'	The Applicant has considered the effect of the Project upon existing rights of way (Please refer to Chapter 17– Agriculture, Land Use and PRoW and Health Chapter 16 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**). Some adverse effects are predicted in the short term only.
2.10.42	'Applicants are encouraged to design the layout and appearance of the site to ensure continued recreational use of public rights of way where	This is the approach taken with the proposed development. PRoW diversions are proposed in four locations – see Chapter 16). New pedestrian access

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	possible during construction, and in particular during operation of the site.'	routes have also been created to increase access to this part of the countryside. A new permissive path was proposed by the Applicant during the consultation exercises along the route of the Evenlode. No third party expressed a wish for this to be delivered and so is not included in the Applicants submission.
2.10.43	'Applicants are encouraged where possible to minimise the visual impacts of the development for those using existing public rights of way, considering the impacts this may have on any other visual amenities in the surrounding landscape.'	The layout of the solar installation, the height of the solar arrays (reduced height post the PEIR), combined with existing and new landscaping has, in combination, led to the avoidance or minimisation of adverse visual impacts of the Project upon sensitive receptors.
2.10.44	Applicants should consider and maximise opportunities to facilitate enhancements to the public rights of way and the inclusion, through site layout and design of access, of new opportunities for the public to access and cross proposed solar development sites (whether via the adoption of new public rights of way or the creation of permissive paths), taking into account, where appropriate, the views of landowners.'	This is the approach taken with the Project. Existing rights of way have been retained and proposed to be enhanced. The Applicant has also consulted upon and now incorporated the provision of new pedestrian access routes (refer to Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**).
2.10.45	''Applicants should set out detail on how public rights of way would be managed to ensure they are safe to use in an outline Public Rights of Way Management Plan.'	The Applicant has produced an outline Public Rights of Way Management Plan within the outline Code of Construction Practice and Operational Management plan **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1]**.
Security and lighting		
2.10.46	'Security of the site is a key consideration for developers. Applicants may wish to consider not only the availability of natural defences such as steep gradients, hedging and rivers but also perimeter security measures such as fencing, electronic security, CCTV and lighting, with the measures proposed on a site-specific basis.'	The Applicant is proposing lighting and security cameras and fencing. See Chapter 6, Table 6.3 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**
Technical Considerations		
Capacity of a site		
2.10.53	'From the date of designation of this NPS, for the purposes of Section 15 of the Planning Act 2008, the maximum combined capacity of the installed inverters (measured in alternating current (AC)) should be used for the purposes of determining solar site capacity.'	The total installed capacity is approximately 936,000 kVA Total apparent power in AC).
2.10.55	"The installed generating capacity of a solar farm will decline over time in correlation with the reduction in panel array efficiency. There is a range of sources of degradation that developers need to consider when deciding on a solar panel technology to be used. Applicants may	The Applicant has assumed some degradation of the panels over time, and replacement as necessary. Details are contained in Chapter 14 – Climate Change and in Chapter 12 Transport **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	account for this by overplanting solar panel arrays."	
2.10.56	'AC installed export capacity should not be seen as an appropriate tool to constrain the impacts of a solar farm. Applicants should use other measurements, such as panel size, total area and percentage of ground cover to set the maximum extent of development when determining the planning impacts of an application.'	In table 6.3 of Chapter 6, the Applicant assumes a range for the following: total installation areas for the solar arrays; an indicative range for the number of solar modules; and an indicative dimension of the PV modules.
2.10.58	"In particular, any permissions granted on the basis of a DC installed generating capacity should be built on that basis, unless an amendment is made to that permission and the difference in impacts is considered.	The Applicant does not wish to consent to be controlled by limitation to its generation capacity. Instead, as with other solar DCO consents (e.g. Mallard Pass, Gate Burton and Cottam), it wishes to secure consent by reference to when decommissioning is to start. As such Requirement 15 of the draft Order states that decommissioning of the authorised development must commence no later than 37.5 years following the date of final commissioning.
Site layout design, and appearance		
2.10.59	'Applicants should consider the criteria for good design set out in EN-1 Section 4.7 at an early stage when developing projects.'	See NPS EN-1 table above and section 4.7.2 and 4.7.3 within that table.
2.10.60	As set out above applicants will consider several factors when considering the design and layout of sites, including proximity to available grid capacity to accommodate the scale of generation, orientation, topography, previous land–use, and ability to mitigate environmental impacts and flood risk.'	See Chapter 5 – Alternatives, and the Layout and Design Principles Document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]**, where the approach to site selection and layout and design refinement and control is set out.
2.10.61	'For a solar farm to generate electricity efficiently the panel array spacing should seek to maximise the potential power output of the site. The type, spacing and aspect of panel arrays will depend on the physical characteristics of the site such as site elevation.'	The Applicant has continued to refine the layout of the solar installation having regard to power output, engineering, and planning and environmental considerations. The illustrative layout can be found in Figures 2.1 to 2.3 inclusive **[EN010147/APP/6.4]**
2.10.62	'In terms of design and layout, applicants may favour a south-facing arrangement of panels to maximise output although other orientations may be chosen. For example, an east-west layout, whilst likely to result in reduced output compared to south-facing panels on a panel-by-panel basis, may allow for a greater density of panels to compensate and therefore for generation to be spread more evenly throughout the day.	The Applicant has continued to refine the layout of the solar installation having regard to power output, engineering, and planning and environmental considerations. The illustrative layout can be found in Figures 2.1 to 2.3 inclusive **[EN010147/APP/6.4]** and the description of the design evolution is contained in Chapter 5 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**
2.10.63	'It is likely that underground and overhead cabling will be required to connect the electrical	No overhead cabling is proposed by the Applicant. However, where cabling crosses important archaeology, cables will be laid

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	assets of the site, such as from the substation to the panel arrays or storage facilities.'	on the surface of avoid damage to the heritage asset.
2.10.64	'In the case of underground cabling, applicants are expected to provide a method statement describing cable trench design, installation methodology, as well as details of the operation and maintenance regime.'	The Applicant has produced a report which provides details of cable laying methods, Volume 3, Appendix 6.2 **[EN010147/APP/6.7]**. An oOMP is also produced which describes the proposed operation and maintenance regime **[EN010147/APP/7.6.2]**.
Project lifetime		
2.10.65	'Applicants should consider the design life of solar panel efficiency over time when determining the period for which consent is required. An upper limit of 40 years is typical, although applicants may seek consent without a time-period or for differing time-periods of operation.'	The Applicant wishes to secure consent by reference to when decommissioning is to start. As such Requirement 15 of the draft Order states that decommissioning of the authorised development must commence no later than 37.5 years following the date of final commissioning.
2.10.66	'Time limited consent, where granted, is described as temporary because there is a finite period for which it exists, after which the project would cease to have consent and therefore must seek to extend the period of consent or be decommissioned and removed.'	The Applicant seeks a temporary consent primarily because much of the site is within the Oxfordshire Green Belt. The Applicant considers it important to allow the Project to generate much needed renewable energy but for the Green Belt to continue to perform its function in the longer term for planning purposes. The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
2.10.67	Solar panel efficiency deteriorates over time and applicants may elect to replace panels during the lifetime of the site.'	The Applicant is assuming that replacement panels will be required over time and has allowed for this eventuality – Appendix 14.2 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
Decommissioning		
2.10.68	'Solar panels can be decommissioned relatively easily and cheaply. The nature and extent of decommissioning of a site can vary. Generally, it is expected that the panel arrays and mounting structures will be decommissioned, and underground cabling dug out to ensure that prior use of the site can continue.'	The Applicant describes its decommissioning proposals in Chapter 6 and in the Decommissioning Plan (see ref **[EN010147/APP/7.6.4]**). See also the Applicant's response to 2.10.66 above.
2.10.69	'Applicants should set out what would be decommissioned and removed from the site at the end of the operational life of the generating station, considering instances where it may be less harmful for the ecology of the site to keep or retain certain types of infrastructure, for example underground cabling, and where there may be socio-economic benefits in retaining site	The Applicant describes its decommissioning proposals in Chapter 6 and in the Decommissioning Plan **[EN010147/APP/7.6.4]**. Some of the key benefits of the Project is not only the renewable energy it will produce, but the considerable

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	infrastructure after the operational life, such as retaining pathways through the site or a site substation.'	enhancement it will make to the landscape with the very significant new planting proposed, but also the biodiversity gain it will achieve, increased public access and educational benefits.
Flexibility in the project details		
2.10.70	'In many cases, not all aspects of the proposal may have been settled in precise detail at the point of application. Such aspects may include: • the type, number and dimensions of the panels; • layout and spacing; • the type of inverter or transformer; and • whether storage will be installed (with the option to install further panels as a substitute).'	Details of the project parameters are set out in Chapter 6 of the ES and the Layout and Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]** which set out control and delivery measures.
2.10.71	'Applicants should set out a range of options based on different panel numbers, types and layout, with and without storage.'	Details of the project parameters are set out in Chapter 3 and 6 of the ES.
2.10.72	'Guidance on how applicants should manage flexibility is set out at Section 2.6 of this NPS.'	Details of the project parameters are set out in Chapter 3 and 6 of the ES.
Impacts		
Biodiversity, ecological, geological conservation and water management		
2.10.76	'The applicant's ecological assessments should identify any ecological risk from developing on the proposed site.'	Details of the ecology assessment, impacts and mitigation are contained within Chapter 9 of the ES and in the Mitigation and Commitments schedule **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
2.10.77	'Issues that need assessment may include habitats, ground nesting birds, wintering and migratory birds, bats, dormice, reptiles, great crested newts, water voles and badgers.'	Relevant surveys have been undertaken.
2.10.78	'The applicant should use an advising ecologist during the design process to ensure that adverse impacts are avoided, minimised or mitigated in line with the mitigation hierarchy, and biodiversity enhancements are maximised.'	The Applicants has employed experienced and competent ecologists to advise on the scheme, and secure substantial BNG. In particular, Mr Guy Parker of Wychwood Ecology Ltd has worked with RPS's ecologists to bring his expertise to bear on the delivery of the BNG and management of the site based upon his recent experience with the Southill Solar Farm in Oxfordshire and Boxsted Solar Farm in Essex. Dr Peter Shepherd of BSG ecology has also been employed to bring his knowledge and expertise in respect of bat populations that exist in and around the Project Site.
2.10.79	'The assessment may be informed by a 'desk study' of existing ecological records, an evaluation of the likely impacts of the solar farm	Details of the ecology assessment, impacts and mitigation are contained within Chapter 9 of the ES and in the Mitigation

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	upon ecological features, and should specify mitigation to avoid or minimise these impacts, and any further surveys required.'	and Commitments schedule Volume 3, Appendix 6.1 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
2.10.80	'Applicants should consider earthworks associated with construction compounds, access roads and cable trenching.'	A Soils Management Plan has been produced and describes how soils will be managed **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1]**.
2.10.81	'Where soil stripping occurs, topsoil and subsoil should be stripped, stored, and replaced separately to minimise soil damage and to provide optimal conditions for site restoration. Further details on minimising impacts on soil and soil handling are above at paragraphs 2.10.33 and 2.10.34.'	A Soils Management Plan has been produced and describes how soils will be managed **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1]**.
2.10.82	'Applicants should consider how security and lighting installations may impact on the local ecology. Where pole mounted CCTV facilities are proposed the location of these facilities should be carefully considered to minimise impact. If lighting is necessary, it should be minimised and directed away from areas of likely habitat.'	The Applicant has considered this and lighting type, location and use will be controlled in the oCMP, the oLEMP and reflected in the Mitigation and Commitments Schedule [**EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
2.10.83	'Applicants should consider how site boundaries are managed. If any hedges/scrub are to be removed, further surveys may be necessary to account for impacts. Buffer strips between perimeter fencing and hedges may be proposed, and the construction and design of any fencing should account for enabling mammal, reptile and other fauna access into the site if required to do so in the ecological report.'	Hedgerow removal has been minimised and where removal is proposed surveys have been undertaken to describe associated impacts and effects. Substantial hedgerow planting is proposed, and the Layout and Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]** references the control measures to be adopted by the Project including the buffers proposed throughout the site. The oLEMP also describes how fencing will allow for access for mammal, reptile and other fauna.
2.10.84	'Where a Flood Risk Assessment has been carried out this must be submitted alongside the applicant's ES. This will need to consider the impact of drainage. As solar PV panels will drain to the existing ground, the impact will not, in general, be significant.'	This is included in ES Volume 3 Appendix 10.1: Flood Risk Assessment **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
2.10.85	'Where access tracks need to be provided, permeable tracks should be used, and localised Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), such as swales and infiltration trenches, should be used to control any run-off where recommended.'	Access tracks are proposed and where surfacing is proposed, that will be permeable avoiding or minimising effects on surface water run-off. Any access tracks located within Flood Zone 1, 2 and 3 have been subjected to the sequential test and exception test. Where required, appropriate mitigation measures are outlined within Volume 3, Appendix 10.1: Flood risk assessment **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
2.10.86	'Given the temporary nature of solar PV farms, sites should be configured or selected to avoid	The conceptual drainage strategy is presented within Appendix 10.2: Conceptual Drainage Strategy

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	the need to impact on existing drainage systems and watercourses.'	**[EN010147/APP/6.5]** and has been developed in accordance with 2023 NPS, NPPF, PPG ID7 the SuDS Manual and local council policy. The Conceptual drainage strategy considers existing and proposed runoff rates, the hierarchy of drainage and how SuDS can be incorporated within the proposed design.
2.10.87	'Culverting existing watercourses/drainage ditches should be avoided.'	Culverting is not proposed by the Applicant
2.10.88	'Where culverting for access is unavoidable, applicants should demonstrate that no reasonable alternatives exist and where necessary it will only be in place temporarily for the construction period.'	Culverting is not proposed by the Applicant
2.10.89	'Solar farms have the potential to increase the biodiversity value of a site, especially if the land was previously intensively managed. In some instances, this can result in significant benefits and enhancements beyond Biodiversity Net Gain, which result in wider environmental gains which is encouraged.'	Substantial BNG is planned for the Project site – Volume 3, Appendix 9.13 [**EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** The Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13. The oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project.
2.10.90	'For projects in England, applicants should consider enhancement, management, and monitoring of biodiversity in line with the ambition set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan and any relevant measures and targets, including statutory targets set under the Environment Act or elsewhere.'	The Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13. The oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project.
2.10.92	'Applicants should consider whether they need to provide geotechnical and hydrological information (such as identifying the presence of peat at each site) including the risk of landslide connected to any development work.'	Ground conditions are described in Chapter 11 of the ES and soil types are also described in Chapter 11 and 17. No peat is present. Hydrological information is contained in Chapter 10 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**
Landscape, visual and residential amenity		
2.10.94	'The approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large-scale solar farms is likely to be the same as assessing other onshore energy infrastructure. Solar farms are likely to be in low lying areas of good	Chapter 8 describes the ZTV of the Project. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	exposure and as such may have a wider zone of visual influence than other types of onshore energy infrastructure.'	
2.10.95	'However, whilst it may be the case that the development covers a significant surface area, in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography, the area of a zone of visual influence could be appropriately minimised.'	As the design and layout of the Project evolved refinements included removing solar arrays on more exposed high ground and lowering of the panel heights have assisted in reducing the visual effects of the Project. This combined with the management of the exiting landscape structure (e.g. allowing existing hedgerow to grow up to a height to screen development) and the substantial new planting proposed is designed to provide effective screening from year 5 and beyond (see Landscape and Visual Chapter 8).
2.10.96	'Landscape and visual impacts should be considered carefully pre-application. Potential impacts on the statutory purposes of nationally designated landscapes should form a part of the pre-application process.'	Notwithstanding that the Project does not fall within any National Landscape, one of the key priorities in the course of the evolution of the design and layout of the Project has been to prioritise, where possible, a landscape led approach to the development. As a result, maximum use has been made of existing landscape features when siting development, substantial new planting is proposed, and development has been stripped back from higher ground all in order to avoid or minimise adverse impacts in visual and character terms.
2.10.97	'Applicants should carry out a landscape and visual assessment and report it in the ES. Visualisations may be required to demonstrate the effects of a proposed solar farm on the setting of heritage assets and any nearby residential areas or viewpoints.'	The landscape and heritage consultant have worked together to avoid or minimise significant adverse effects upon heritage assets and other sensitive receptors. Representative viewpoints have been chosen and photomontages produced to describe visual effects of the development (refer to Chapter 7 and 8 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**).
2.10.98	'Applicants should follow the criteria for good design set out in Section 4.7 of EN-1 when developing projects and will be expected to direct considerable effort towards minimising the landscape and visual impact of solar PV arrays especially within nationally designated landscapes.'	See response above to paragraphs 2.10.96, 2.10.97 and section 4.3 of this PSS.
2.10.99	'Whilst there is an acknowledged need to ensure solar PV installations are adequately secured, required security measures such as fencing should consider the need to minimise the impact on the landscape and visual impact..'	The Applicant, where possible, has placed fencing behind existing or proposed planting in order avoid to reduce adverse visual effects of fencing and other security measures.
2.10.100	''`The applicant should consider as part of the design, layout, construction, and future maintenance plans how to protect and retain,	The Applicant has adopted a landscape led approach to the layout and design of the Project, maximising the use of existing

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	wherever possible, the growth of vegetation on site boundaries, as well as the growth of existing hedges, established vegetation, including mature trees within boundaries. Applicants should also consider opportunities for individual trees within the boundaries to grow on to maturity.'	landscape features (hedgerows, trees and woodland) when siting development, imposing appropriate buffer distances to protect existing features, proposing substantial new planting in key areas, and stripping development back from higher ground, all in order to avoid or minimise adverse impacts in visual and character terms. Individual veteran trees have also been identified and protected throughout the Project Site.
2.10.101	'The impact of the proposed development on established trees and hedges should be informed by a tree survey and arboricultural/hedge assessment as appropriate.'	The Applicant has retained the vast majority of existing landscape features throughout the Project Site, with only limited hedgerow removal. Hedgerow surveys have been undertaken and effects reported within the Ecology and Landscape Chapters 9 and 8 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.
Glint and glare		
2.10.102	'Solar panels are specifically designed to absorb, not reflect, irradiation. However, solar panels may reflect the sun's rays at certain angles, causing glint and glare. Glint is defined as a momentary flash of light that may be produced as a direct reflection of the sun in the solar panel. Glare is a continuous source of excessive brightness experienced by a stationary observer located in the path of reflected sunlight from the face of the panel. The effect occurs when the solar panel is stationed between or at an angle of the sun and the receptor.'	The Applicant has undertaken a Glint and Glare assessment. Mitigation measures adopted and no residual adverse effects are predicted – Volume 3, Appendix 4.4 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**
Cultural Heritage		
2.10.107	'The impacts of solar PV developments on the historic environment will require expert assessment in most cases and may have effect both above and below ground.'	The Applicant has assessed above and below ground heritage assets including potential effects upon The Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS) - see Volume 3, Appendix 7.4 **[EN010147/APP/6.3 and 6.5]**. No significant effects are predicted. Substantial harm to heritage assets is also avoided and so complies with planning policy requirements.
2.10.109	'Below ground impacts, although generally limited, may include direct impacts on archaeological deposits through ground disturbance associated with trenching, cabling, foundations, fencing, temporary haul routes etc.'	The Applicant has agreed a WSI with the County Archaeologist **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**. This includes an agreed approach of protection of underground archaeology. Positive effects are predicted as the Applicant has removed development from all identified areas of potential archaeological significance i.e. a no dig approach. In

Paragraph	Details	Comments
		addition, where cabling crosses important areas of underground archaeology, cables will be laid on the surface to avoid damaging the asset.
2.10.110	‘Equally, solar PV developments may have a positive effect, for example archaeological assets may be protected by a solar PV farm as the site is removed from regular ploughing and shoes or low-level piling is stipulated.’	See above response to 2.10.109.
2.10.112	‘Applicant assessments should be informed by information from Historic Environment Records (HERs) or the local authority.	The applicant has undertaken a desk top exercise, examining all relevant records relevant to the site, examined photographic records and undertaken extensive geophysical surveys of the site. Trial trenching is also underway, with the results of this being reported shortly after submission of the DCO in agreement with the County Archaeologist and Historic England. **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**
2.10.113	‘Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, the applicant should submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation. These should be carried out using expertise where necessary and in consultation with the local planning authority, and should identify archaeological study areas and propose appropriate schemes of investigation, and design measures, to ensure the protection of relevant heritage assets.’	See response to 2.10.122 above. Setting of heritage assets has also been considered by the Applicant and appropriately protected by reason of distance from the receptor and/or screening. No significant effects are predicted. Substantial harm to heritage assets is also avoided and so complies with planning policy requirements.
2.10.114	‘In some instances, field studies may include investigative work (and may include trial trenching beyond the boundary of the proposed site) to assess the impacts of any ground disturbance, such as proposed cabling, substation foundations or mounting supports for solar panels on archaeological assets.’	The approach to identification, evaluation and protection of heritage assets has been agreed with the County Archaeologist **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**. The Applicant continues to work with HE in respect of the HIA study which addresses effect upon The Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site see Volume 3, Appendix 7.4 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**. No significant effects are predicted. Substantial harm to heritage assets is also avoided and so complies with planning policy requirements.
2.10.115	‘The extent of investigative work should be proportionate to the sensitivity of, and extent of, proposed ground disturbance in the associated study area.’	The approach to identification, evaluation and protection of underground heritage assets has been agreed with the County Archaeologist **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**.
2.10.116	‘Applicants should take account of the results of historic environment assessments in their design proposal.’	The Applicant has removed development away from areas identified as having potential archaeological importance. Setting of heritage assets has also been

Paragraph	Details	Comments
		considered by the Applicant and appropriately protected by reason of distance from the receptor and/or with the introduction of landscape screening. No significant effects are predicted. Substantial harm to heritage assets is also avoided and so complies with planning policy requirements.
2.10.117	"Applicants should consider what steps can be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting.'	See response to paragraph 2.10.116 above. A WSI has also been agreed with the County Archaeologist see Volume 3, Appendix 7.4 **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**.
2.10.118	'As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large-scale solar farms which depending on their scale, design, and prominence, may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset.'	The Applicant has removed development away from areas identified as having potential archaeological importance. Setting of heritage assets has also been considered by the Applicant and appropriately protected by reason of distance from the receptor and/or with the introduction of landscape screening. The Applicant continues to work with HE in respect of the HIA study which addresses the potential effect upon The Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**. No significant effects are predicted. Substantial harm to heritage assets is also avoided and so complies with planning policy requirements.
2.10.119	'Applicants may need to include visualisations to demonstrate the effects of a proposed solar farm on the setting of heritage assets.'	Visualisations and cross sections have been produced by the Applicant in the HIA report **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**.
Construction including traffic and transport noise and vibration		
2.10.120	'Modern solar farms are large sites that are mainly comprised of small structures that can be transported separately and constructed on-site, with developers designating a compound on-site for the delivery and assemblage of the necessary components.	The Applicant has given detailed consideration to vehicular access requirements for construction and operation. In particular, the general approach for construction is to deliver all materials into the four main Construction Compound sites as identified on the Temporary Facilities pan **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**, from which materials will be distributed as necessary throughout the wider site. Detailed consideration has also been paid to the design and layout of the accesses proposed to serve these compound areas and these details are shown at Figures **[EN010147/APP/7.3.1]**.
2.10.121	'Many solar farms will be sited in areas served by a minor road network. Public perception of the construction phase of solar farms will derive	An assessment of the traffic and transportation effects of the development is reported in Chapter 12 of the ES. This

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	mainly from the effects of traffic movements, which is likely to involve smaller vehicles than typical onshore energy infrastructure but may be more voluminous.'	chapter sets out the assumptions on which the assessment is based including the delivery routes to be used during the construction phase. No significant adverse effects are predicted.
2.10.123	'Applicants should assess the various potential routes to the site for delivery of materials and components where the source of the materials is known at the time of the application and select the route that is the most appropriate.'	See response to paragraph 2.10.121 above.
2.10.124	'Where the exact location of the source of construction materials, such as crushed stone or concrete is not be known at the time of the application, applicants should assess the worst-case impact of additional vehicles on the likely potential routes.'	See response to paragraph 2.10.121 above
2.10.125	'Applicants should ensure all sections of roads and bridges on the proposed delivery route can accommodate the weight and volume of the loads and width of vehicles. Although unlikely, where modifications to roads and/or bridges are required, these should be identified, and potential effects addressed in the ES.'	See Applicants' response to paragraph 2.10.121 above. The Works Plans and schedules within the draft DCO describe the works required for access purposes **[EN010147/APP/2.3]**
2.10.126	"Where a cumulative impact is likely because multiple energy infrastructure developments are proposing to use a common port and/or access route and pass through the same towns and villages, applicants should include a cumulative transport assessment as part of the ES. This should consider the impacts of abnormal traffic movements relating to the project in question in combination with those from any other relevant development. Consultation with the relevant local highways authorities is likely to be necessary.'	The Applicant has undertaken a cumulative effects assessment with other relevant development – Chapter 20 [**EN010147/APP/6.3]**. No significant effects are predicted.
Secretary of State decision making		
Factors influencing site selection and design		
Agriculture land classification and land type		
2.10.145	'The Secretary of State should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The Secretary of State should ensure that the applicant has put forward appropriate mitigation measures to minimise impacts on soils or soil resources.'	The assessment of effects in respect of BMV is set out in Chapter 8 of the ES and section 4.3 of this PSS. A Soil Management Plan is proposed **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1]**. Whilst some BMV is lost by the Project the areas are small and not significant in EIA terms. It is considered that on balance the benefits arising from the Project outweigh the impact upon BMV land.
Technical Considerations		

Paragraph	Details	Comments
Project lifetime and decommissioning		
2.10.146	'The Secretary of State should ensure that the applicant has put forward outline plans for decommissioning the generating station when no longer in use and restoring the land to a suitable ...'	The Applicant has provided an outline Decommissioning Plan as part of the ES and DCO **[EN010147/APP/7.6.4]**.
2.10.147	'Where the consent for a solar farm is to be time-limited, the DCO should impose a requirement setting that time-limit from the date the solar farm starts to generate electricity.'	The Applicant does not wish to consent to be controlled by limitation to its generation capacity. Instead, as with other solar DCO consents (e.g. Mallard Pass, Gate Burton and Cottam), it wishes to secure consent by reference to when decommissioning is to start. As such Requirement 15 of the draft Order states that decommissioning of the authorised development must commence no later than 37.5 years following the date of final commissioning.
2.10.148	'Such a requirement should also secure the decommissioning of the generating station after the expiration of its permitted operation to ensure that inoperative plant is removed after its operational life.'	The Applicant has prepared a Decommissioning Plan which is secured by Requirement **[EN010147/APP/7.6.4]**.
2.10.149	'An upper limit of 40 years is typical, although applicants may seek consent without a time period or for differing time-periods for operation.'	The Applicant seeks a temporary consent for the development – see response to paragraph 2.10.147 above.
2.10.150	'The time limited nature of the solar farm, where a time limit is sought as a condition of consent, is likely to be an important consideration for the Secretary of State.'	The Applicant seeks a temporary consent for the development – see response to paragraph 2.10.147 above.
2.10.151	'The Secretary of State should consider the period of time the applicant is seeking to operate the generating station, as well as the extent to which the site will return to its original state, when assessing impacts such as landscape and visual effects and potential effects on the settings of heritage assets and nationally designated landscapes.'	Noted. The Applicant considers these effects within relevant chapters of the ES, and in the conclusion on the planning balance at section 4.0 of this PSS.
Impacts		
2.10.152	'The impacts identified in Part 5 of EN-1 and below, are not intended to be exhaustive.'	Noted.
2.10.153	'The Secretary of State should consider any impacts which it determines are relevant and important to its decision.'	Noted. The Applicant believes it has assessed all relevant impacts to allow a decision to be made.
Biodiversity, ecological, geological conservation and water management		
2.10.154	'Water management is a critical component of site design for ground mount solar plants. Where previous management of the site has involved intensive agricultural practice, solar	The Applicant has sought to optimise the environmental advantages of the development, and incorporates significant BNG and this, together with other

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	sites can deliver significant ecosystem services value in the form of drainage, flood attenuation, natural wetland habitat, and water quality management.'	environmental improvements, are set out in the oLEMP. Of note is the ability of the Applicant to manage the Evenlode corridor to bring that area into a more favourable conservation status, and the proposal to create a water attenuation feature and associated bunding designed to avoid or reduce flooding that has historically occurred in the village of Cassington.
2.10.155	'The Secretary of State must consider the worst-case effects in its consideration of the application and consent.' '	The Applicant has assessed the likely worst case effects arising from the development (see Chapter 4 of the ES, Approach to Assessment).
2.10.156	Where developments are proposed on peat, to ensure the development will result in minimal disruption to the ecology, or release of CO2, and that the carbon balance savings of the scheme are maximised, the Secretary of State should be satisfied that the solar farm layout and construction methods have been designed to minimise soil disturbance during construction and maintenance of roads, tracks, and other infrastructure and in England should take into account the policies set out in the England Peat Action Plan 2021 ....'	No peat is present on the Project Site.
Landscape, visual and residential amenity		
2.10.157	'The Secretary of State will consider the landscape and visual impact of any proposed solar PV farm, taking account of any sensitive visual receptors, and the effect of the development on landscape character, together with the possible cumulative effect with any existing or proposed development. Nationally designated landscapes (National Parks, The Broads and Areas of Outstanding Beauty) are afforded extra protection due their statutory purpose. Development in these areas needs to satisfy policy as set out in EN-1 Section 5.10.'	Adverse landscape and visual effects of the development have been avoided or minimised as a result of continuous refinements to the Project layout and design. Relevant environmental effects and mitigation measures are set out with the Landscape and Visual Effects Chapter of the ES, in the Layout and Design Principles Document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]**, and in the Mitigations and Commitment Schedule **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**. Whilst some short term some adverse effects are predicted during construction and in Year 1 in winter, these effects diminish and are avoided after year 5. Overall, the site is capable of absorbing the development without giving rise to unacceptable adverse effects. The effects of the solar farm are temporary and reversible and will ultimately lead to a significant biodiversity and landscape enhancement of the area.
Glint and glare		
2.10.158	'Solar PV panels are designed to absorb, not reflect, irradiation. However, the Secretary of State should assess the potential impact of glint and glare on nearby homes, motorists, public	The Applicant has undertaken a Glint and Glare Assessment and no significant adverse effects have been found – Volume 3, Appendix 4.4 **[EN010147/APP/7.6.5]**.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	rights of way, and aviation infrastructure (including aircraft departure and arrival flight paths).'	
2.10.159	'Whilst there is some evidence that glint and glare from solar farms can be experienced by pilots and air traffic controllers in certain conditions, there is no evidence that glint and glare from solar farms results in significant impairment on aircraft safety. Therefore, unless a significant impairment can be demonstrated, the Secretary of State is unlikely to give any more than limited weight to claims of aviation interference because of glint and glare from solar farms.'	See response to paragraph 2.10.158 above.
Cultural Heritage		
2.10.60	'Solar farms are generally consented on the basis that they will be time-limited in operation. The Secretary of State should therefore consider the length of time for which consent is sought when considering the impacts of any indirect effect on the historic environment, such as effects on the setting of designated heritage assets.'	The Applicant seeks a temporary consent and reports upon relevant effects within all topic chapters in the ES (e.g. Chapter 7, Historic Environment [**EN010147/APP/6.3]**). No adverse effects are predicted, and some beneficial effects are expected.
Construction including traffic and transport noise and vibration		
2.10.161	'Once solar farms are in operation, traffic movements to and from the site are generally very light, in some instances as little as a few visits each month by a light commercial vehicle or car. Should there be a need to replace machine components, this may generate heavier commercial vehicle movements, but these are likely to be infrequent.'	The assumptions underpinning the Traffic and Transportation effects are set out within Chapter 12 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** of the ES and relevant appendices within Volume 3, Appendix 12 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**
2.10.162	'The Secretary of State is unlikely to give any more than limited weight to traffic and transport noise and vibration impacts from the operational phase of a project.'	In respect of traffic and transportation effects there will be no significant effects arising from the Project during the construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning phases.

Appendix 3

NPS EN – 5 Compliance Table

Table 4: National Policy Statement for Electricity Works Infrastructure NPS EN-5)

Key Paragraphs

Paragraph	Details	Comments
Assessment and Technology-Specific Information		
Introduction		
2.1.4	'Decommissioning of electricity networks is not specifically covered in this NPS. Generally, nationally significant electricity networks are likely to have an ongoing function, but will be subject to maintenance, reinforcement works and for assets to be replaced when they come to the end of their lifespan.'	Noted. The Applicant has prepared a Decommissioning Plan for the Project **[EN010147/APP/7.6.4]**. It assumes that the NGET substation will remain in situ once consented and commissioned.
2.1.5	'As stated in Section 4.2 of EN-1, to support the urgent need for new low carbon infrastructure, all power lines in scope of EN-5 including network reinforcement and upgrade works, and associated infrastructure such as substations, are considered to be CNP infrastructure ....'	Noted. The Applicant is proposing associated electrical infrastructure to enable connection to the NGET substation; this infrastructure will attract CNP status in policy terms.
Factors influencing site selection and design		
2.2.1	'The Secretary of State should bear in mind that the initiating and terminating points – or development zone – of new electricity networks infrastructure is not substantially within the control of the applicant.'	In the case of the Botley West solar farm, the Applicant intends to secure consent for a new NGET substation within its Order Limits. The subsequent consent will be transferred to NGET to build out and commission **[EN010147/APP/3.1]**.
2.2.2	'Siting is determined by: • the location of new generating stations or other infrastructure requiring connection to the network, and/or • system capacity and resilience requirements determined by the Electricity System Operator.'	NGET have chosen to develop and commission a new 400kV substation to serve the Botley West solar farm and other renewable generation developments emerging nearby. The location is assumed to be within the Applicants Order Limits within its Southern Site area. The Applicant is aware however, that NGET is also pursuing the possibility of securing consent for its new substation on land immediately to the west of the Applicants Southern Site. or possibly immediately to the west, both being in close proximity of the existing 400kV overhead line. The approach to assessment of the NGET substation is set out in Chapter 6 of the ES. In the event that NGET delivered on land to the west, the Applicant has assessed that scenario cumulatively.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
		Siting of the NGET substation was influential in the selection of the Project Site.
2.2.3	'These twin constraints, coupled with the government's legislative commitment to net zero by 2050, strategic commitment to new interconnectors with neighbouring North Seas countries[7] and an ambition of up to 50GW of offshore wind generation by 2030, means that very significant amounts of new electricity networks infrastructure is required, including in areas with comparatively little build-out to date.'	This is noted and understood by the Applicant.
2.2.4	'However, a strategic and holistic approach to onshore and offshore network planning, as set out in paragraphs 2.7 – 2.8, will identify the most efficient way of meeting decarbonisation targets and should reduce the overall amount of network infrastructure required.'	This is noted by the Applicant, but the NGET 400kV substation is CNP infrastructure and is vital to deliver the Botley West Project as well as other energy generating and storage scheme nearby.
2.2.5	'Additionally, applicants retain control in managing the identification of routing and site selection between the identified initiating and terminating points or within the development zone.'	The availability and provision of the new NGET substation was one of a number of factors that influenced the Applicants' site selection (see Chapter 5, Alternatives). The provision of the connecting electrical cables largely follow the public highway. There are four locations where alternative cable routes are possible and being evaluated (see Chapter 5 and 6 in the ES for details).
2.2.6	'Moreover, the locational constraints identified above do not, of course, exempt applicants from their duty to consider and balance the site-selection considerations set out below, much less the policies on good design and impact mitigation detailed in sections 2.4-2.9.'	The site selection and cable route choice and influences upon both are described in detail in Chapter 5 and 6 of the ES.
2.2.7	'The connection between the initiating and terminating points of a proposed new electricity line will often not be via the most direct route. Siting constraints, such as engineering, environmental or community considerations will be important in determining a feasible route.'	The site selection and cable route choice and influences upon both are described in detail in Chapter 5 and 6 of the ES.
2.2.8	'There will usually be a degree of flexibility in the location of the development's associated substations, and applicants should consider carefully their location, as well as their design.'	The siting of the Applicants electrical infrastructure has sought to avoid or minimise any adverse effects, including from visual or from a noise perspective. Design of above ground infrastructure will be the subject of approval from the relevant local planning authority.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
2.2.9	'In particular, the applicant should consider such characteristics as the local topography, the possibilities for screening of the infrastructure and/or other options to mitigate any impacts. (See Section 2.10 below and Section 5.10 in EN-1.)'	Relevant mitigation measures are described in the Mitigation and Commitments Schedule – Volume,3 Appendix 6.1 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
2.2.10	'As well as having duties under Section 9 of the Electricity Act 1989, (in relation to developing and maintaining an economical and efficient network), applicants must take into account Schedule 9 to the Electricity Act 1989, which places a duty on all transmission and distribution licence holders, in formulating proposals for new electricity networks infrastructure, to "have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and …do what [they] reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects."'	The Applicant has taken into account the duties associated with Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989.
2.2.12	'Transmission and distribution licence holders are also required under Schedule 9 to the Electricity Act 1989 to produce and publish a statement setting out how they propose to perform this duty generally.'	The Applicant has produced a statement to address Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 **[EN010147/APP/1.1]**.
Climate Change Adaption and Resilience		
2.3.2	'As climate change is likely to increase risks to the resilience of some of this infrastructure, from flooding for example, or in situations where it is located near the coast or an estuary or is underground, applicants should in particular set out to what extent the proposed development is expected to be vulnerable, and, as appropriate, how it has been designed to be resilient to: • flooding, particularly for substations that are vital to the network; and especially in light of changes to groundwater levels resulting from climate change; • the effects of wind and storms on overhead lines; • higher average temperatures leading to increased transmission losses; • earth movement or subsidence caused by flooding or drought (for underground cables); and	Climate change effects are assessed with the Climate Change Chapter no.14 within the ES. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	• coastal erosion – for the landfall of offshore transmission cables and their associated substations in the inshore and coastal locations respectively.'	
2.33	'Section 4.10 of EN-1 advises that the resilience of the project to the effects of climate change must be assessed in the Environmental Statement (ES) accompanying an application. For example, future increased risk of flooding would be covered in any flood risk assessment (see Sections 5.8 in EN-1). Consideration should also be given to coastal change (see sections 5.6 in EN1).'	Climate change effects are assessed with the Climate Change Chapter no.14 within the ES. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.
Consideration of good design for energy infrastructure		
2.4.3	'However, the Secretary of State should bear in mind that electricity networks infrastructure must in the first instance be safe and secure, and that the functional design constraints of safety and security may limit an applicant's ability to influence the aesthetic appearance of that infrastructure.'	Subject to safety and engineering requirements, the design of above ground electrical infrastructure will be the subject of detail approval by the relevant planning authority via Requirements in the DCO.
2.4.4.	'While the above principles should govern the design of an electricity networks infrastructure application to the fullest possible extent – including in its avoidance and/or mitigation of potential adverse impacts (particularly those detailed in Sections 2.9 below) – the functional performance of the infrastructure in respect of security of supply and public and occupational safety must not thereby be threatened.'	Noted. See Applicant response to 2.4.3 above.
Environmental and Biodiversity Net Gain		
2.5.1	'When planning and evaluating the proposed development's contribution to environmental and biodiversity net gain, it will be important – for both the applicant and the Secretary of State – to supplement the generic guidance set out in EN-1 (Section 4.6) with recognition that the linear nature of electricity networks infrastructure can allow for excellent opportunities to: i. reconnect important habitats via green corridors, biodiversity stepping zones, and reestablishment of appropriate hedgerows; and/or ii. connect people to the environment, for instance via footpaths and cycleways constructed in tandem with environmental enhancements.'	The Applicant has achieved significant BNG (refer to oLEMP and BNG Report at **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** and Volume 3, Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**, and is able to deliver other benefits including increased public access to the site (refer to Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Plan, **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**).
Land Rights and Land Interests		

Paragraph	Details	Comments
2.6.1	'In order to be lawfully able to install, inspect, maintain, repair, adjust, alter, replace or remove an electricity line (above or below ground), its related equipment (such as monopoles, pylons/transmission towers, transformers and cables), and/or its associated mitigation or enhancement schemes, applicants must: i. own the land on, over, or under which the relevant activity is to take place; or ii. hold sufficient rights over or interests in that land (typically in the form of an easement); or iii. have permission for the activity from the present owner or occupier of that land (typically in the form of a wayleave).'	Land ownership and rights are reported within the Book of reference **[EN010147/APP/4.3]**
2.6.2	'Where the applicant does not own or wish to own the land in question, it should try to reach a voluntary agreement giving it sufficient rights and/or permissions to undertake the relevant work.'	Voluntary agreements have been sought throughout the Project area. For details on see Book of reference **[EN010147/APP/4.3]** and Land and Rights Negotiations Tracker **[EN010147/APP/3.6]**
2.6.3	'As a last resort, where it does not succeed in reaching the agreement that it requires, the network company may, as part of its application to the Secretary of State, seek to acquire rights compulsorily over the land in question by means of a provision in the DCO.'	Voluntary agreements have been sought throughout the Project area. For details on see Book of reference **[EN010147/APP/4.3]** and Land and Rights Negotiations Tracker **[EN010147/APP/3.6].** Compulsory powers sought are set out in the draft DCO **[EN010147/APP/3.1]**
2.6.5	'The applicant may also seek the compulsory acquisition of land. This will not normally be necessary where lines and cables are installed but may be sought where other forms of electricity networks infrastructure (such as new substations) are required.'	The compulsory powers sought are set out in the draft DCO **[EN010147/APP/3.1]**
2.6.6	As detailed in Section 4.1.8 of EN-1, where the use of land at a specific location is required to facilitate the development by providing for mitigation, landscape enhancement and biodiversity net gain, an applicant may, as part of its application to the Secretary of State, seek the compulsory acquisition of that land, or rights over that land. The Secretary of State will consider any such application under the provisions of the Planning Act 2008 and any associated guidance	The compulsory powers sought are set out in the draft DCO **[EN010147/APP/3.1]**
Applicant Assessment		
Biodiversity and Geological Conservation		
2.9.3	'Electricity networks infrastructure pose a particular potential risk to birdlife including large birds, such as swans and geese, and	No overhead lines are proposed by the Applicant. The NGET substation has been deliberately sited close to the existing 400kV

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	perching birds. These may collide with overhead lines and risk being electrocuted. Large birds may also be electrocuted when landing or taking off by completing an electric circuit between live and ground wires. Even perching birds can be killed as soon as their wings touch energised parts of the infrastructure.'	line to reduce costs of connection to the national grid network and limit any adverse visual or other effects that might otherwise arise if the overhead connection was required.
2.9.6	'Particular consideration should be given to feeding and hunting grounds, migration corridors and breeding grounds, where they are functionally linked to sites designated or allocated under the 'national site network' provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations.'	The Applicant has considered impacts upon feeding and hunting grounds, migration corridors and breeding grounds where relevant within Chapter 9 of the ES. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**
Landscape and Visual Impact		
2.9.7	'While the government does not believe that the development of overhead lines is incompatible in principle with applicants' statutory duty under Schedule 9 to the Electricity Act 1989, to have regard to visual and landscape amenity and to reasonably mitigate possible impacts thereon, in practice new overhead lines can give rise to adverse landscape and visual impacts.'	See response to paragraph 2.9.3 above. No overhead lines are proposed by the Applicant. The landscape and visual effects of the substations and other development are assessed with Chapter 8 in the ES. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**
2.9.8	'These impacts depend on the type (for example, whether lines are supported by towers or monopole structures), scale, siting, and degree of screening of the lines, as well as the characteristics of the landscape and local environment through which they are routed.'	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.7 above.
2.9.9	'New substations, sealing end compounds (including terminal towers), and other above-ground installations that serve as connection, switching, and voltage transformation points on the electricity network may also give rise to adverse landscape and visual impacts.'	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.7 above.
2.9.10	'Cumulative adverse landscape, seascape and visual impacts may arise where new overhead lines are required along with other related developments such as substations, wind farms, and/or other new sources of generation.'	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.7 above.
2.9.11	'Landscape and visual benefits may arise through the reconfiguration, rationalisation, or undergrounding of existing electricity network infrastructure. Though mitigation of the landscape and visual impacts arising from overhead lines and their associated infrastructure is usually possible, it may not always be so, and the impossibility of full	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.7 above.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	mitigation in these cases does not countermand the need for overhead lines.'	
2.9.12	'However, in nationally designated landscapes (for instance, National Parks, The Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) even residual impacts may well make an overhead line proposal unacceptable in planning terms. (See Section 2.9.20 below for guidance on this case.)'	The Project is not located within any nationally designated landscape.
2.9.13	'Where possible, applicants should ensure that the principles detailed in Sections 2.11.16-2.11.19 below are embodied in the design of their proposed overhead line route and its associated infrastructure. Applicants should also offer proposals (for instance those detailed in Section 2.10 below) for additional mitigation.'	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.7 above.
Undergrounding and subsea cables		
2.9.20	'Although it is the government's position that overhead lines should be the strong starting presumption for electricity networks developments in general, this presumption is reversed when proposed developments will cross part of a nationally designated landscape (i.e. National Park, The Broads, or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).'	Noted. All cables are laid underground or, in limited areas, on the surface where significant archaeology has been identified. As a result no significant adverse visual or other environmental effects are predicted.
2.9.21	'In these areas, and where harm to the landscape, visual amenity and natural beauty of these areas cannot feasibly be avoided by re-routing overhead lines, the strong starting presumption will be that the applicant should underground the relevant section of the line.'	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.20.
2.9.22	'However, undergrounding will not be required where it is infeasible in engineering terms, or where the harm that it causes (see section 2.11.4) is not outweighed by its corresponding landscape, visual amenity and natural beauty benefits. Regardless of the option, the scheme through its design, delivery, and operation, should seek to further the statutory purposes of the designated landscape. These enhancements may go beyond the mitigation measures needed to minimise the adverse effects of the scheme.'	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.20.
2.9.23	'Additionally, cases will arise where – though no part of the proposed development crosses a designated landscape – a high potential for widespread and significant adverse landscape and/or visual impacts along certain sections of its	See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.20.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	route may result in recommendations to use undergrounding for relevant segments of the line or alternatively consideration of using a route including subsea cabling.'	
2.9.24	'In these cases, and taking account of the fact that the government has not laid down any further rule on the circumstances requiring use of underground or subsea cables, the Secretary of State must weigh the feasibility, cost, and any harm of the undergrounding or subsea option against: • the adverse implications of the overhead line proposal; • the cost and feasibility of re-routing overhead lines or mitigation proposals for the relevant line section; and • the cost and feasibility of the reconfiguration, rationalisation, and/or use of underground or subsea cabling of proximate existing or proposed electricity networks infrastructure.'	Noted. See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.20.
2.9.25	In such cases the Secretary of State should only grant development consent for underground or subsea sections of a proposed line over an overhead alternative if they are satisfied that the benefits accruing from the former proposal clearly outweigh any extra economic, social, or environmental impacts that it presents, the mitigation hierarchy has been followed, and that any technical obstacles associated with it are surmountable. In this context it should consider: • the landscape and visual baseline characteristics of the setting of the proposed route, in particular, the impact on high sensitivity visual receptors (as defined in the current edition of the Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment), residential areas, designated landscapes, valued landscapes, designated heritage assets and Heritage Coasts (including, where relevant, impacts on the setting of designated features and areas), noting the policy in EN-1 section 5.4.53 on regional and local designations; • the additional cost of the proposed underground or sub-sea alternatives, including their significantly higher lifetime cost of repair and later uprating; • the potentially very disruptive effects of undergrounding on local communities,	Noted. See Applicants response to paragraph 2.9.20.

habitats, archaeological and heritage assets, marine environments, soil (including peat soils), hydrology, geology, and, for a substantial time after construction, landscape and visual amenity. (Undergrounding an overhead line will mean digging a trench along the length of the route, and so such works will often be disruptive – albeit temporarily – to the receptors listed above than would an overhead line of equivalent rating);

- the potentially very disruptive effects of subsea cables on the seabed and the species that live in and on it, including physical damage to and full loss of seabed habitats. Cable protection can also be required where cables cross each other, or where they cannot be buried deep enough to protect them from becoming exposed. Such protection causes additional impacts that are often greater than those of the cable itself due to the large areas covered. There can also be issues where subsea cables make landfall, as much coastal land is protected habitat with environmental and heritage designations and landfall connections could cause additional disruption to coastal communities and the environment;
- the applicant's commitment, as set out in their ES, to mitigate the potential detrimental effects of undergrounding works on any relevant agricultural land and soils (including peat soils), particularly regarding Best and Most Versatile land, including development and implementation of a Soil Resources and Management Plan. Such a commitment must guarantee appropriate handling of soil, backfilling, and return of the land to the baseline Agricultural Land Classification (ALC), thus ensuring no loss or degradation of agricultural land. Such a commitment should be based on soil and ALC surveys in line with the 1988 ALC criteria and due consideration of the Defra Construction Code of Practice for Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites.'

Paragraph	Details	Comments
Noise and Vibration		
2.9.26	'All high voltage transmission lines have the potential to generate noise under certain conditions.'	Noise and vibration are assessed where relevant within the Chapter 13, Noise and Vibration. No significant adverse effects are predicted to arise. Mitigation measures are set out within the Mitigation and Commitments schedule – Volume 3, Appendix 6.1 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**
2.9.27	'Line noise is most commonly caused by corona noise when the conductor surface electric stress exceeds the inception level for corona discharge activity which is released as acoustic energy and radiates into the air as sound. Transmission line conductors are normally designed to operate below this threshold.'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.9.26 above.
2.9.28	'Surface contamination on a conductor or accidental damage during transport or installation can cause local enhancement of electric stress and initiate discharge activity leading to the generation of additional noise.'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.9.26 above.
2.9.34	'Transmission line audible noise is generally categorised as 'crackle' or 'hum', according to its tonal content.'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.9.26 above.
2.9.37	'Audible noise effects can also arise from substation equipment such as transformers, quadrature boosters and mechanically switched capacitors.'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.9.26 above.
2.9.38	'Transformers are installed at many substations, and generate low frequency hum. Whether the noise can be heard outside a substation depends on a number of factors, including transformer type and the level of noise attenuation present (either engineered intentionally or provided by other structures).'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.9.26 above.
2.9.39	'For the assessment of noise from substations, standard methods of assessment and interpretation using the principles of the relevant British Standards[25] are satisfactory.'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.9.26 above.
2.9.40	"For the assessment of noise from overhead lines, the applicant must use an appropriate method to determine the sound level produced by the line in both dry and wet weather conditions, in addition to assessing the impact on noise-sensitive receptors.'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.9.26 above.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMFs)		
2.9.44 to 2.9.58	Health effects of EMF's'	Chapter 16: Human Health in Volume 1 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** considers public understanding of EMF exposure in terms of mental health outcomes associated with concern, acknowledging that actual risks are unlikely to be significant for public health (see section 16.9 of the Chapter).
Sulphur Hexafluoride		
2.9.59	'Sulphur Hexafluoride (SF6) is an insulating and arc-suppressant gas used in high-voltage switchgear for electricity networks.'	Noted
2.9.60	'It is also an extraordinarily potent greenhouse gas, and fugitive emissions from electricity networks infrastructure are an object of increasing environmental concern, especially in light of the UK's commitment to net zero by 2050.'	Noted
2.9.61	'Applicants should at the design phase of the process consider carefully whether the proposed development could be reconceived to avoid the use of SF6-reliant assets.'	The Applicant will seek to avoid the use of SF6-reliant assets.
Secretary of State decision making		
Impacts Biodiversity and Geological conservation		
2.11.1	'Where biodiversity impacts are identified, including those associated with bird collision with overhead lines, the Secretary of State should be satisfied that all feasible options for mitigation have been considered and evaluated appropriately.'	The Applicant has assessed the effects upon flora and fauna arising from electrical infrastructure within Chapter 9, Ecology. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** No significant adverse effects are predicted to arise.
Landscape and Visual		
2.11.2	'The Secretary of State should be satisfied that the development, so far as is reasonably possible, complies with the Holford and Horlock Rules (please see paragraphs 2.9.16 - 2.9.19) or any updates to them.'	No Overhead lines are proposed. The Applicant has assessed the landscape and visual effects arising from electrical infrastructure within Chapter 8, Landscape and Visual Effects. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** No significant adverse effects are predicted to arise.
2.11.3	'The Secretary of State should also be satisfied that all feasible options for mitigation – including the rationalisation, reconfiguration, or undergrounding of existing electricity networks infrastructure, have been considered and evaluated appropriately.'	Noted. No Overhead lines are proposed. The Applicant has refined the layout and design of the Project to avoid or minimise adverse environmental effects. This approach is described in Chapter 5 in the ES, in the Layout and Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]**, and the Mitigations and Commitments Schedule – Volume 3, Appendix 6.1 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
2.11.4	'In circumstances where it can be demonstrated that a mitigation measure	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.11.3 above.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	and/ or technological approach is appropriate and/ or necessary for a project, including to limit landscape and visual impact as set out above, the Secretary of State should take this into account in decision making.'	
2.11.5	'Nationally designated landscapes have specific statutory purposes which help ensure their continued protection. The Secretary of State should have special regard to nationally designated landscapes, where the general presumption in favour of overhead lines should be reversed to favour undergrounding.'	The Project does not fall within and nationally designated landscapes.
Noise and vibration		
2.11.7	'The Secretary of State should ensure that appropriate assessment methodologies have been used in the evidence presented to it, and that the appropriate mitigation options have been considered and adopted. Where the applicant can demonstrate that appropriate mitigation measures will be put in place, the residual noise impacts are unlikely to be significant.'	Noted. Noise effects have been assessed within Chapter 13 in the ES. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** Mitigation measures are set out within the Mitigation and Commitments Schedule Volume 3, Appendix 6.1 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**. No significant effects are predicted to arise.
2.11.8	Consequently, noise from overhead lines is unlikely to lead to the Secretary of State refusing an application, but it may need to consider the use of appropriate requirements in the DCO to ensure noise is minimised as far as is practicable'	See Applicant response to paragraph 2.11.7 above.
Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMFs)		
2.11.9	'This NPS does not repeat the detail of the ICNIRP 1998 guidelines on restrictions or reference levels. The government has developed with the electricity industry a Code of Practice, 'Power Lines: Demonstrating compliance with EMF public exposure guidelines – a voluntary Code of Practice', published in February 2011 that specifies the evidence acceptable to show compliance with ICNIRP 1998 guidelines and is also in line with the terms of the 1999 EU Council Recommendation on EMF exposure.'	Chapter 16: Human Health in Volume 1 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** considers public understanding of EMF exposure in terms of mental health outcomes associated with concern, acknowledging that actual risks are unlikely to be significant for public health (see section 16.9 of the Chapter).
Sulphur Hexafluoride		
2.11.17	'The Secretary of State should grant consent for an electricity networks development only if the applicant has demonstrated either: i. that the development will not use SF6; or ii. (a) that there is no proven commercially available alternative to the use of SF6; and	The Applicant will consider the use of SF6 and SF6 free alternatives in the detailed design work.

Paragraph	Details	Comments
	(b) that a bespoke SF6-free alternative would be grossly disproportionate in terms of cost; and (c) that emissions monitoring and control measures compliant with the F-gas Regulation and/or its successors are in place.'	

Appendix 4

West Oxfordshire Policy – Compliance Tables

Table 5: West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 relevant planning policies

Policy	Brief Description	Comment
Policy OS2 – Locating Development in the right places	Development in the Green Belt is to comply with national Green Belt policies	The Applicant firmly believes there are VSC which support the location of the Botley West solar farm in the Green Belt. Harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm, is outweighed by the benefits the project delivers. See the Applicant's VSC case at section 5 and Appendix 8 of this PSS. Paragraph 4.2.7 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Policy EH1 – Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	Great weight will be given to conserving and enhancing the area's natural beauty, landscape and countryside, including wildlife and heritage, including proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB.	The Project site does not fall within or adjacent to the Cotswold AONB (national landscape). The low height of the Project and distance from the national landscape will not give rise to issues of setting, The Project therefore complies with Policy EH1.
Policy EH2 – Landscape Character	West Oxfordshire's natural environment will be conserved and enhanced.	The Project will affect landscape character during operation. The scale of the Project, necessary to meet the urgent need for renewable energy generation, and to address the climate emergency declared within West Oxfordshire, will adversely character, but that adverse effect will be limited, temporary and overtime (5 years onwards) will be offset by the significant new landscaping that will complement the existing landscape structure in the area. For most of the operational life of the Project, after new landscaping has become established, the Applicant considers landscape character will be enhanced. On decommissioning the character will be conserved and significantly enhanced with an important and valuable legacy left for the benefit of the area. On balance the Project is considered to be substantially in compliance with Policy EH2.
Policy EH3 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity	The biodiversity of West Oxfordshire shall be protected and enhanced to achieve an overall net gain in biodiversity and minimise impacts on geodiversity.	The Project represents the most significant opportunity within the district to secure BNG, over a significant area of land. It is unique in that respect. The Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13. The oLEMP

Policy	Brief Description	Comment
		[EN010147/APP/7.6.3] will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project. The dual use proposed by the Applicant on the site, a critical renewable energy project, with a retained agricultural use beneath, managed to provide significant BNG, therefore complies with Policy EH13.
Policy EH4 – Public realm and green infrastructure	The existing areas of public space and green infrastructure of West Oxfordshire will be protected and enhanced for their multi-functional role, including their biodiversity, recreational, accessibility, health and landscape value and for the contribution they make towards combating climate change.	See Applicant response to Policy EH3. In addition, the Project will deliver further benefits including increased public access, educational provision, and significant landscape enhancements. The Project complies with Policy EH4.
Policy EH6 – Decentralised and renewable or low carbon energy development (except wind turbines)	In principle, renewable and low-carbon energy developments, especially run-of-river hydropower and the use of biomass will be supported. Any proposals for a solar farm involving best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence which demonstrates why poorer quality land has not been used in preference to best and most versatile agricultural land.	As the project is a renewable energy development, the Applicant presumes support in principle from West Oxfordshire District Council, In terms of BMV, the Project will lead to a small loss of BMV land (refer to Chapter 17 in the ES – a permanent loss of approx. 5.5ha). Approximately 3.8ha of that loss relates to the positioning of the NGET substation. This is sited to be close to the adjacent 400kV lines and adjacent to the Applicant main substation. No better alternative siting could be established by the Applicant within the DCO Order Limits. The overall loss of BMV land is not considered to be significant in EIA terms. The Applicant is of the view that the Project is substantially in compliance with Policy EH6.
Policy EH7 – Flood Risk	Flood risk will be managed using the sequential, risk-based approach, set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, of avoiding flood risk to people and property where possible and managing any residual risk (taking account of the impacts of climate change).	Flood risk is addressed within Chapter 10 of the ES (ref Table 10.3). A flood Risk assessment has been undertaken amongst other assessments. No adverse effects are predicted during construction, operation or the decommissioning phases of the Project. Additional mitigation measures are proposed north of Cassington (creation of water body and bunding and ditch widening) to help alleviate the incidence of flooding that the village currently experiences. It is considered that the Project complies with Policy EH7.
Policy EH8 – Environmental Protection	Proposals which are likely to cause pollution or result in exposure to sources of pollution or risk to safety, will only be permitted if measures can be implemented to minimise pollution	Pollution risk has been assessed and no significant adverse effects have been identified.

Policy	Brief Description	Comment
	and risk to a level that provides a high standard of protection for health, environmental quality and amenity.	The Project therefore complies with Policy EH8.
Policy EH9 – Historic Environment	All development proposals should conserve and/ or enhance the special character, appearance and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire's historic environment, including the significance of the District's heritage assets, in a manner appropriate to their historic character and significance and in a viable use that is consistent with their conservation, in accordance with national legislation, policy and guidance for the historic environment.	Conserving and enhancing of heritage assets, including their settings, has been achieved through the design of the Project (Chapter 7, Table 7.3 and Section 7.8). No significant adverse effects are predicted. The Project complies with Policy EH9.
Policy EH11 – Listed Buildings	Proposals affecting listed buildings and their settings will be permitted where the historic interest of the building is conserved or enhanced, the curtilage is respected and its special interest is retained.	Conserving and enhancing of heritage assets, including their settings, has been achieved through the design of the Project. No significant adverse effects are predicted. The Project complies with Policy EH11.
Policy EH13 – Historic Landscape Character	In determining applications that affect the historic character of the landscape or townscape, particular attention will be paid to, *inter alia,* age, distinctiveness, rarity, sensitivity and capacity of a historic landscape, the extent to which key historic features resonant of the area's character and the degree to which the form and layout of the development will respect and build on the pre-existing historic character and the degree to which the development conserves or enhances the special historic character of its surrounding.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on the overall historic landscape is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant effects are predicted. The Project complies with Policy EH13.
Policy EH14 – Registered historic Parks and Gardens	Development proposals must conserve or enhance special features and ensure development does not detract from the special interest of the asset.	Chapter 10 of the ES assesses the effects upon Registered Historic Parks and Gardens. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms, the effects predicted are not considered to be in conflict with Policy EH14.
Policy EH15 – Scheduled Monuments and other nationally important archaeological remains	Proposals for development that would affect, directly or indirectly, the significance of Scheduled Monuments or non-scheduled archaeological remains of demonstrably equal significance will be permitted where the proposals would conserve or enhance the significance of the Monument or remains.	Assessment of effects upon Scheduled Ancient Monuments is set out in Chapter 10, Table 7.15. The detailed assessment found that the construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning of the Project would result in effects of minor adverse significance in respect of three Scheduled Monuments, one Grade I Registered Park and Garden, two Grade I listed buildings, two Grade II* listed buildings, eleven Grade II listed buildings and four

Policy	Brief Description	Comment
		Conservation Areas, also effects of negligible adverse significance in respect of one Grade II listed building and one Conservation Area. In all cases the effect would be long-term, not significant in EIA terms and fully reversible. In planning policy terms, the effects predicted are not considered to be in conflict with Policy EH15.
Policy EH16 – Non-designated heritage assets	When considering proposals that would affect, directly or indirectly, non-listed buildings, non-scheduled, non-nationally important archaeological remains or non-Registered Historic Parks and Gardens, as such assets are also irreplaceable, the presumption will be in favour of the avoidance of harm or loss.	Chapter 10 of the ES assesses the effects upon non-designated heritage assets. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms, the effects predicted are not considered to be in conflict with Policy EH16.
Policy EW9 – Blenheim World Heritage Site	The exceptional cultural significance (Outstanding Universal Value) of the Blenheim World Heritage Site will be protected, promoted and conserved for current and future generations.	Chapter 10 sets out the assessment of effects upon The Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site. A separate Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been undertaken for the Blenheim Palace WHS, in accordance with the appropriate guidance produced on behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). This is presented as Volume 3, Appendix 7.4: Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site – Heritage Impact Assessment of the ES. The HIA identified that the construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning of the Project would result in a minor negative impact on one of the seven defined attributes which contribute towards the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the WHS. On this basis, the magnitude of impact on the significance of the WHS is predicted to be **negligible adverse**. This impact would be time-limited and fully reversible. The Applicant does not believe there to be a conflict with Policy EW9.

Table 6: Eynsham Neighbourhood Development Plan relevant policies

Policy	Description	Comment
Policy ENP4 – Green Infrastructure – The Setting for New Developments	New developments should integrate all aspects of design, connectivity and the natural environment. Consideration should be given to the setting of new development and the relationship between village and countryside.	The Applicant has adopted key layout and design principles themselves designed to avoid adverse effects upon sensitive receptors, and to enhance landscape, ecology and biodiversity (see Layout and Design Principles Document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]**. and the Mitigation Measures and

Policy	Description	Comment
		Commitments Schedule ref Volume 3, Appendix 6.1 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**. Where relevant these measures are secured through the management plans and Requirements within the DCO. As a result the Project complies with Policy ENP4.
Policy ENP4(A) – Enhancing Biodiversity	In order to contribute to the achievement of increased biodiversity within the ENP Area proposals for both residential and non-residential development should where appropriate, *inter alia,* including a biodiversity action plan demonstrating how bio-diversity net gain will be achieved and seek to protect 'Best and Most Versatile' agricultural land unless demonstrably impractical.	The Project presents a unique opportunity for the planning authority to secure significant BNG. This will achieved by retaining an agricultural use beneath the solar arrays and on other undeveloped land, and by managing it in a way to deliver significant BNG. The Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** The oLEMP [**EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project. The Project complies with Policy ENP4(A).
Policy ENP5 Sustainability – Climate Change	Particular support will be given for proposals that help meet the intentions of the Climate Change Act 2008 including development that makes the most efficient use of the land and materials and maximises the opportunities for the use of renewable and low-carbon forms of energy in accordance with WOLP Policy EH4.	Climate Change effects are set out within Chapter 14 of the ES. Significant beneficial effects from the Botley West Solar Farm are predicted. The Applicant considers the Project complies with the NPPF and represents a unique opportunity to contribute at scale to the resolution of the Climate Change Emergency declared by the host authorities.

Table 7: Cassington Neighbourhood Development Plan relevant policies

Policy	Description	Comment
Policy CAS1 - Cassington Nature Recovery Network	Development proposals that affect the Network must maintain and improve the functionality of the Network, including delivering at least 10% net gain to general biodiversity assets, in the design of their layouts and landscaping schemes.	Throughout the Project site, the Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13. The oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project.
Policy CAS3 – Dark Skies	Development proposals that require the installation of external lighting should be designed to minimise the occurrence of light pollution, with energy-efficient forms of lighting expected, which reduce light scatter and comply with the Institute of Lighting Professional guidelines for rural areas. Proposals for	The Project will require lighting in targeted areas for security reasons. The measures implemented will be agreed in the oOMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.2]** and will avoid or minimise the potential for light pollution. The Project complies with Policy CAS3.

Policy	Description	Comment
	all development will be expected to demonstrate how it its intended to prevent light pollution.	
Policy CAS4 – Cassington Conservation Area	Development proposals should sustain and enhance the historic environment, particularly the special architectural and historic significance of the designated Cassington Conservation Area and its setting.	Chapter 7 of the ES considers impacts on heritage assets. No adverse effects are predicted upon the Cassington Conservation Area or its setting. There is no conflict with Policy CAS4.

Appendix 5

Cherwell District Council Policy Compliance Table

Table 8: Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2021 (Part 1) relevant planning policies and relevant 'saved' policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996

Policy	Description	Comment
Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2021 (Part 1)		
Policy ESD 1 – Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change	Measures will be taken to mitigate the impact of development within the District on climate change.	Climate Change effects are set out within Chapter 14 of the ES. Significant beneficial effects form the Botley West Solar Farm are predicted. The Applicant considers the Project complies with the NPPF and represents a unique opportunity to contribute at scale to the resolution of the Climate Change Emergency declared by the host authorities.
Policy ESD 5 – Renewable Energy	The Council supports renewable and low carbon energy provision wherever any adverse impacts can be addressed satisfactorily. The potential local environmental, economic and community benefits of renewable energy schemes will be a material consideration in determining planning applications.	The Applicant considers the Project complies with Policy ESD 5 and represents a unique opportunity to secure critical national infrastructure in the form of renewable solar energy. It is also able to contribute at scale to the resolution of the Climate Change Emergency declared by the authority. The Project complies with Policy ESD 5
Policy ESD 10 – Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment	Protection and enhancement of natural resources will be sought together with net gain. Damage or loss will not be permitted unless the benefits clearly outweigh the harm.	The Project presents a unique opportunity for the planning authority to secure significant BNG. This will be achieved by retaining an agricultural use beneath the solar arrays and on other undeveloped land, and by managing it in a way to deliver significant BNG. Details are set out within the oLEMP and BNG Report - Volume 3 Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**. The Project complies with Policy ESD 10.
Policy ESD 12 – Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	High priority will be given to the protection and enhancement of the Cotswolds AONB and the Council will seek to protect the AONB and its setting from potentially damaging and inappropriate development.	The Project site does not fall within or adjacent to the Cotswold AONB (national landscape). The low height of the Project and distance from the national landscape will not give rise to issues of setting, The Project therefore complies with Policy ESD 12.
Policy ESD 13 – Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement	Development will be expected to respect and enhance the local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage to local landscape character cannot be avoided. Proposals will not be permitted where they:	Chapter 8 of the ES considers effects upon the landscape. The Project will affect landscape character as it introduces a form of development that is not currently common in the landscape. Limited adverse effects cannot be avoided, but these effects have been minimised by following key layout and design principles. The Layout and

Policy	Description	Comment
	• Cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside • Cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography • Be inconsistent with local character • Impact on areas judged to have a high level of tranquillity • Harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features, or • Harm the historic value of the landscape.	Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]** provides for buffers between existing settlements and the solar arrays, buffers to protect trees hedgerows and woodland. These measures, together with the significant new landscaping proposed, assist is reducing adverse visual effects and effect upon landscape character. One decommissioned, the project will leave an important and significant landscape legacy, resulting in a significant enhancement of the area. On balance the Project is considered to comply with Policy ESD 13. Heritage effects are described in Chapter 7. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms there is no conflict.
Policy ESD 14 – Oxford Green Belt	Development proposals within the Green Belt will be assessed in accordance with government guidance contained in the NPPF and NPPG.	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a VSC that outweighs harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.7 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Policy ESD 17 – Green Infrastructure	The Green Infrastructure network will be maintained and enhanced via a number of measures, including ensuring the Green Infrastructure network considerations are integral to the planning of new development.	The Project will not only provide overall protection to the existing landscape features but also a substantial enhancement to Green infrastructure in the area, supported by long term management - see oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]**
'Saved' policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996		
Policy GB1 – Development in the Green Belt	There will be a Green Belt around the built-up area of Oxford, approximately 6.4-9.6 km (4-6 miles) wide, where development will be severely restricted. The 5 purposes of the green belt are to be adhered to. Very Special Circumstances may exempt development from normal green belt restrictions.	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS (Appendix 8). On balance the Project is supported by a VSC that outweighs harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Policy C7 – Landscape Conservation	Development will not normally be permitted if it would cause demonstrable harm to the topography and character of the landscape.	Chapter 8 of the ES considers effects upon the landscape. The Project will affect landscape character as it introduces a form of development that is not currently common in the landscape. Limited adverse effects cannot be avoided, but these effects have been minimised by following key layout and design principles. The Layout and Design Principles document

Policy	Description	Comment
		[EN010147/APP/7.7] provides for buffers between existing settlements and the solar arrays, buffers to protect trees hedgerows and woodland. These measures together with the significant new landscaping proposed, assist is reducing adverse visual effects and effect upon landscape character. One decommissioned, the project will leave an important and significant landscape legacy, resulting in a significant enhancement of the area (see Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Areas plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]** On balance the Project complies with Policy C7
Policy C10 – Historic Landscapes, Parks and Gardens and Historic Battlefields	Development which would have a detrimental effect upon the character and appearance of historic landscapes, parks and gardens and battlefields and their settings will normally be resisted.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant effects are predicted. The Project complies with Policy C10.
Policy C25 – Development affecting the site or setting of a schedule ancient monument	In considering proposals for development which would affect the site or setting of a scheduled ancient monument, other nationally important archaeological sites and monuments of special local importance, the council will have regard to the desirability of maintaining its overall historic character, including its protection, enhancement and preservation where appropriate.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant effects are predicted. In planning policy terms there is no conflict with Policy C25.

Appendix 6

VoWH District Council & Oxfordshire County Policy Compliance Tables

Table 9: Relevant planning policies of the VoWH Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and 2

Policy	Description	Comment
Core Policy 13 – The Oxford Green Belt	The Oxford Green Belt will continue to be protected to maintain its openness and permanence. Inappropriate development will not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Core Policy 33 – Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility	The Council will work with OCC and others to, *inter alia,* actively seek to ensure that the impacts of new development on the strategic and local road network are minimised.	Chapter 12 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** assess the effect of the Project on the highway network. No adverse effects are predicted. The Project complies with Core Policy 33.
Core Policy 35 – Promoting Public Transport, Cycling and Walking	The Council will work with OCC and others to, *inter alia,* seek to support the provision of new cycling routes where proposals are consistent with other plan policies.	The Project provides a new cycle route south of Bladon. The Project complies with Core Policy 35.
Core Policy 39 – The Historic Environment	The Council will collaborate with others to ensure new development conserves and where possible enhances designated and non-designated heritage assets, and their setting, in accordance with national legislation and guidance.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant effects are predicted. In Planning terms there is no substantial harm arising and therefore is substantially in accordance with Core Policy 39.
Core Policy 41 – Renewable Energy	The Council encourages schemes for renewable and low carbon energy generation. Planning applications for renewable and low carbon energy generation (excluding wind energy) will be supported, provided that they do not cause significant adverse effects.	Whilst some limited adverse effects will arise, the benefits of the Project are considered to clearly outweigh these and thus it complies with Core Policy 41. The Project represents a unique opportunity to secure critical national infrastructure in the form of renewable solar energy. It is also able to contribute at scale to the resolution of the Climate Change Emergency declared by the authority.
Core Policy 42 – Flood Risk	The risk and impact of flooding will be minimised by sensitively locating developments, managing flood risk and by not increasing the risk of flooding elsewhere.	Flood risk is addressed within Chapter 10 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. A flood Risk assessment has been undertaken amongst other assessments. No adverse effects are predicted during construction, operation or the decommissioning phases of the Project.

Policy	Description	Comment
		The Project complies with Core Policy 42.
Core Policy 43 – Natural Resources	Developers are encouraged to make provision for the effective use of natural resources where applicable, including but not limited to avoiding the development of the best and most versatile agricultural land, unless it is demonstrated to be the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives, by first using areas of poorer quality land in preference to that or a higher quality.	Chapter 18 in the ES assesses waste and natural resources. Waste minimisation measures will be adopted as part of the oCoCP, oOMP and Decommissioning Plan. In terms of BMV, the Project will lead to a small loss of BMV land (refer to Chapter 17 in the ES – a permanent loss of approx. 5.5ha). Approximately 3.8ha of that loss relates to the positioning of the NGET substation. This is sited to be close to the adjacent 400kV lines and adjacent to the Applicant main substation. No better alternative siting could be established by the Applicant within the DCO Order Limits. The overall loss of BMV land is not considered to be significant in EIA terms or policy terms. The Project is substantially in accordance with Core Policy 43.
Core Policy 44 – Landscape	The key features that contribute to the nature and quality of the VoWH District's landscape will be protected from harmful development and where possible enhanced.	Chapter 8 of the ES considers effects upon the landscape. The Project will affect landscape character as it introduces a form of development that is not currently common in the landscape. Limited adverse effects cannot be avoided, but these effects have been minimised by following key layout and design principles. The Layout and Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]** provides for buffers between existing settlements and the solar arrays, buffers to protect trees hedgerows and woodland. These measures together with the significant new landscaping proposed, assist is reducing adverse visual effects and effect upon landscape character. One decommissioned, the project will leave an important and significant landscape legacy, resulting in a significant enhancement of the area (see Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Areas plan **[EN010147/APP7.3.3]** On balance the Project is considered to comply with Core Policy 44.
Core Policy 45 – Green Infrastructure	A net gain in Green Infrastructure, including biodiversity, will be sought wither through on-site provision or off-site contributions, and the targeted use of other funding sources. A net loss of Green Infrastructure, including biodiversity, through development proposals, will be resisted.	Chapter 8 and 9 deal with landscape and ecology issues respectively. The Project presents a unique opportunity for the planning authority to secure significant BNG and landscape enhancements. This will be achieved by retaining an agricultural use beneath the solar arrays and on other undeveloped land, and by managing it in a way to deliver significant BNG. Significant new landscaping proposals also form part of the Project. Details are set out within the oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** and BNG Report in

Policy	Description	Comment
		Volume 3, Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]** and the Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**. The Project complies with Core Policy 45.
Core Policy 46 – Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity	Development that will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity will be permitted. Opportunities for biodiversity gain, including the connection of sites, large-scale habitat restoration, enhancement and habitat re-creation will be actively sought, with a primary focus on delivery in the Conservation Target Areas. A net loss of biodiversity will be avoided.	The Project presents a unique opportunity for the planning authority to secure significant BNG. This will be achieved by retaining an agricultural use beneath the solar arrays and on other undeveloped land, and by managing the land in a way to deliver significant BNG. Details are set out within the oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** and BNG Report – n\volume 3, Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]** The Project complies with Core Policy 46.
Local Plan 2031 Part 2		
Core Policy 13a – Oxford Green Belt	The Green Belt Boundary is amended however the approach to development within the Oxford Green Belt is set out in Core Policy 12 (Local Plan 2031: Part 1)	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Development Policy 21 – External Lighting	Sets out measures to ensure development involving external lighting is appropriately designed and located.	A lighting scheme will be prepared to support security measures for key infrastructure. The scheme will be delivered through the oOMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.2]** and via a Requirement within the DCO.
Development Policy 23 – Impact of Development on Amenity	Proposals should demonstrate they will not result in significant adverse impacts on the amenity of neighbouring uses, individually and when considered cumulatively.	Chapter 5 of the ES, Alternatives, describes the design evolution of the Project and how from the outset, measures were introduced to avoid or minimise potential for significant adverse effects upon amenity (see Layout and Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]** , Mitigation Measures and Commitments Schedule, Volume 3, Appendix 6.1 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]** and the oCoCP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1]**. The Project complies with development Policy 23.
Development Policy 25 – Noise Pollution	Seeks to ensure new development is acceptable in relation to noise pollution.	Chapter 13 in the ES, Noise, deals with potential effects arising from noise. No significant effects are predicted. The Project complies with Development Policy 25.

Policy	Description	Comment
Development Policy 26 – Air Quality	Seeks to ensure new development is adequately considers air quality.	Chapter 19 in the ES, Air Quality, deals with effects relating to air quality. No significant effects are predicted. The Project complies with Development Plan Policy 26.
Development Policy 27 – Watercourses	Seeks to ensure watercourses are accommodated appropriately within new development.	Chapter 10, Hydrology and Flood Risk, reports on potential impacts upon watercourses.
Development Policy 31 – Protection of Public Rights of Way, National Trails and Open Access Areas	Seeks to support improvements to the Public Rights of Way Network and Open Access Areas, and to protect National Trails.	Chapter 17, Agriculture Land Use and Public Rights of Way describes the Projects proposals in respect of Public Rights of Way and access. Chapter 16 on Human Health also reports on access issues **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. New permissive paths are proposed alongside improvements to existing rights of way (see landscape ecology and Amenities Area Plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**). The Project complies with Development Policy 31.
Development Policy 36 – Heritage Assets	New development that may affect designated and non-designated heritage assets is required to demonstrate that is conserves and enhances the special interest or significance of the heritage assets and its setting in accordance with Core Policy 39. Harm to or loss of the significance of a designated heritage asset will require clear and convincing justification.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms, the project complies with Development Policy 36.
Development Policy 37 – Conservation Areas	Requires development within or affecting the setting of a Conservation Area to demonstrate that it will conserve or enhance its special interest, character, setting and appearance.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms, the project complies with Development Policy 37.
Development Policy 39 – Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments	Seeks for development to not have a detrimental impact on the site of or setting of nationally important designated or non-designated archaeological remains or Scheduled Monuments.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms, the project complies with Development Policy 39.

Table 10: Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan relevant policies

Policy	Description	Comment
Policy DBC2 – Cumnor	Development proposals within the Conservation Area and its setting should preserve or enhance its	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter

Policy	Description	Comment
Conservation Area	significance as a designated heritage asset.	10 of the ES. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms, the project complies with Policy DBC2.
Policy DBC4 – Development in the Green Belt	The Green Belt will continue to be protected to maintain its openness and permeance; development in the Green Belt will be determined against VOWH Local Plan Part 1 Core Policy 13. Inappropriate development will not be supported except in very special circumstances.	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Policy DBC6 – Conserving and Enhancing Local Heritage Assets	The Neighbourhood Plan has identified Local Heritage Assets and the effect which development would have on the significance of these assets should be taken into account in planning applications.	The assessment of the likely impacts and effects on heritage assets is set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. No significant adverse effects are predicted. In planning policy terms, the project complies with Policy DBC6.
Policy DBC7 – Important Views	The Neighbourhood Plan identifies Important Views as contributing to the essential rural character of the Parish. Developments should preserve, or where practicable enhance, the local character of the landscape and should take account of the important views identified. Development which would have an unacceptable impact on the local character of the landscape and/or on an identified important view will not be supported.	Chapter 8 of the ES considers effects upon the landscape. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** The Project will affect landscape character as it introduces a form of development that is not currently common in the landscape. Limited adverse effects cannot be avoided, but these effects have been minimised by following key layout and design principles. The Layout and Design Principles document **[EN010147/APP/7.7]** provides for buffers between existing settlements and the solar arrays, buffers to protect trees hedgerows and woodland. These measures together with the significant new landscaping proposed, assist is reducing adverse visual effects and effect upon landscape character. One decommissioned, the project will leave an important and significant landscape legacy, resulting in a significant enhancement of the area (see Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Areas plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**
Policy RNE1 – Green Infrastructure	Proposals should protect, and where practicable enhance, 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, and minimise impacts on, and providing net gains for, biodiversity where practicable. Particular account should be taken of: • Local footpaths • Trees and Hedgerows	Chapter 8 and 9 deal with landscape and ecology issues respectively. The Project presents a unique opportunity for the planning authority to secure significant BNG and landscape enhancements. This will be achieved by retaining an agricultural use beneath the solar arrays and on other undeveloped land, but managing it in a way to deliver significant BNG. Significant new landscaping proposals also form part of the Project, building upon the existing landscape structure of the area. Details are included within the oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** and BNG Report –

Policy	Description	Comment
	• The Hurst on Cumnor Hill, Spring Farm and Wytham Woods SSSIs. • Designated Ancient Woodlands, Priority Habitats and Priority Species • Chawley, Smith Hill Copse, Long Leys Farm Meadows, Long Copse, Footpath at Chawley, Thanks Island west of Farmoor, Farmoor Reservoir and Swinford Meadow LWSs. • Common land and village greens. Proposals should maintain and enhance existing on-site biodiversity assets and provide for wildlife needs on site where practicable. On-site biodiversity enhancements will be supported as will proposals that provide wildlife corridors allowing wildlife to move from one area of habitat to another.	Volume 3, Appendix 9.13 **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**, and the Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Area plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**. The Project complies with Policy RNE1.
Policy RNE2 – Flood Risk	Development proposals should be located and designed to take account of flood risk, with particular attention give to potential flood risk impacts in Farmoor (as shown on maps 14 and 15), Cumnor Hill (as shown on map 15) and Dean Court area (as shown on map 15). Unless the exception tests in paragraph 159 of the NPPF are met, inappropriate developments in areas at risk of flooding will not be supported. If development in such areas is required, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. There should be no unacceptable increase in surface water discharge off site with proposals taking account of impacts in terms of run off generations and surface water drainage.	Flood risk is addressed within Chapter 10 of the ES (ref Table 10.3). **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** A flood Risk assessment has been undertaken amongst other assessments. No adverse effects are predicted during construction, operation or the decommissioning phases of the Project. It is considered that the Project complies with Policy RNE2.
Policy T11 – Sustainable Transport	"A. As appropriate to its scale, nature and location new development should incorporate a balanced and sustainable transport provisions, including; Facilities for cycling; Off street parking provision; Convenient pedestrian links to public transport facilities; Electric charging points for vehicles. B. New development should not have an unacceptable impact on the free and	Chapter 12 in the ES, considers relevant traffic and transport proposals and environmental effects. **Section 12.9** of this chapter assesses the impact of construction vehicle movements arising from the Project on the LRN and SRN. No significant adverse effects are predicted. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** The Project protects existing and provides new pedestrian links and a new cycle link (see Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Plan ref **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]**). The Project is substantially in accordance with Policy T11.

Policy	Description	Comment
	safe flow of traffic in general, and at the following locations in particular: i. Land adjacent to or near to the A420 approaching Botley Interchange; ii. Lower Cumnor Hill and Eynsham Road; iii. The historic village core of Cumnor; iv.Swinford Toll Bridge."	
Policy TI2 – Cycle Routes	The B4044 cycle route as shown on map 19 is safeguarded. New development adjacent to this should enhance the safety and amenity of the proposed cycle path and development proposal should not compromise the scope for public access to the protected route. Development proposals that maximise opportunities for cycle movements to promote connectivity within and between the settlements will be supported.	Chapter 17, Agriculture, Land Use and Public Rights of Way assess effects upon rights of way. **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** It describes the temporary diversions necessary during construction and proposed permanent diversions. New permissive paths and a cycleway is proposed. No significant adverse effects are predicted. The Project accords with Policy T13.
Policy T13 – Footpaths and Bridleways	"A. New development proposals should take into account the safety, accessibility and visual amenity of Cumnor's network of footpaths and bridleways. Developments proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on their accessibility and recreational amenity value will not be supported. B. Where it is practicable to do so new development should take opportunities to enhance the accessibility, connectivity and amenity of footpaths and public rights of way."	Chapter 17, Agriculture, Land Use and Public Rights of Way assess effects upon footpaths and bridleways. It describes the temporary diversions necessary during construction and proposed permanent diversions. The permanent diversions are limited in length and realign the statutory route to the existing 'desire line' of the right of way actually used by the public. Existing footpaths are protected, and new permissive paths and cycleway is proposed. No significant adverse effects are predicted. The Project accords with Policy T13.

Table 11: Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy relevant policies and relevant 'saved' policies from the Minerals and Waste Local Plan (1996).

Policy	Description	Comment
Policy M8 – Safeguarding Mineral Resources	Development preventing or hindering the possible future working of the mineral will not be permitted unless it can be shown that the site has been allocated, the need of the development outweighs the economic and sustainability consideration relating to the mineral resource or the mineral will be extracted prior to development. Within Mineral Consultation Areas, District Councils will consult the	A Mineral Safeguarding Area for sharp sand and gravels has been identified within the Project area. In accordance with local planning policy a Mineral Resource Assessment (MRA) has been undertaken that demonstrates that although sand and gravel deposits of potential commercial interest are present sporadically beneath part of the Central Site area, the Project will not result in the permanent sterilisation of these resources. The MRA is presented as Chapter

Policy	Description	Comment
	County Council on non-mineral development applications.	11, Appendix 11.14 [**EN010147/APP/6.5**]. Notwithsatnding, the Applicant considers the Project to be substantially in accordance with Policy M8
Policy C11 – Rights of Way	Seeks to maintain and retain the integrity and amenity value of the rights of way network shall be maintained. Diversions should be safe, attractive and convenient and, if temporary, shall be reinstated as soon as possible. If permanent diversions are required, these should seek to enhance and improve the public rights of way network. Improvements and enhancements are generally encouraged.	Chapter 17, Agriculture, Land Use and Public Rights of Way assess effects upon footpaths and bridleways. [**EN010147/APP/6.3**] It describes the temporary diversions necessary during construction and permanent diversions. The permanent diversions are limited in length and realign the statutory route to the existing 'desire line' of the right of way actually used by the public. Existing footpaths are protected, and most enhanced with new planting. New permissive paths are proposed. No significant adverse effects are predicted. The Project accords with Policy C11.
Policy C12 – Green Belt	Proposals that constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, will not be will not be permitted except in Very Special Circumstances, which will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS (Appendix 8). On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case. The Project does not conflict with Policy C12.

Appendix 7

NPPF Compliance Table

Table 12: NPPF 2023 paragraphs

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development		
Paragraph 10	Provides that for sustainable development to be pursued positively, at the heart of the NPPF, is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.	The Project has been designed and laid out, and is subject to a number of mitigation measures, which together deliver sustainable development. The Project successfully delivers a vital contribution to the Governments solar targets and Net Zero obligations, significant BNG, and will leave a significant and positive landscape and biodiversity legacy in the region for the long term (see the oCoCP and oOMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.1 and 7.6.2]**, the oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]**, the Landscape, Ecology and Amenities Area plan **[EN010147/APP/7.3.3]** and the Mitigation and Commitments schedule **[EN010147/APP/6.5]**.
Paragraph 11	Sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which for decision-taking means: *"c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or* *d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:* *i. the application of policies in this Framework that protects areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or* *ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."*	Section 2 of this PSS sets out the decision making process the Secretary of State will follow in respect of NSIP's. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance, for England, has been taken into account within the energy NPSs where appropriate (Paragraph 4.1.11) To the extent paragraph 11 is relevant, the Project accords with its provisions.
Section 11 – Making effective use of land		
Paragraph 124	Identifies how planning policies and decisions should encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural	The Project has evolved in a way that positively balances the impacts associated with development at scale in countryside

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
	land and take opportunities to achieve net environmental gains such as developments that, amongst other things, would enable new habitat creation.	locations, with the very significant benefits the Project will bring. Importantly, the Project is regarded by Government as being a CNP, providing as it does a vital contribution to the delivery of the Governments solar targets ; making a positive contribution to its Net Zero obligations and its BNG goals, and also by helping to positively address the Climate Change Emergencies that the host authorities have declared.
Section 13 – Protecting Green Belt land		
Paragraph 142	Provides that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to *"prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence."*	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS (Appendix 8). On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Paragraph 143	Provides the five purposes of a Green Belt, which are: " a. *The check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;* b. *To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;* c. *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;* d. *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and* e. *To assist in urban regenerations, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land."*	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS Appendix 8). On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Paragraph 152	Details that *"Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances."*	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Paragraph 153	Highlights that local planning authorities, when considering a planning application, should ensure that *"substantial weight is given to*	The VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
	any harm to the Green Belt." It continues that *"Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations."*	VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Paragraph 154	Details that where development in the Green Belt is not considered inappropriate development, which range from, inter alia, agricultural buildings, provision for outdoor sport and creation to limiting infilling in villages.	The Applicant considers that the provision of electrical cables and related works (see Appendix 8 for details in this PSS) comprise engineering operations directly associated with the Project is not inappropriate development in Green Belt terms.
Paragraph 155	The forms of development detailed are also not considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, providing they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, including engineering operations.	The Applicant considers that the provision of electrical cables and related works (see Appendix 8 for details in this PSS) comprise engineering operations directly associated with the Project is not inappropriate development in Green Belt terms. The wider VSC case which supports the project being allowed in this location for a temporary period is set out in this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Paragraph 156	In specific relation to renewable energy developments; *"When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources."*	The Applicant's VSC case supports the project being allowed in this location. Details of the Green Belt assessment are set out in Appendix 8 of this PSS. On balance the Project is supported by a VSC case that outweighs harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Paragraph 4.2.17 on NPS EN-1 states that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the VSC case.
Section 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change		
Paragraph 157	States *"The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate … It should help to: shapes places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and*	Climate Change effects are set out within Chapter 14 of the ES. Significant beneficial effects from the Botley West Solar Farm are predicted. The Applicant considers the Project complies with the NPPF and represents a

Section/Paragraph Number	Description	Comment
	improve resilience; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure."	unique opportunity to contribute at scale to the resolution of the Climate Change Emergency declared by the host authorities.
Paragraph 160	Seeks to help increase the supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat through the plan-making process via positive strategies which maximise the potential for suitable development, future re-powering and life extension, whilst ensuring adverse impacts are addressed, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts.	Whilst the host authorities have not expressly allocated land for renewable energy development, all have policies which support in principle renewable energy development. The Applicant considers the Project complies with the NPPF and represents a unique opportunity to contribute at scale to the resolution of the Climate Change Emergency declared by the host authorities.
Paragraph 163	Does not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, in planning applications, and for local planning authorities to approve applications where its impacts are, or can be made, acceptable.	The Applicant notes and welcomes the position on need.

Appendix 8

Green Belt Statement - Very Special Circumstances

8.1 Context

Need

8.1.1 The UK's energy security and net zero obligations will only be delivered if we can enable the development of new low carbon sources of energy at speed and scale. This is the Government policy (NPS EN-1 section 4.2 para 4.2.2). Wind and solar are the lowest cost ways of generating electricity, helping reduce costs and providing a clean and secure source of electricity supply (as they are not reliant on fuel for generation). Government analysis shows that a secure, reliable, affordable, net zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar (NPS EN-1 para 3.3.20). If consented, the Botley West Project will play a vital role in this respect. The Government goal of 70GW by 2035 of solar development is currently, and for the foreseeable future, significantly behind meeting this target by some 39GW (see DCO Solar Capacity Calculation, Chapter 5, Alternatives, Annex A **[EN010147/APP/6.4]**.

8.1.2 The scale of the problem of meeting net zero and to deliver clean, reliable and secure energy to the UK, is immense; the scale of the solution needs to mirror the scale of the problem.

8.2 Policy

National Policy Statements (NPS)

8.2.1 Government has committed to fully decarbonising the power system by 2035, subject to security of supply, to underpin its 2050 net zero goals. More than half of final energy demand in 2050 could be met by electricity (NPS EN-1 para 2.3.7), as transport and heating in particular shift from fossil fuel to electrical technology.

8.2.2 Ensuring the UK is more energy independent, resilient and secure requires the smooth transition to abundant, low-carbon energy. The UK's strategy to increase supply of low carbon energy is dependent on deployment of renewable and nuclear power generation, alongside hydrogen and CCUS (NPS EN-1 para 4.2.2).

8.2.3 With smart and strategic planning, the UK can maintain high environmental standards and minimise impacts while increasing the levels of deployment at the scale and pace needed to meet our energy security and net zero ambitions. Government has therefore concluded that there is a critical national priority (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure (NPS EN-1 para 4.2.4). The Botley West Project is a CNP qualifying project (NPS EN-1, para 4.2.5, first bullet point (low carbon onshore generation) and second bullet point (electricity grid infrastructure,

including all power lines and associated substations)), one of a few projects at scale that has been proposed which will help address the need for CNP infrastructure.

8.2.4 The Secretary of State will continue to consider the impacts and benefits of all CNP Infrastructure applications on a case-by-case basis. The Secretary of State must be satisfied that the applicant's assessment demonstrates that the requirements set out in NPS EN-1 have been met (i.e. paras 3.2.6 to 3.2.8: the need is urgent, that substantial weight should be attached to that need, and that the Secretary of State is not required to consider separately the specific contribution made to that need by each project).

8.2.5 The Applicant has assessed the likely significant effects of the project and by applying relevant mitigation measures has reduced the adverse effects as far as reasonably practicable. To that extent it shows how the Project meets the requirements of the NPS's.

8.2.6 NPS policy then states that, where the Secretary of State is satisfied that they have been met, the CNP presumptions set out below apply (NPS EN-1 para 4.2.4).

8.2.7 The NPS goes on to state that where residual impacts of a development proposal remain after the mitigation hierarchy has been applied, such residual impacts are unlikely to outweigh the urgent need for this type of infrastructure. Therefore, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely that consent will be refused on the basis of these residual impacts. The exception to this presumption of consent are residual impacts onshore and offshore which present an unacceptable risk to, or unacceptable interference with, human health and public safety, defence, irreplaceable habitats or unacceptable risk to the achievement of net zero. Further, the same exception applies to this presumption for residual impacts which present an unacceptable risk to, or unacceptable interference offshore to navigation, or onshore to flood and coastal erosion risk.

8.2.8 As a result as set out in NPS EN-1 (paras 4.2.16 and 4.2.17), **the Secretary of State will take as the starting point for decision making that such infrastructure is to be treated as if it has met any tests which are set out within the NPSs, or any other planning policy**, which requires a clear outweighing of harm, exceptionality or very special circumstances.

8.2.9 **This means that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the following, non-exhaustive, list of tests:**

- **where development within a Green Belt requires very special circumstances to justify development;**
- where development within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) requires the benefits (including need) of the development in the location proposed to clearly outweigh both the likely impact on features of the site that make it a SSSI, and any broader impacts on the national network of SSSIs.
- where development in nationally designated landscapes requires exceptional circumstances to be demonstrated; and

- where substantial harm to or loss of significance to heritage assets should be exceptional or wholly exceptional.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

8.2.10 The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Paragraph 142 of NPPF 2023 states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt Policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The five purposes of the Green Belt are set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF. These are:

1. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
2. to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
3. to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
4. to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
5. to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

8.2.11 Guidance in respect of how to assess harm to Green Belt can be found in NPS EN-1 section 5.11. In particular, paragraphs 5.11.36 to 5.11.38 state that when located in the Green Belt, energy infrastructure projects may comprise 'inappropriate development'. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. The NPPF (2023) makes clear that most new building is inappropriate in Green Belt and should be refused permission unless in very special circumstances (VSC).

8.2.12 Paragraph 5.11.37 of NPS EN-1 states that VSC is not defined in national planning policy as it is for the individual decision maker to assess each case on its merits and give relevant circumstances their due weight. However, when considering any planning application affecting Green Belt land, the Secretary of State should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering any application for such development, while taking account, in relation to renewable and linear infrastructure, of the extent to which its physical characteristics are such that it has limited or no impact on the fundamental purposes of Green Belt designation. VSC may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewables and other low carbon sources.

8.2.13 The NPPF at paragraph 153 states that VSC will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

8.2.14 Paragraph 154 of the NPPF confirms that local planning authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt, subject to seven specific exceptions.

a. buildings for agriculture and forestry;
b. the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the

openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

c. the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

d. the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

e. limited infilling in villages;

f. limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and

g. limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:

   – not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or

   – not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

8.2.15 Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it (paragraph 155). These are:

- mineral extraction;
- engineering operations;
- local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
- material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
- development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

8.2.16 Paragraph 156 also states that when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate VSC if projects are to proceed. Such VSC may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

8.3 Context for the VSC Case

8.3.1 Before examining the balance of harm to the Green Belt, the Applicant will set out here:

1. The Project site and how it relates to the Oxfordshire Green Belt;

2. What are the ‘inappropriate’ components of the Project and which are not inappropriate;
3. What is Openness and how is it assessed, and the current effectiveness of the Oxfordshire Green Belt; and
4. What is the relevant ‘policy test’ to be applied for inappropriate development in the Green Belt

1. The Project in the Green Belt

8.3.2 The factors that influenced the Project site location, scale, layout and design are set out in Chapter 5 of the ES (paragraphs 5.1.25 to 5.1.43) and are not repeated in full here.

8.3.3 However, it is part of the Applicant’s case that the South East remains an area of greatest demand. As a result, the Applicant’s focus was to look for suitable and available land in the South East to develop a solar farm. That search for a site started the summer of 2019. At this point whilst scale was not a determinative factor, the scale of all solar farms determines their viability, and generally the larger the solar farm the more viable it becomes. The Applicants’ desire, therefore, was to develop at scale, if possible, but this would have to balanced against the cost of the electrical connection infrastructure required.

8.3.4 The next stage in the site selection process was to find a substation into which a connection could be made – one which had capacity to accept a connection for a new generating station. Generally, land close to a suitable substation cost less to connect to than one further away. Power loss also drops away the greater the distance involved – the connection infrastructure, which is funded by the developer, is also expensive and so the desire is to locate a site in close proximity to a substation wherever possible.

8.3.5 A review of substations commenced in October 2019. The Applicant looked at approximately 19 substations to establish their ability to accept new connections, as well as whether land might be available next to or close to relevant substations to construct a solar farm. Their investigations revealed that several substations had capacity. Figure 5.6: Substation Locations in Volume 2 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.4]** shows the locations of the 19 substations examined by the Applicant as well as indicating those with capacity as well as their location in proximity to Green Belt and National Landscape designations.

8.3.6 There was one substation in particular where it was clear to the Applicant that offered good potential to deliver a solar farm at scale. This was at Cowley in South Oxfordshire District. National Grid confirmed there was space at the substation to accommodate a new connection, were supportive of the Applicant to pursue the connection, and this was also relatively close to landowners who were also willing to offer land to build a solar farm. The substation at Northfleet in East London, just outside the Green Belt, also had grid capacity but was not taken forward by the Applicant as the site was land-locked with no reasonable prospect of securing land in close proximity for a solar development at scale.

8.3.7 Whilst the Cowley substation is located within the Green Belt, all other substations examined with headroom capacity, were also located within the Green Belt, meaning that development of a project in the vicinity of any of the four substations with capacity, would also fall within Green Belt and have an impact upon it. A site without any impact on Green Belt therefore, was not available to the Applicant.

8.3.8 Having regard to Green Belt and other constraints, the Project then developed into its current form the subject of the DCO application.

8.3.9 A broad representation of the 'above ground development' (AGD) (i.e. excludes underground cables) elements of the Project can be seen on Figure GB1 (Annexed to the end of the Green Belt Statement) in relation to the Oxfordshire Green Belt. The Figure is intended to show, in simplistic terms, a 'birds-eye' or aerial view of the development and assumes the areas occupied by the solar arrays within each field parcel, appear largely as one mass; the exceptions to that are the maintenance tracks running for the most part north to south that have been excluded from the 'mass' within each field parcel. Figure GB1 in this Statement does not show the areas free from development between the solar array rows, of which there are many, each of which will be between 2-3m. Neither does the figure attempt to show graphically that beneath the solar areas is land that is also free from development and maintains an agricultural use of the land.

8.3.10 In other words, from a Green Belt assessment perspective, it shows a worst case scenario, as if the development proposed, spatially, occupies more land that it will, that it is permanent, and that has a volume or mass within the landscape that again in reality it will not (given the airspace beneath the solar arrays and the continued agricultural use of the land).

8.3.11 The Oxfordshire Green Belt occupies an area of approximately 34,464 ha. The AGD of the Project occupies an area of approximately 497 ha. or 1.4% of the total Oxfordshire Green Belt. Approximately 31% of the total area of the Project site (the DCO Order Limits) lies beyond the Green Belt and 69% falls within it. All of the Northern Site lies beyond the Green Belt. All except a limited margin at the western edge of the Central Area falls within the Green Belt. All of the Southern Site falls within the Green Belt.

8.3.12 The Central Area is the largest of the three Project Site areas, and where the Project occupies a greater extent of Green Belt land.

8.3.13 The narrowest point between settlements in the Green Belt affected by the Project are in the Central Area. This can be seen in Figure GB 2 annexed to this Green Belt Statement. Here the narrowest point in the Green Belt lies between Begbroke and Bladon. From settlement edge to settlement edge, the narrowest gap is approximately 1.4km and furthest is 2.4km. The focus of the Applicants analysis is on this area of the Green Belt as this, arguably, is where the Green Belt purposes are under most pressure.

2. What are the 'inappropriate' components of the Project and which are not inappropriate

8.3.14 The Applicant has described earlier that there are some exceptions to the how some development can be considered not inappropriate in Green Belt and thus avoid the presumption of harm being created, provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In the case of Botley West, to the extent it falls within the Green Belt, the following components should, in the opinion of the Applicant, be regarded as ***not inappropriate***:

- Structures that may be required to maintain the agricultural use of the site i.e. sheep/cattle pens and water supply facilities and any associated accesses. Such facilities are likely to be required to maintain the agricultural use. The delivery and details of such will be the detailed LEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]**, but it is reasonable to assume that to the extent they are needed, they will be small in scale, dispersed throughout the site, and thus avoid conflict with the openness of the Green Belt and its purpose.
- All land set aside for:
  - Agricultural use
  - Archaeological protection
  - Sky Lark plots
  - Open land between arrays and field boundaries, including buffer zones and unsurfaced maintenance tracks
  - Community based food growing areas (as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it)

8.3.15 All the above factors either have no above ground impact on openness, and in the case of any community food growing initiative areas provided, will be akin to the 'allotment' exception in policy terms.

- Engineering operations required in connection with the construction and laying of all electrical cable work to facilitate the development.

8.3.16 This form of development will be temporary and transitory in terms of its visual and spatial impact in the Green Belt, and following construction the cables will be buried below ground and so not impact upon openness or affect the purposes of the Green Belt.

8.3.17 In light of the above, in the opinion of the Applicant, the following development should be regarded ***inappropriate*** for the purposes of assessing harm to the Green Belt:

a. Installation of all substations proposed by the Applicant constitute inappropriate development.

b. Installation of solar arrays.

c. Fencing, cameras, lighting apparatus,

d. Construction compounds and associated vehicular accesses;

e. Other new vehicular access points

8.3.18 It is these components of the development from which harm may arise. The issue of temporary versus performance of the development will be discussed further below.

3. What is Openness and what is the effectiveness of the Green Belt in this location

8.3.19 The NPPF 2023 at paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that: “The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence”.

8.3.20 There is no definition of ‘openness’ in the NPPF, nor anywhere else in statute or policy relevant to this application. For the purposes of this statement, the Applicant considers openness in the context of the amount of the spatial presence or footprint of the development i.e. the extent of the physical presence of the development in the landscape in a two-dimensional sense i.e. from a birds eye or aerial view. Secondly, the visual impact of the development is also important and capable of being factored into the test of openness i.e. the degree to which the development can be seen from public vantage points and the effect of landscaping and the screening function that performs and affects what can be seen.

8.3.21 Openness therefore has a spatial and visual component to it. This has been taken into account in the Applicants VSC case from paragraph 8.3.38.

8.3.22 In examining the level of harm of the proposed development in Green Belt terms, it is also desirable to assess the effectiveness of the role that the Green Belt performs in and around the Project site. The five purposes of the Green Belt are set out in paragraph 134 of the NPPF 2019. These are:

1. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
2. to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
3. to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
4. to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
5. to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

8.3.23 In the opinion of the Applicant, the Green Belt in this part of Oxfordshire adequately performs all of these functions. There is no area where the Green Belt could be considered visually degraded nor so narrow between any settlements that would undermine or threaten its purposes.

8.3.24 To that extent the Green Belt in and around the Project site still performs its function of openness and delivers on the five purposes of Green Belt as policy intended.

4. The Policy Test

8.3.25 Bearing in mind the relatively new concept of CNP infrastructure (coming into force through the latest NPS series (January 2024)), and given that solar qualifies as CNP infrastructure then, as a starting point, the Applicant will be seen to have succeeded at a VSC test. Nevertheless, the Applicant has set out the VSC case in support of this presumption.

8.3.26 The planning policy test therefore is that if:

- The Applicant has demonstrated that the likely significant effects of the project have been assessed and the mitigation hierarchy has been applied, thus avoiding or minimising any residual adverse effects, and that
- Subject to any legal requirements (including under s.104 of the Planning Act 2008), and that
- A VSC has been set out,

then any harm caused by inappropriate development, and any other harm, is likely to be considered to be acceptable, outweighed by the urgent need for this type of infrastructure.

8.3.27 In the Applicants opinion, defining the *level* of harm is important too, insofar as a 'low level' of harm could be offset by a corresponding 'low level VSC case. Conversely, a significant level of harm would need to be offset by significant VSC in order to become acceptable in policy terms.

8.3.28 Below the Applicant set out point 4 of the above i.e. the VSC followed by conclusions.

8.4 The VSC Case

8.4.1 Paragraph 5.11.37 of NPS EN-1 states that VSC is not defined in national planning policy as it is for the individual decision maker to assess each case on its merits and give relevant circumstances their due weight.

8.4.2 The Applicants' VSC case rests upon the balance between the benefits deriving from the Project, balanced against harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm.

8.4.3 Below the Applicant sets out:

1. Botley West and its affect upon the Purposes of Green Belt
2. Botley West and its affect upon Openness
3. Any Other Harm
4. Level of Harm
5. The VSC of Botley West
6. Conclusion and Policy Test compliance

1. Botley West and its affect upon the Purposes of Green Belt

Purpose 1

8.4.4 Green Belt purpose 1 is to ‘check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas’.

8.4.5 The Project by being located on agricultural land, means that is falls between settlements. During the operational life of the Project, it does mean that one has introduced ‘development’ between settlements. However, this along with many other solar schemes, is not ‘built-up’ in the way development in the Green Belt usually means. It does not comprise of ‘buildings’ that would otherwise occupy significantly more ‘volume’ and it is not permanent, unlike virtually all other development types – solar development is reversible if the Applicant makes it so. Here the Applicant has chosen to make the development temporary and reversible.

8.4.6 In the Applicants view, therefore, whilst they are introducing development that lies between settlements, that development is not ‘unrestricted’ in policy terms. It is development that is ‘restricted’.

8.4.7 It is ‘restricted’ in design and location – it is restricted in height to a low level, hugging the contours of the existing landscape, and laid out in a way with significant buffers between sensitive receptors and with significant landscaping protection and enhancement measures. In the Applicants experience, these attributes or characteristics of the development are much more positive and beneficial than would normally be offered or insisted upon if it were commercial or residential development, where planning policy normally drives development towards higher densities with significantly more urbanising influences (roads, other hard surfacing, lighting etc) than that associated with solar development.

8.4.8 Also, as it temporary and reversible, the Project prevents other forms of permanent built development eroding the openness of the Green Belt and that would otherwise permanently undermine its purposes. Not only does the Project provide that particular safeguard, but during it's operational, and beyond, it has overwhelming benefits.

8.4.9 Lastly, the operational life is planned to be approximately 37.5 years. That is accepted as a long time. But infrastructure planning in the UK is not about short term expediency. One has to plan for the long term in the public interest. In that context, whilst the temporary period is long in duration, it is nonetheless, temporary in planning policy terms with limited harm to Green Belt purpose 1.

Purpose 2

8.4.10 Green Belt purpose 2 is to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.

8.4.11 As discussed earlier, the Project, by virtue of being located on agricultural land, falls between settlements and that the operation of the Project will introduce ‘development’ between settlements. However, this along with many other solar schemes, is not ‘built-up’ in the way development in the Green

Belt usually means. It is does not comprise ‘buildings’ that occupy significantly more ‘volume’, and it is not permanent, unlike virtually all other development types – solar development is reversible. Here the Applicant has chosen to make the development temporary and reversible. To that extent therefore, any conflict with purpose 2 is temporary and reversible.

8.4.12 In addition, geographically, the effect of the Project on this purpose is limited. In the Applicants opinion, the area of the Green Belt in the vicinity of the Project where the issue of towns merging into one another is under the greatest pressure, is between Bladon and Begbroke (see Figure GB 2 at the end of this Green Belt Statement). The distances on this Figure show that at its narrowest point there is approximately 1.4km from the closet edge of Bladon to the closest edge of Begbroke, and at its greatest it is approximately 2.4km distant.

8.4.13 The introduction of solar arrays and related electrical infrastructure between these towns can be seen on Figure GB 1 and 2. Spatially the solar farm occupies a large area between the two. Conscious of this, the Applicant has sought to ensure the spatial effect of occupying land was restricted and that, visually, it would not be perceptible.

8.4.14 Spatially, the Applicant made the conscious decision to set back the proposed layout and significantly increase the normal buffer distance (minimum 25m) in key locations. For example, whilst land was offered to the Applicant hard up against the southern edge of Bladon, they expressly chose not to take this land to maximise the commercial opportunity, and instead created a very wide buffer (see Figure GB2). The decision to increase the areas of land that were free from development was undertaken to assist in limiting the spatial and visual effect upon the Green Belt (including purpose 2). In addition, fields against the western edge of the A44 going north from Begbroke toward Bladon were briefly considered for inclusion in the Project but were excluded for reasons including that they were considered too visually exposed and would add to the spatial effects of the Project.

8.4.15 Visually, the existing intervisibility between Begbroke and Bladon is extremely limited. In the summer months, there is no intervisibility and in the winter months intervisibility is confined to very limited glimpses of the highest parts of buildings. This is the case because of the gently undulating topography between these two towns and the significant levels of existing intervening landscape features in the form of hedgerows and woodland. The proposed enhancements to the existing landscape structure in the area between the two towns will also increase the sense of visual separation.

8.4.16 The introduction of low lying energy solar infrastructure, itself following the contours of the land, keeping away from the relatively high ground, respecting the existing landscape structure which itself will be enhanced by further extensive landscaping proposals, means that the visually, one will not see or likely to perceive any conflict with Green Belt purpose 2 at any point between these settlements. In all other areas where the Project is present within the Green Belt there are significantly greater separation distances such that this issue of the merging of towns becomes much more diluted resulting in significantly less or no conflict with purpose 2 of the Green Belt.

8.4.17 Again, as the Project is temporary and reversible, the Project prevents other forms of permanent built development which would otherwise cause the merging of settlements in this part of the Green Belt.

8.4.18 In the Applicants opinion, therefore, conflict with Green Belt purpose 2 is limited.

Purpose 3

8.4.19 Green Belt purpose 3 is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

8.4.20 The Applicant accepts there is conflict with this purpose. Whilst the re-use of previously developed land can make a positive contribution to sustainable development by reducing the amount of countryside and undeveloped greenfield land that needs to be used, the Government recognises (NPS EN-1 paragraph 5.11.3), that it may not be possible for many forms of energy infrastructure. Ground mounted solar falls into that category.

8.4.21 Given the significant shortfall that persists in respect of the amount of solar development that is needed to meet the Governments objectives of a five fold increase to 70GW by 2035 (see Solar DCO Capacity Calculation Chapter 5, Alternatives, Annex A **[EN010147/APP/6.4]**, it will inevitably require development in countryside locations and in some cases in Green Belt.

8.4.22 The Applicant has set out in Chapter 5 of the ES why the Project is in this location and of the scale that it is. Those reasons are not repeated here.

8.4.23 Notwithstanding, given the nature of ground mounted solar development, and the urgent need for it, conflict with purpose 3 of the Green Belt is in the Applicant view unavoidable, but temporary and reversible.

Purpose 4

8.4.24 Green Belt purpose 4 is to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

8.4.25 A comprehensive assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the development is set out in Chapter 21 of the ES **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. No significant adverse effects are predicted.

8.4.26 The evolution and refinement of the Project design and layout has minimised or avoided adverse effects on heritage assets. The Applicant has also undertaken an assessment of the impact upon The Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS), in accordance with relevant methodology. This study concludes that there is either no impact or a minor negative impact upon the WHS – see ES Appendix 7.4 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. In planning terms, the Applicant also concludes that in the absence of likely significant environmental effects, there is no 'substantial harm' caused either, in the context of the planning policy tests set out at paragraph 5.9.26 to 5.9.34 in NPS EN-1 (and elsewhere).

8.4.27 The Applicant concludes therefore that despite the scale and location of the Project, there is no conflict with Green Belt purpose 4.

Purpose 5

8.4.28 Green Belt purpose 5 is to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

8.4.29 Given the nature of ground mounted solar development requiring large areas of land in a countryside location, and to be near to a suitable grid connection, this has resulted in a Project which is largely, but not wholly, within the Green Belt. Even this scale of development is too small to meet the Government target of a five fold increase to 70GW by 2035. Roof top solar, whilst supported by the Applicant, is not the solution to address the urgent need for renewable energy in the UK.

8.4.30 Directing ground mounted solar to previously developed land and/or urban locations, will not solve the climate crisis declared by the host planning authorities nor meaningfully address the urgent need to this type of infrastructure. Planning Policy whilst discouraging the use of Green Belt does not rule such development out, not least because of the critical national priority status this form of renewable energy benefits from meaning that the presumption is that as a starting point the VSC test has been met.

8.4.31 The Applicant believes there is a conflict with Green Belt purpose 5, but given the above, it considers the conflict is justified by these circumstances.

2. Botley West and its affect upon Openness

8.4.32 The Applicant considers that the Project impact upon the openness of the Green Belt is limited in visual terms. Its impact upon the spatial aspect of Green Belt is greater but still justified and acceptable.

8.4.33 At an early stage of the feasibility of the development of the Project, the Applicant produced a high-level constraints plan to understand site sensitivities in planning and environmental terms. This included plotting on a suitable OS plan base:

- National and local environmental designations e.g. National Landscapes, ecological designations;
- Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site and all listed buildings, registered gardens and Conservation Areas;
- Landscape designations including protected trees and Ancient Woodland and all existing lines of trees/hedgerow;
- Watercourses and areas at a high risk of flooding;
- Engineering constraints such as roads, railway lines and overhead power lines; and
- Other major infrastructure, existing or planned, including Oxford Airport and local plan allocations for major residential development.

8.4.34 This provided a framework within which the Applicant could start to consider ways in which the site could be designed and laid out that minimised or avoided conflict with these assets and other environmental factors.

8.4.35 Various iterations of the evolution of the design of the solar farm included decisions to:

- Remove solar arrays on land that might adversely affect the setting of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site e.g. areas of land south of Bladon village, or other listed buildings;
- Remove solar arrays on land within or close to Conservation Areas e.g. Church Hanborough Conservation Area, where the environmental consultants advised against placement of panels or other electrical infrastructure within the Conservation Area,
- Create a buffer free from development adjacent to areas of ancient woodland and veteran trees,
- Creating a buffer away from residential areas of a minimum of 25m from the curtilage of such property;
- Removing panels from beyond the southern edge of the Oxford Airport runway, to allow for extra margins of safety and the opportunity for the airport to install further landing lights;
- Removing solar arrays and other electrical infrastructure where the Applicant discovered potentially significant underground archaeology as a result of aerial photography, desk top research and comprehensive geophysical surveys across all of the site proposed to be developed.
- To move development components, where practicable, to avoid permanent loss of best and most versatile agricultural land and to protect soil resource;
- To position noise generating infrastructure, where possible, away from sensitive receptors; and
- To choose cable corridors and cable laying techniques to minimise adverse environmental effects. This meant using the existing road network where possible, and where routes were required to cross agricultural or other land or features, to use open cut or Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) where appropriate. For example, HDD is proposed to be used extensively to avoid trees, hedgerows, sensitive ecology, roads and the railway. In targeted areas of important archaeology, cables will be laid on the surface, suitable protected.

8.4.36 The evaluation of site constraints and constant evolution of the design and layout presented opportunities to provide the following:

- areas for habitat enhancement, including planting of native species and opportunity to enhance existing habitat;
- ability to enhance the existing landscape structure and character and provide screening for the Project from public vantage points;
- retention of agricultural use beneath the solar arrays, and for areas of land made available for community-based food growing initiatives;
- enhance the existing network of public rights of way, where appropriate, with new landscaping and,

- the provision of new footpaths and cycleways to improve pedestrian access in the area.

8.4.37 The EIA and consultation processes (see Consultation Report **[EN010147/APP/5.1]**) has also formed an integral part of this iterative design process through the identification of environmental constraints and identifying opportunities for mitigation and enhancement.

8.4.38 In landscape terms (see Chapter 8 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]** , therefore, with the retention, enhancement and management of existing characteristic landscape features during the lifetime of the Project, the overall structure of the landscape will remain. The Project would not result in any significant harm to the landscape value of the Project Site, with limited loss of important landscape characteristics. Following the completion of the construction phase, at winter Year 1, a Medium magnitude of direct impact upon the Project Site would result in a Moderate adverse significance of effect, which is not significant in landscape terms.

8.4.39 At summer Year 15, the establishment of proposed planting and the continued grassland management would help to integrate the Project into the landscape. On balance, there would be an overall magnitude of impact of Low, with a Minor adverse significance of effect, which is not significant in landscape terms.

8.4.40 The Project is located within multiple landscape character areas / types, as derived from the available local authority landscape character assessment(s). There would be a Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) significance of effect upon those landscape character areas as a whole within which the Project is located. At a local level, landscape characterising effects upon the Project site, within a small part of the LCA(s) is considered to be Moderate adverse (not significant).

8.4.41 The assessment has taken account of the landscape baseline situation, with the essential landscape structure in terms of existing vegetation being retained, protected and enhanced as part of the Project.

8.4.42 No significant effects are predicted during construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning of the Botley West Project on landscape character areas within the 5 km study area.

8.4.43 No significant effects are predicted during construction, operation and maintenance or decommissioning of the Botley West Project on nationally designated landscapes, including the Cotswolds National Landscape.

8.4.44 Of the 55 Representative Viewpoints assessed as part of the Environmental Statement, it is concluded that there will be 12 Major adverse (significant) visual effects at winter Year 1 (following the Construction phase of the Project) only, from views available at Representative Viewpoints 5b, 5c, 13, 17, 25, 26, 32, 33, 38, 39, 50 and 54 arising from the Project during the operation and maintenance phase. These effects would diminish over time, with no residual significant visual effects predicted at summer Year 15.

8.4.45 In accordance with the LVIA methodology, landscape and visual effects has been assessed at winter Year 1 and summer Year 15. Although 12 significant effects have been identified, as detailed above, by Year 15 these are

anticipated to be not significant. However, it is reasonable to assume that these effects would start to diminish by year 5, as it is anticipated that new hedgerow planting, planted at a height of 60-90 cm, would achieve a growth rate of approximately 30 cm per year. Therefore, by year 5 of the Project, it is anticipated that newly established hedgerows, if suitably manged, would have achieved a height of approximately 2 to 3 metres and therefore screen views to much of the Project.

8.4.46 In summary, a total of 12 significant effects, detailed above, have been identified. Of the remaining 43 Representative Viewpoints, no other likely significant effects have been identified. On balance, it is considered that the quality and character of the landscape and visual resources would largely be maintained and would have the capacity to accommodate the Project without likely significant effects beyond those identified at a very local level or where it would be difficult to entirely mitigate visual effects. In addition, proposed planting would have a longer term benefit reinforcing the landscape character of the local landscape.

8.4.47 In visual terms the Applicant considers that despite the spatial extent of the Project site, it will be successful in limiting its visibility from public vantage points and therefore reduce to an acceptable level the actual or perceived effect upon the openness of the Green Belt and that being eroded by development.

8.4.48 Again, the Project is also temporary and reversible, except for the retained landscaping and agricultural land use that will remain, and preserve the openness of the Green Belt for the long term.

3. Any Other Harm

8.4.49 The Applicant has assessed the likely significant effects of the project and by applying relevant mitigation measures has reduced the adverse effects as far as reasonably practicable (see the Applicants Environmental Statement Chapter 21, Residual Effects **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**, and how the Project meets the requirements of the NPS' (see section 4.2 of the PSS and the Planning Balance conclusions).

8.4.50 Policy at national and local level has also been assessed. The Applicant has found that the Project accords with NPS EN-1, 3 and 5, and either accords, or is in substantial accordance with all other policy.

8.4.51 No other areas or types of harm are considered to arise.

4. Level of Harm

8.4.52 The submission documents include an Environmental Statement which addresses all the likely significant environmental effects associated with the development and appropriate mitigation measures. The PSS set out an analysis of compliance with relevant planning policy. In all material respects therefore, it will meet these key national policy objectives, leaving only residual effects that are not considered to be adverse and with many having significant beneficial effects.

8.4.53 In terms of the Green Belt, a detailed assessment has been undertaken to address this constraint. While a significant part of development proposed is regarded as 'inappropriate development', there are no suitable or better alternatives that would not also give rise to impacts other Green Belt locations (see Figure 5.6 **[EN010147/APP/6.4]**). The harm caused by those parts of the Project that are defined as inappropriate within the Green Belt is limited, but it is acknowledge that there remains some conflict with Green Belt purpose. Specifically, it is acknowledged by the Applicant that there would be limited conflict with purpose 1 and 2 (unrestricted urban sprawl and merging of towns); a conflict with purposes 3 and 5 (encroachment and regeneration); but no conflict with purpose 4 (setting of historic towns).

8.4.54 Substantial weight should be given to the harm caused against the five purposes, but the Applicant considers whilst it is significant in respect of purposes 3 and 5, it is less so in respect of purposes 1 and 2 with no conflict in respect of purpose 4.

8.4.55 The effect upon the openness of Green Belt has also been assessed. Whilst spatially the effect is large, the actual or perceived visual effects are limited, as a result of careful layout and design and the landscaping measures embedded as part of the Project.

8.4.56 Overall whilst there is conflict with Green Belt policy, including to openness, overall the harm caused by inappropriateness is considered to be limited. Any other harm arsing caused by the Project is also limited.

5. The VSC of Botley West

8.4.57 Paragraph 5.11.37 of NPS EN-1 states that VSC is not defined in national planning policy as it is for the individual decision maker to assess each case on its merits and give relevant circumstances their due weight. In summary, in the opinion of the Applicant the VSC relating to the Project includes:

- VSC 1 - Meeting the urgent need for secure, clean, renewable energy;
- VSC 2 - Overall compliance with relevant NPS and relevant parts of approved and emerging plans;
- VSC 3 – Renewable energy to power the equivalent of 330,000 homes;
- VSC 4 - Biodiversity Net Gain;
- VSC 5 – Economic, Educational and Sustainability Benefits;
- VSC 6 - Landscape and Access legacy;
- ~~VSC 7 - Community Benefit Fund;~~
- ~~VSC 8 - Discounted electricity prices;~~

8.4.58 These are discussed in turn below.

VSC 1 - Meeting the urgent need for secure, clean, renewable energy

8.4.59 The need for this form of renewable energy is unquestionable. National Planning policy is very clear on the need point. Considerable weight is

afforded to the Applicants proposal as a result of the contribution it will make to meeting that need. NPS – EN1 at paragraph 3.3.61 confirms that need for all these types of infrastructure is established by this NPS and a combination of many or all of them is urgently required for both energy security and Net Zero

VSC 2 - Overall compliance with relevant NPS and relevant parts of approved and emerging plans;

8.4.60 It has been demonstrated that the Project is in compliance or substantially in compliance with relevant national and relevant local planning policy “see Policy Compliance Tables at Appendix 1 to 8 of the PSS **[EN010147/APP/7.1]** and section 4.3 of the PSS.

8.4.61 The VSC case for compliance with Green Belt policy is made out in this document at Appendix 8.

8.4.62 Whilst BMV land is permanently lost through the project the loss is considered to be small and not significant in EIA terms (see Chapter 17 **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**. In policy terms this loss is largely down to the delivery of the National Grid substation, necessary as part of the upgrading to the electricity infrastructure in this part of Oxfordshire, and to connect this and other renewable energy projects to the National Grid. The choice of location for that substation is driven by the need to be in close proximity to the existing 400kV OHL. No better alternative was available to the Applicant within the Order Limits.

8.4.63 In addition, another area of BMV land loss is due to the betterment that has been created to avoid or minimise the flooding that occurs intermittently in the village of Cassington (not caused by the Project). Here the applicant has proposed a shallow pond, ditch widening and bunding. On balance this betterment was considered to be desirable despite the loss of some BMV land.

8.4.64 To site a Project of this nature elsewhere in the region with a suitable grid connection point was not available to the Applicant (see Chapter 5, Alternatives **[EN010147/APP/6.3].** In any event, land free from being BMV, is very limited in the region – the disposition of BMV can seen on the Predictive Best and Most Versatile Plan at Figure 17.2 **[EN010147/APP/6.4].** At this scale the Project site largely avoids a high or moderate likelihood of impacting BMV land and only subsequent soil testing should the extent of BMV.

8.4.65 In policy terms, therefore, whilst there is some permanent loss of BMV there are compelling reasons for that including:

- The lack of an available site with a suitable grid connection free from BMV land; and
- The need to locate the National Grid Substation (of the size and orientation set out) close to the existing OHL; and
- The desirability of providing a betterment to the residents of Cassington who have hitherto suffered from intermittent flooding, in the form a new

water storage solution (and for the Applicant's solution driven by Surface Water Modelling to optimise its location), and

- The containment of the permanent loss of BMV to a small area which is not considered significant in EIA terms – see Chapter 17, Agriculture, Landuse and Public Rights of Way **[EN010147/APP/6.3].**

8.4.66 Chapter 21 of the ES and table 21.1 summarises the effects including the residual effects of the Project **[EN010147/APP/6.3**]. One can see that not all effects are adverse. Indeed, most of the environmental effects are assessed as beneficial. As a result, compliance or substantial compliance with policy is easily achieved and therefore forms an integral part of VSC 2. Importantly this Project is unique insofar as if can deliver substantial commitments to many important policies, including landscape and nature conservation, BNG and in positively addressing the Climate Change emergencies that have been declared by all of the host planning authorities.

VSC 3 - Renewable energy to power the equivalent of 330,000 homes

8.4.67 The Project is anticipated to deliver enough electricity to power the equivalent of approximately 330,000 homes (based on the Government estimate of annual average household power consumption of 4000 kWh). This is a significant contribution to the UK's renewable energy needs. Considerable weight should be afforded to the application on that basis.

VSC 4 - Biodiversity Net Gain

8.4.68 During operation the Project will be able to deliver a significant biodiversity net gain compared to what exists on site currently. The Defra Statutory BNG Metric has been used to demonstrate net gain. It is intended that the Project will have a gain of at least 70% Habitat BNG. Full details are set out in Appendix 9.13. The oLEMP **[EN010147/APP/7.6.3]** will act as a mechanism to record and monitor ecological data on created, or evolving habitats, during the operation of the Project. This measure of gain, over such an extensive area, is unique and significant and complies with local policy and national planning policy. Significant weight should be attributed to the project on this basis.

VSC 5 – Economic, Educational and Sustainability Benefits

8.4.69 The impact of employment generation on unemployment rates in the Study Area is assessed to be beneficial at construction and decommissioning phases and beneficial at the operational and maintenance phase. The impact of providing education and skills benefits as part of a targeted employment and skills plan is assessed to have beneficial impacts at construction and operation phases. In addition, the direct investment is assessed to have a beneficial impact across all phases of the Project.

8.4.70 Land will be made available for educational purposes too. Embedded within the Project is the provision of a large covered but open sided structure, that can be used to take parties of school children to as a base for an educational field trip. The oOMP and oLEMP sets out what is intended to be provided,

how and where. This facility is assessed as having a beneficial effect to heath.

8.4.71 Several local food growing companies have expressed interest in food growing initiatives on land within the Project Site. Up to 30ha of land has been set aside within the masterplan for this purpose. Delivery of this initiative will be established once the site has become operational. Agreements in the form of site licenses, will be established with interested organisations. The licenses will facilitate the management and set out controls within which the site should operate i.e. including how the land will be set out, how pedestrian and vehicular will be achieved, and hours of operation and security arrangements. The principle of these food growing area initiatives is set out in the oOMP and details will be subject to approval of the OMP via a Requirement within the DCO.

VSC 6 - Landscape and Access legacy

8.4.72 During the operational life of the Project and beyond the Project will establish a significant landscape benefit because of the substantial new tree and hedgerow planting that is embedded within the Project alongside management of the land to deliver significant BNG. New public access routes will also be created allowing greater access than has otherwise been available in the area. The oLEMP and oOMP are the mechanisms by which the landscape, public access and ecology benefits will be realised and form part of the ongoing legacy for the region.

~~VSC 7 - Community Benefit Fund~~

~~8.4.73 Once operational the Project will set up a Community Fund which will receive £200,000-00 from SolarFive Ltd every year. That is the equivalent of approximately £7,500,000-00 over the lifetime of the Project (expected to be approx. 37.5 years). The Community Fund would be administered by a body comprising representatives from PVDP, The Blenheim Estate and local community leaders. It is expected that grants will be made to local causes and organisations. The Community Fund will be delivered as part of a Community Benefits Package agreed outside the scope of the DCO application, with relevant local authorities.~~

~~8.4.74 Whilst not to be considered in the planning balance case, this is nonetheless a socio-economic benefit to those living in the local area.~~

~~VSC 8 - Discounted electricity prices~~

~~8.4.75 If consented, the Applicant will establish a new retail electricity company and that company will offer BWSF electricity and green power from other suppliers to all of Oxfordshire. Residential customers within the 2km consultation zone will be offered a 5% discount from the Ofgem price cap.~~

~~8.4.76 Again, whilst not to be considered in the planning balance case, this is nonetheless an economic benefit to those living in the local area.~~

8.5 BALANCE OF CONSIDERATIONS AND OVERALL CONCLUSIONS – GREEN BELT

8.5.1 This Appendix to the PSS has described the factors that are relevant in assessing compliance with Green Belt policy. It describes

- Botley West and its affect upon the Purposes of Green Belt
- Botley West and its affect upon Openness
- Any Other Harm
- The Level of Harm, and
- The VSC case for Botley West

8.5.2 Paragraph 5.11.37 of NPS EN-1 states that VSC is not defined in national planning policy as it is for the individual decision maker to assess each case on its merits and give relevant circumstances their due weight. However, when considering any planning application affecting Green Belt land, the Secretary of State should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering any application for such development, while taking account, in relation to renewable and linear infrastructure, of the extent to which its physical characteristics are such that it has limited or no impact on the fundamental purposes of Green Belt designation. VSC may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewables and other low carbon sources.

8.5.3 The VSC case for those parts of the Project that fall within the Oxfordshire Green Belt, have been set out in this Appendix. The Applicant considers that it has demonstrated that the considerable benefits arising from the Project more than outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt, and to any other harm.

8.5.4 Noting the above, the Government has concluded that there is a critical national priority (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure (NPS EN-1 para 4.2.4). The Botley West Project is a CNP qualifying project (NPS EN-1, para 4.2.5, first bullet point (low carbon onshore generation) and second bullet point (electricity grid infrastructure, including all power lines and associated substations)), one of a few projects at scale that has been proposed which will help address the need for CNP infrastructure.

8.5.5 NPS policy then states that, where the Secretary of State is satisfied that they have been met, the CNP presumptions set out below apply (NPS EN-1 para 4.2.4).

8.5.6 The NPS goes on to state (4.2.15) that where residual impacts of a development proposal remain after the mitigation hierarchy has been applied, such residual impacts are unlikely to outweigh the urgent need for this type of infrastructure. Therefore, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely that consent will be refused on the basis of these residual impacts. The exception to this presumption of consent are residual impacts onshore and offshore which present an unacceptable risk to, or unacceptable interference with, human health and public safety, defence, irreplaceable

habitats or unacceptable risk to the achievement of net zero. Further, the same exception applies to this presumption for residual impacts which present an unacceptable risk to, or unacceptable interference offshore to navigation, or onshore to flood and coastal erosion risk.

8.5.7 As a result as set out in NPS EN-1 (paras 4.2.16 and 4.2.17), **the Secretary of State will take as the starting point for decision making that such infrastructure is to be treated as if it has met any tests which are set out within the NPSs, or any other planning policy**, which requires a clear outweighing of harm, exceptionality or very special circumstances.

8.5.8 NPS EN-1, paragraph 4.2.17 states that:

" This means that the Secretary of State will take as a starting point that CNP Infrastructure will meet the following, non-exhaustive, list of tests:

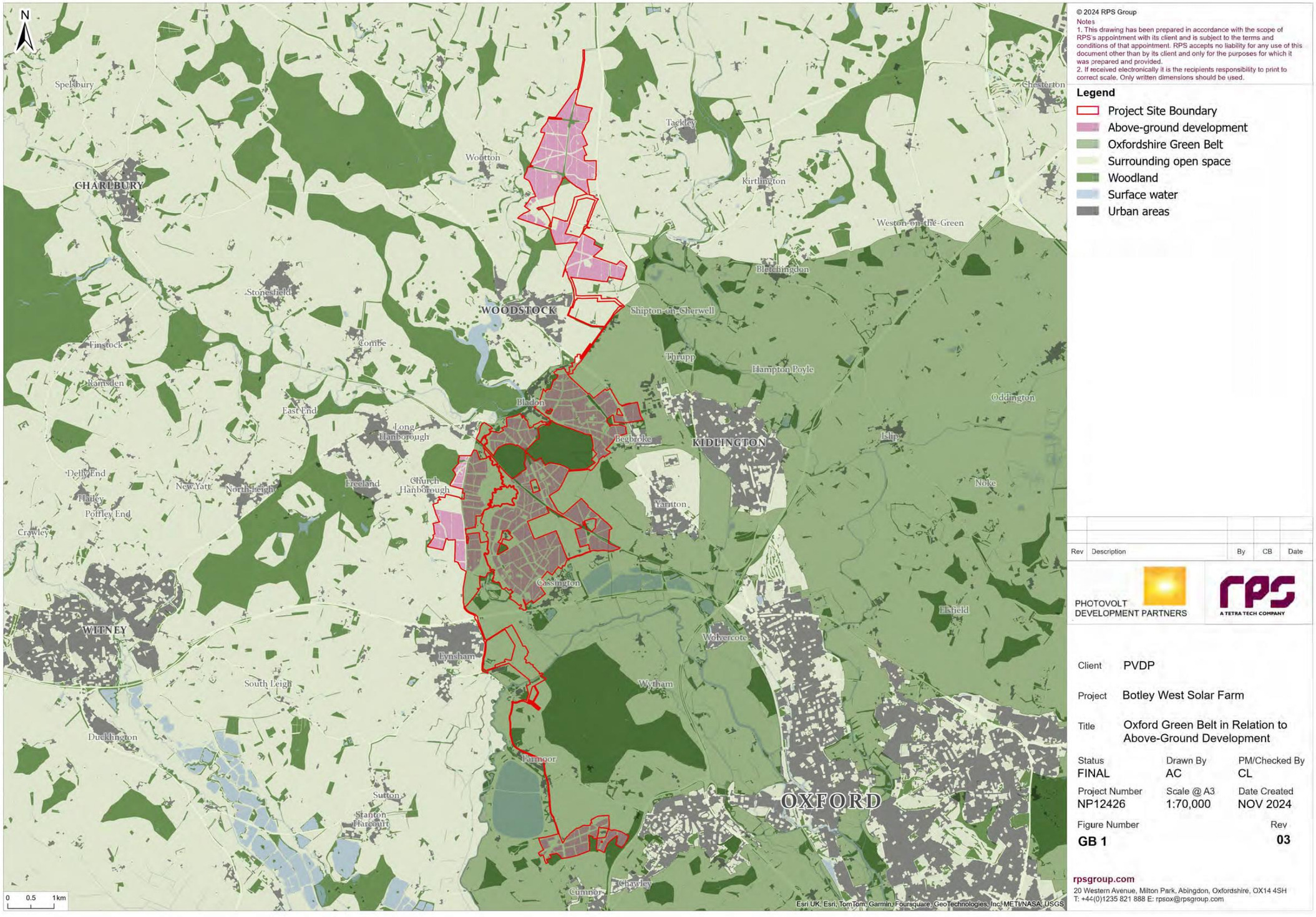
where development within a Green Belt requires very special circumstances to justify development;

..."

8.5.9 It is the Applicants view that there are no factors alone or in combination that would prevent the Examining Authority or the Secretary of State from now reaching the conclusion that the Botley West solar farm has applied the mitigation hierarchy and has reduced adverse effects to the extent that they cannot outweigh the urgent need for this type of infrastructure.

8.5.10 In light of the limited residual environmental effects of the Project, the VSC case made out, and the fact that the Botley West Solar Farm is CNP infrastructure, the Applicant considers the Project is acceptable in this Green Belt location.

FIGURES



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Legend

- Project Site Boundary
- Above-ground development
- Oxfordshire Green Belt
- Surrounding open space
- Woodland
- Surface water
- Urban areas

Rev	Description	By	CB	Date

PHOTOVOLT DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

RPS A TETRA TECH COMPANY

Client	PVDP
Project	Botley West Solar Farm
Title	Oxford Green Belt in Relation to Above-Ground Development

Status	Drawn By	PM/Checked By
FINAL	AC	CL
Project Number	**Scale @ A3**	**Date Created**
NP12426	1:70,000	NOV 2024
Figure Number		**Rev**
GB 1		03

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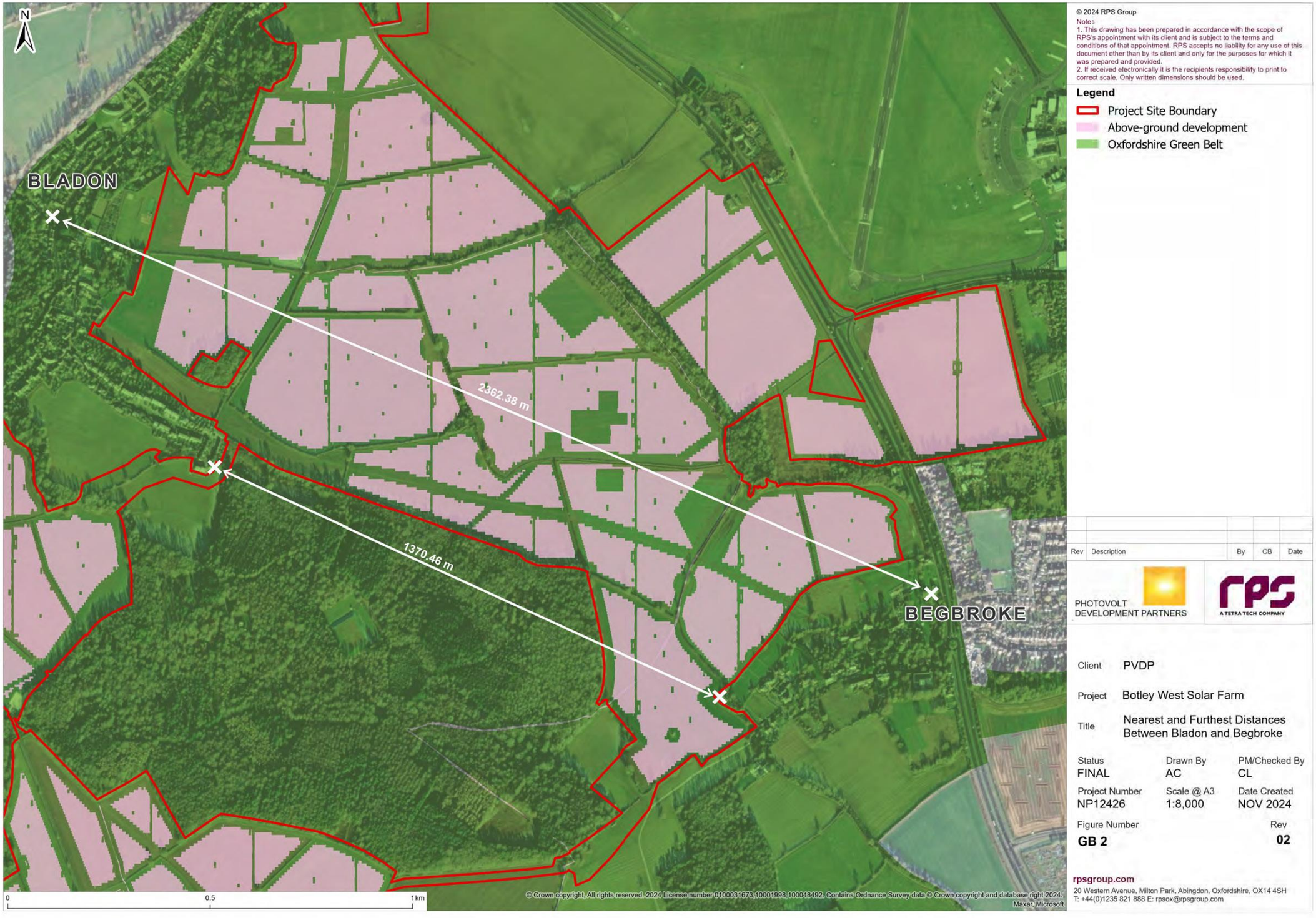

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Legend

- Project Site Boundary
- Above-ground development
- Oxfordshire Green Belt

Rev	Description	By	CB	Date

PHOTOVOLT DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

A TETRA TECH COMPANY

Client	PVDP
Project	Botley West Solar Farm
Title	Nearest and Furthest Distances Between Bladon and Begbroke

Status	Drawn By	PM/Checked By
FINAL	AC	CL
Project Number	**Scale @ A3**	**Date Created**
NP12426	1:8,000	NOV 2024
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GB 2		**02**

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