Botley West Solar Farm

Environmental Statement

Volume 3

Appendix 8.5: Landscape Character Assessment

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Contents

1 Landscape Character Assessment

1.1 Landscape Effects

1.1.1 Based on the Baseline Studies in section 8.6 of the LVIA, the following LCAs are assessed in this section.

- Open limestone wolds LCT (LCA4 Eastern Parks and Valleys);
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale) (LCA4 Eastern Parks and Valleys);
- Floodplain pasture LCT (LCA11 Eynsham Vale);
- Open rolling vale farmland LCT (LCA11 Eynsham Vale);
- Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT (LCA11 Eynsham Vale);
- Floodplain pasture LCT (LCA12 Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fingers); and,
- Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT (LCA12 Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fingers)
- The Floodplain pasture LCT
- Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT

1.1.2 The LCTs, which extend beyond the LVIA Study Area, are areas for which baseline conditions have not been part of the field survey, and therefore, the assessment of landscape effects attributable to the Project in relation to the specific LCT does not comprise those areas which are outside of the LVIA Study Area.

1.2 Construction Phase Landscape Effects

1.2.1 The only receptor likely to experience construction and decommissioning effects that are markedly different to the operational effects is the site itself, which would temporarily (in the short term) take on the character of a construction site. These effects would be very different in nature to those experienced once the Project is complete, but similar in terms of their magnitude and significance. Typical temporary activities would include the movement of vehicles, heavy plant and materials within the site.

1.2.2 The construction and eventual decommissioning of the Project would be short-term, involving the movement of vehicles, localised excavations and the installation of the panels using small-scale construction machinery. Construction works would involve the creation of platforms for substations, construction compounds, stripping and stockpiling material, digging trenches, and installing underground cables. The related earthworks would result in a direct change to the existing landscape fabric. Although the solar panels cover a large area, the supporting frames have a relatively small foundation construction footprint which would have minimal impact on existing retained grassland habitats.

1.2.3 There would the loss of small areas of grassland habitat and hedgerows as the access track is completed and where the invertors, substation and other solar farm infrastructure is installed. The construction works would not include the loss of valuable native woodland or other valuable landscape features within the application boundary. Apart from some bits of hedgerow, as shown on the hedgerow removal plan.

1.2.4 The proposed cable connecting the solar panels to the inverters and substation building would be buried underground, through an excavation. Most of these operations would be carried out concurrently in order to minimise the overall length of the construction programme.

1.2.5 Site restoration would be programmed and carried out to allow restoration of disturbed areas as early as possible. Once operational, the cable would be hidden underground with only inspection covers visible. The existing habitats and features affected by the construction would be reinstated following completion, with no significant landscape effects likely to persist post-construction and therefore operational impacts attributable to the cable corridor have been scoped out.

Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT

1.2.6 The northern section of the Project, which contains the Project Substation and Solar Panel, is located within the Open limestone wolds LCT. The most northern section with solar panels falls within the Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT.

Sensitivity

1.2.7 The Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT are not covered by any statutory landscape designations. This is a medium value local landscape of productive farmland under intensive arable cultivation, valued for large-scale fields, well-drained soils and a sparse network of hedgerows and trees. The network of PRoWs indicates some recreational value.

1.2.8 The surrounding wooded environment and the fields' perimeter vegetation indicate inherent scope in the landscape to mitigate the type of development proposed, therefore reducing its susceptibility to change.

1.2.9 The Project would retain the existing tree and hedgerow field boundaries within and around the northern section of the Project site, with the solar farm development confined to individual field parcels to ensure its integration into the landscape and to provide screening. In addition, the northern section of the Project is located close to the A4260, the scale of the landscape is large, and therefore the susceptibility of these LCTs to the type of low-lying development proposed is considered Low, resulting in **medium-low** sensitivity of the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT within the Study Area.

1.2.10 Low susceptibility to solar farm development has been assessed for the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT in the Renewable Energy And Low Carbon Energy Assessment And Strategy For West Oxfordshire 2016).

Magnitude of change

1.2.11 The Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT are large-scale agricultural landscapes, and the type of construction activities proposed, are not notably discordant in nature within this large-scale and busy agricultural landscape with a dense transport network. Also, the works would not be carried out concurrently across all visible fields. Therefore, the introduction of this type of construction work would result in direct medium-scale change to the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT.

1.2.12 The construction works would not include the loss of valuable native woodland or other valuable landscape features within the application boundary. Apart from some bits of hedgerow, as shown on the hedgerow removal plan (Figure 2.10).

1.2.13 The temporary nature and reversibility of the effects will minimise any perceived impact, which is considered to be of a **low** magnitude upon the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT within the LVIA Study Area.

Significance of Effect

1.2.14 The low magnitude of change upon medium sensitive landscape would result in **moderate/minor** and not significant effects. The nature of these effects would be direct, short-term, localised (reversible) and adverse.

1.2.15 The Substation platform would involve direct and permanent changes to the existing landscape fabric to a limited physical extent.

Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA

1.2.16 A part of the northern section of the Project, which lies next to Banbury Road to the south of the B4027, and to the west of the A260 is within the Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA.

1.2.17 This part of the Project contains the Project Substation, and agricultural land covered by Solar Panels. The 275 kV Cable Corridor extends immediately to the east of Hensington (Woodstock) along Shipton Road and Upper Campsfield Road/A4095, and crosses under Oxford Road / A44 to the south west at Bladon.

Sensitivity

1.2.18 The Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA is not covered by any statutory landscape designations. Due to the development pressure, the area being criss-crossed by roads and services and erosion of vernacular character, medium landscape value has been applied to Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA.

1.2.19 The large-scale fields within dense transport network and fields' perimeter vegetation indicate inherent scope in the landscape to mitigate the type of development proposed, therefore reducing its susceptibility to change.

1.2.20 The Project would retain the existing tree and hedgerow field boundaries within and around this part of the northern section of the Project site, with the solar farm development confined to individual field parcels to ensure its integration into the landscape and to provide screening. The susceptibility of this LCAs to

the type of low-lying development proposed is considered medium-low, resulting in **medium-low** sensitivity overall.

Magnitude of change

1.2.21 The Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA is a large-scale agricultural landscapes, and the type of construction activities proposed are not notably discordant in nature within this large-scale and busy farmland. Therefore, the introduction of this type of construction work would result in direct medium-scale change to the Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA .

1.2.22 The construction works would not include the loss of valuable native woodland or other valuable landscape features within the application boundary. Apart from some bits of hedgerow, as shown on the hedgerow removal plan (Figure 2.10).

1.2.23 The temporary nature and reversibility of the effects will minimise any perceived impact, which is considered to be of a **low-negligible** magnitude upon the Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA within the LVIA Study Area.

Significance of Effect

1.2.24 The low-negligible magnitude of change upon medium-low sensitive landscape would result in **minor** and not significant effects. The nature of these effects would be direct, short-term, localised (reversible) and adverse.

1.2.25 The Substation platform would involve direct and permanent changes to the existing landscape fabric to a limited physical extent.

Floodplain pasture LCT

1.2.26 The Floodplain pasture LCT of the Eynsham Vale LCA comprises the confluence of River Evenlode with River Glyme. The area within the application boundary is allocated for Land Available for Community Food Growing Area and new planting / areas for enhancement (Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.2C).

1.2.27 The Floodplain pasture LCT of the Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fingers LCA would accommodate the works related to the 275kV cable corridor, to the east of Eynsham.

Sensitivity

1.2.28 The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment considers that the unspoilt floodplain pasture is of particularly high quality and sensitive to development.

1.2.29 Medium susceptibility to solar farm development has been assessed for the Floodplain pasture in the Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Energy Assessment and Strategy for West Oxfordshire 2016). However, it is considered to have low susceptibility as it is to be used as a Food Growing Area and for new planting.

1.2.30 On this basis, medium landscape sensitivity has been applied to the Floodplain Pasture LCT in relation to the proposed Landscape Strategy.

Magnitude of change

1.2.31 The Floodplain pasture LCT of the Eynsham Vale LCA is allocated for Community Food Growing Area and new planting / areas for enhancement (Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.2C). Therefore, this area of the Floodplain pasture LCT would not be disturbed by construction works. The establishment of a Landscape Strategy is considered to cause a low magnitude of impact during construction phase.

1.2.32 The proposed cable route would be buried underground, through an excavation. Site restoration would be programmed and carried out to allow restoration of disturbed areas as early as possible. The existing landscape features, ground surface, would be reinstated upon completion.

Significance of Effect

1.2.33 A low magnitude of change upon a medium sensitive landscape would result in **Minor** and not significant effects. The nature of these effects would be direct, short-term, localised and beneficial.

Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT & Open rolling vale farmland LCT

1.2.34 The centre section of the Project, which contains the Project Substation and Solar Panel, is located within the mix of Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open flat vale farmland LCT. The fields to the north of Cassington fall within the Open flat vale farmland LCT.

Sensitivity

1.2.35 The Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open rolling vale farmland LCT are not covered by any statutory landscape designations. This is a medium value landscape of productive farmland under intensive arable cultivation. The network of PRoWs indicates to some recreational value.

1.2.36 The surrounding wooded small landforms (including Pinsley Wood, Burleigh Wood, Bladon Heath, Begbroke Wood) and the fields' perimeter vegetation indicate inherent scope in the landscape to mitigate the type of development proposed, therefore reducing its susceptibility to change.

1.2.37 Medium susceptibility to solar farm development has been assessed for the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Low susceptibility to Open flat vale farmland LCT in the Renewable Energy And Low Carbon Energy Assessment And Strategy For West Oxfordshire 2016).

1.2.38 The Project would retain the existing tree and hedgerow field boundaries within and around the centre section of the Project site, with the solar farm development confined to individual field parcels to ensure its integration into the landscape and to provide screening.

1.2.39 In addition, the woodland/ vegetation in the centre section of the Project extends between the major transport corridors, such as A4422 to the north, A40 to the south and A44 to the east. The railway bisects the Site to the west of the urban areas of Kidlington and Yarnton. A soft rural edge merges with an urban edge and urban influences.

1.2.40 Therefore, the susceptibility of these LCTs to the type of low-lying development proposed is considered low, resulting in **medium-low** sensitivity overall.

Magnitude of change

1.2.41 The Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open flat vale farmland LCT are large-scale agricultural landscapes, and the type of construction activities proposed, are not notably discordant in the context of this large-scale and busy agricultural landscape with a dense transport network. Also, the works would not be carried out concurrently across all visible fields. Therefore, the introduction of this type of construction work would result in direct medium-scale change to the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open rolling vale farmland LCT.

1.2.42 The construction works would not include the loss of valuable native woodland or other valuable landscape features within the application boundary. Apart from some bits of hedgerow, as shown on the hedgerow removal plan (Figure 2.10).

1.2.43 The temporary nature and reversibility of the effects will minimise any perceived impact, which is considered to be of a **low** magnitude upon the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open rolling vale farmland LCT within the LVIA Study Area.

Significance of Effect

1.2.44 The low magnitude of change upon medium sensitive landscape would result in **moderate/minor** and not significant effects. The nature of these effects would be direct, short-term, localised (reversible) and adverse.

1.2.45 The Substation platform would involve direct and permanent changes to the existing landscape fabric to a limited physical extent.

Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT

1.2.46 Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT of the Eynsham Vale LCA extends in between the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open flat vale farmland LCT within the centre section of the Project. Most of this area is allocated for new planting / areas for enhancement (Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.2C). Therefore, this area of the Floodplain pasture LCT would not be adversely affected or disturbed by construction works.

1.2.47 Further to the south of Eynsham, the Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT of the Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fingers LCA would accommodate the larger sections of the cable corridor.

Sensitivity

1.2.48 The Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT is not covered by any statutory landscape designations. This is a distinctively flat and low-lying medium value cultivated land within the floodplain.

1.2.49 Low susceptibility to solar farm development has been assessed for the Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT in the Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Energy Assessment and Strategy for West Oxfordshire 2016).

1.2.50 Therefore, the susceptibility of these LCTs to the type of low-lying development and landscape enhancement proposal is considered low, resulting in **medium-low** sensitivity overall.

Magnitude of change

1.2.51 The proposed cables would be buried underground, through an excavation which requires a corridor of approximately 10 m for access. The wide 275 kV cable corridor area to the east of Eynsham, which crosses the fields is approximately 1400m long and the route from the centre site to the southern site is approximately 9km long.

1.2.52 The construction works would not include the loss of valuable native woodland or other valuable landscape features within the application boundary. Apart from some bits of hedgerow, as shown on the hedgerow removal plan (Figure 2.10).

1.2.53 Therefore, the introduction of this type of construction work would result in direct small-scale change to the Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT.

1.2.54 The temporary nature and reversibility of the effects will minimise any perceived impact, which is considered to be of a **low** magnitude upon the Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT within the LVIA Study Area.

Significance of Effect

1.2.55 The low magnitude of change upon medium-low sensitive landscape would result in **moderate/minor** and not significant effects. The nature of these effects would be direct, short-term, localised (reversible) and adverse.

Vale Edge Slopes/ Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT 9G

1.2.56 The southern section of the Project which contains a Project Main Substation, a National Grid Substation Area and 30 ha which is covered by Solar Panels, are all located within the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT.

Sensitivity

1.2.57 The Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT is not subject to any landscape designations within the LVIA Study Area.

1.2.58 This is a landscape that is actively used for agricultural cultivation as well as for recreation. The landscape is valued for its openness, allowing wide panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. It is a landscape that has been considered particularly sensitive to a large-scale solar farm development by the ‘South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study Landscape Sensitivity Assessment’.

1.2.59 In the locality, sensitivity is considered reduced to high-medium, due to the existing transmission line, urban influence, strong pattern of woodland blocks and hedgerows.

1.2.60 Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT is evaluated as having a **high-medium sensitivity** to the Project.

Magnitude of change

1.2.61 Construction works within the Application Boundary would involve the creation of the Substations' platform, construction compounds, stripping and stockpiling material, digging trenches, and installing ducts and cables. The related earthworks would result in a direct change to the existing landscape fabric. With completion of the works related to the cables the ground will be reinstated. Also, land within temporary construction compounds will be reinstated to its previous use.

1.2.62 The construction works would not include the loss of valuable native woodland or other valuable landscape features within the application boundary.

1.2.63 Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT is a small-scale landscape, and as the development area is located on a lower north facing slope of the landform to the north of the settlement of Cumnor, in between transport routes the type of activities proposed are not notably discordant in nature within this landscape with a dense transport network and blocks of forestry plantation. Therefore, the introduction of this type of construction work would result in direct overall medium-scale change to the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT.

1.2.64 The temporary nature and reversibility of the effects will minimise any perceived impact, which is considered to be of a low magnitude upon the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT within the LVIA Study Area.

Significance of Effect

1.2.65 The low magnitude of change upon a highly sensitive landscape would result in **moderate and significant effects**. The nature of these effects would be direct, short-term, localised (reversible) and adverse.

1.2.66 The Substation platform would involve direct and permanent changes to the existing landscape fabric to a limited physical extent.

River Valley LCT / Farmoor Reservoir Lower Valley LCT 14A

1.2.67 The northernmost edge of the southern section of the Project, including 1.6km cable corridor is located within the River Valley LCT.

Sensitivity

1.2.68 The River Valley LCT is not subject to any landscape designations within the LVIA Study Area.

1.2.69 This is a flat lowland landscape with small woodlands and hedgerows creating an enclosed character. The landscape has limited long-distance views and does not have prominent skylines; however, it is often visible from higher areas of adjacent Oxford West Ridge Hilltops LCA (7B) and Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT (9G). It is a landscape that has been considered highly sensitive to a large-scale solar farm development by the 'South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study Landscape Sensitivity Assessment'.

1.2.70 In the locality, sensitivity is considered reduced to medium, due to the flat topography, urban influence of Farmoor and Botley, the A420, and large-scale fields defined by hedgerows.

1.2.71 River Valley LCT is evaluated as having a **medium sensitivity** to the Project.

Magnitude of change

1.2.72 Construction works within the Application Boundary would involve the construction compounds, stripping and stockpiling material, digging trenches, and installing ducts and cables. The related earthworks would result in a direct change to the existing landscape fabric. With completion of the works related to the cables the ground will be reinstated. Also, land within temporary construction compounds will be reinstated to its previous use.

1.2.73 The construction works would not include the loss of valuable native woodland or other valuable landscape features within the application boundary.

1.2.74 The introduction of this type of construction works, which are equivalent to road works would result in direct overall small-scale change to the River valley LCT.

Significance of Effect

1.2.75 The low-negligible magnitude of impact upon a medium sensitive landscape would result in **Minor and not significant effects**. The nature of these effects would be direct, short-term, localised (reversible) and adverse.

1.3 Operation and Maintenance Phase Landscape Effects

1.3.1 Once operational, the Cables will be hidden underground with only inspection covers visible at the link boxes. The existing habitats and features affected by the construction of the Cable Corridor will be reinstated following completion, with no significant landscape effects likely to persist post-construction. Therefore, operational impacts attributable to the Cable Corridor have been scoped out, including effects upon the Floodplain Pasture LCT.

Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT

1.3.2 The northern section of the Project, which contains the Project Substation, and 247.3 ha covered by Solar Panel, is located within the Open limestone wolds LCT. The most northern section with solar panels falls within the Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT.

Sensitivity

1.3.3 The Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT are not covered by any statutory landscape designations. This is a medium value local landscape of productive farmland under intensive arable cultivation, valued for large-scale fields, well-drained soils and a sparse network of hedgerows and trees. The network of PRoWs indicates some recreational value.

1.3.4 Relatively flat topography, surrounding wooded environment and the fields' perimeter vegetation indicate inherent scope in the landscape to mitigate the type of development proposed, therefore reducing its susceptibility to change.

1.3.5 The Project would retain the existing tree and hedgerow field boundaries within and around the northern section of the Project site, with the solar farm development confined to individual field parcels to ensure its integration into the landscape and to provide screening. In addition, the northern section of the Project is located close to the A4260, the scale of the landscape is large, and therefore the susceptibility of these LCTs to the type of low-lying development

proposed is considered Low, resulting in **medium-low** sensitivity of the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT within the Study Area.

1.3.6 Low susceptibility to solar farm development has been assessed for the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT in the Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Energy Assessment and Strategy for West Oxfordshire 2016).

Magnitude of change

1.3.7 High magnitude of change would occur within the extent of the site, given that there would be a change in the existing landscape character from agricultural fields to a solar farm development. High magnitude effect of the Project on landscape character, where the land use would be notable different from the current agricultural uses, would be contained to within the Site and its immediate proximity, occurring only in a localised extent of the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT in the Medium-term, until such time as the proposed mitigation planting develops and matures.

1.3.8 The Project would introduce several man-made objects across 247.3 ha, comprising solar panels, convertor stations and a project Substation, as described in Table 8.15, into the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT.

1.3.9 Due to the location of the Project Substation, close to the A4290, backed by a mature treebelt to the south, its perceptual imprint and therefore impact on the perceivable character of the landscape would be limited.

1.3.10 The landscape of the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT would retain its distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas. The low-lying nature of the solar panels would not affect the open and exposed character of the landscape. Its semi-enclosed character with visual containment provided by woodland belts would be slightly reinforced by the proposed mitigation planting.

1.3.11 The valuable landscape features would be preserved and enhanced as part of the Landscape Strategy, as described and shown on the Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.1a to 2.4d.

1.3.12 Direct perceivable effects on the landscape character would be predominantly contained within the site and its local context up to approximately 0.5 km. Beyond this distance, perceivable effects on landscape character would rapidly decrease to a Negligible scale (Viewpoint 3, 6, 7, 10, 12). Also, the ZTV is limited and fragmented, as shown in Figure 8.7, 8.8, 8.8a and 8.9 to 8.11. It is judged that the intrinsic and prevailing characteristics of the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT would not be discernibly affected through the introduction of the Project.

Significance of Effect

Year 1

1.3.13 The effects upon completion would be of a **Low** magnitude, resulting in **Moderate/minor** and not significant effects. It is judged that the impact would

be adverse due to the noticeable change from an agricultural landscape to a solar farm development, where visibility would be available.

Year 15

1.3.14 Long-term effects, as proposed mitigation planting matures, further enhancing the existing landscape structure, would reduce to a Low-negligible magnitude, resulting in **Minor** and not significant and **neutral** effects, with perceptual effects reducing in accordance with distance from the site's boundaries, as the proposed planting establishes and filters/screens the Project to a greater degree.

1.3.15 It is considered that the Project would not affect how the landscape character of the Open limestone wolds LCT & Semi-enclosed limestone wolds LCT as a whole would be perceived within the study area. The visible portions of the Project appear as unobtrusive elements within the wide landscape context.

Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA

1.3.16 A part of the northern section of the Project, which lies next to Banbury Road to the south of the B4027, and to the west of the A260 is within the Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA.

1.3.17 This part of the Project contains the Project Substation, and agricultural land covered by Solar Panels.

Sensitivity

1.3.18 The Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA is not covered by any statutory landscape designations. Due to the development pressure, the area being criss-crossed by roads and services and erosion of vernacular character, medium landscape value has been applied to Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA.

1.3.19 The large-scale fields within dense transport network and fields' perimeter vegetation indicate inherent scope in the landscape to mitigate the type of development proposed, therefore reducing its susceptibility to change. Also, a large part of the land to the south west of Kidlington is allocated as Cherwell Strategic Development Sites, which further reduces the susceptibility of the landscape to development.

1.3.20 The Project would retain the existing tree and hedgerow field boundaries within and around this part of the northern section of the Project site, with the solar farm development confined to individual field parcels to ensure its integration into the landscape and to provide screening. The susceptibility of this LCAs to the type of low-lying development proposed is considered Low, resulting in **medium-low** sensitivity overall.

Magnitude of change

1.3.21 High magnitude of change would occur within the extent of the site, given that there would be a change in the existing landscape character from agricultural fields to a solar farm development. High magnitude effect of the Project on landscape character, where the land use would be notable different from the current agricultural uses, would be contained to within the Site and its immediate proximity, occurring only in a localised extent of the Lower Cherwell

Floodplain LCA in the Medium-term, until such time as the proposed mitigation planting develops and matures.

1.3.22 The Project would introduce several man-made objects, comprising solar panels, converter stations and Project Substation, as described in Table 8.15, into the Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA.

1.3.23 Due to the location of the Project Substation, close to Banbury Road, backed by existing field boundary vegetation to the south, its perceptual imprint and therefore impact on the perceivable character of the landscape would be limited.

1.3.24 The landscape of the Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA would retain its rural character.

1.3.25 The valuable landscape features would be preserved and enhanced as part of the Landscape Strategy, as described and shown on the Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.1a to 2.4d.

1.3.26 Direct perceivable effects on the landscape character would be predominantly contained within the site and its local context up to approximately 0.5 km. Beyond this distance, effects on landscape character would rapidly decrease to a Negligible scale (Viewpoint 14, 15). Also, the ZTV is limited and fragmented, as shown in Figure 8.7, 8.8, 8.8a and 8.9 to 8.11. It is judged that the intrinsic and prevailing characteristics of the Lower Cherwell Floodplain LCA would not be discernibly affected through the introduction of the Project.

Significance of Effect

Year 1

1.3.27 The Low-negligible magnitude of change upon medium-low sensitive landscape would result in Minor and not significant effects at Year 1. The nature of these effects would be direct, medium-term, localised and adverse.

Year 15

1.3.28 It is expected that the magnitude of change/ impact would reduce over time as the proposed mitigation planting matures, resulting in Minor/negligible neutral and not significant effects at Year 15.

Floodplain pasture LCT

1.3.29 The Floodplain pasture LCT of the Eynsham Vale LCA comprises the confluence of River Evenlode with River Glyme. The area within the application boundary is allocated for Land Available for Community Food Growing Area and new planting / areas for enhancement (Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.2C).

Sensitivity

1.3.30 The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment considers that the unspoilt floodplain pasture is of particularly high quality and sensitive to development.

1.3.31 Medium susceptibility to solar farm development has been assessed for the Floodplain pasture in the Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Energy Assessment and Strategy for West Oxfordshire 2016). However, it is

considered to have low susceptibility as it is to be used as a Food Growing Area and for new planting.

1.3.32 On this basis, medium landscape sensitivity has been applied to the Floodplain Pasture LCT in relation to the proposed Landscape Strategy.

Magnitude of change

1.3.33 The landscape enhancement would take place over 14ha and is therefore considered a large-scale improvement within a small-scale landscape.

1.3.34 Allocation of the land for Community Food Growing and new planting / areas for enhancement (Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.2C) is considered as a medium-scale improvement.

Significance of Effect

Year 1

1.3.35 The medium magnitude of change upon a medium sensitive landscape would result in **Moderate/minor** and not significant effects. The nature of these effects would be direct, medium-term, and **beneficial.**

Year 15

1.3.36 It is expected that the magnitude of beneficial impact would increase over time as the proposed landscape enhancement is established, resulting in **Moderate** and significant effects at Year 15. The nature of these effects would be direct, long-term, and **beneficial.**

Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT & Open rolling vale farmland LCT

1.3.37 The centre section of the Project, which contains three Project Substations, and Solar Panels, is located within the mix of Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open flat vale farmland LCT. The fields to the north of Cassington fall within the Open rolling vale farmland LCT.

Sensitivity

1.3.38 The Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open flat vale farmland LCT are not covered by any statutory landscape designations. This is a medium value landscape of productive farmland under intensive arable cultivation. The network of PRoWs indicates to some recreational value.

1.3.39 The surrounding wooded small landforms (including Pinsley Wood, Burleigh Wood, Bladon Heath, Begbroke Wood) and the fields' perimeter vegetation indicate inherent scope in the landscape to mitigate the type of development proposed, therefore reducing its susceptibility to change. Also, a large part of the land to the north of Eynsham is allocated as the West Eynsham Strategic Development Area, which further reduces the susceptibility of the landscape to development.

1.3.40 Medium susceptibility to solar farm development has been assessed for the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Low susceptibility to Open flat vale farmland LCT in the Renewable Energy And Low Carbon Energy Assessment And Strategy For West Oxfordshire 2016).

1.3.41 The Project would retain the existing tree and hedgerow field boundaries within and around the centre section of the Project site, with the solar farm development confined to individual field parcels to ensure its integration into the landscape and to provide screening.

1.3.42 In addition, the woodland/ vegetation in the centre section of the Project extends between the major transport corridors, such as A4422 to the north, A40 to the south and A44 to the east. The railway bisects the Site to the west of the urban areas of Kidlington and Yarnton. Soft rural edge merges with urban edge and urban influences.

1.3.43 Therefore, the susceptibility of these LCTs to the type of low-lying development proposed is considered low, resulting in **medium-low** sensitivity overall.

Magnitude of change

1.3.44 High magnitude of change would occur within the extent of the site, given that there would be a change in the existing landscape character from agricultural fields to a solar farm development. High magnitude effect of the Project on landscape character, where the land use would be notable different from the current agricultural uses, would be contained to within the Site and its immediate proximity, occurring only in a localised extent of the Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT and Open rolling vale farmland LCT in the Medium-term, until such time as the proposed mitigation planting develops and matures.

1.3.45 The Project would introduce several man-made objects, comprising solar panels, convertor stations and three project Substations, as described in Table 8.15, into the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open rolling vale farmland LCT.

1.3.46 Due to the location of the Project Substations, one next to the A44/ Woodstock Road, immediately to the south west of London Oxford Airport, and the second close to the Cassington Road railway crossing with the third being next to Lower Road backed by mature vegetation to the south, their perceptual imprint and therefore their impact on the perceivable character of the landscape would be limited.

1.3.47 The landscape of the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open rolling vale farmland LCT would retain its expansiveness with a dominant sky, views of focal features such as the church spire of Hanborough, and a skyline formed by the wooded landform of Burleigh Wood. The low-lying nature of the solar panels would not affect the exposed character of the landscape. The proposed mitigation planting would slightly reinforce its semi-enclosed character with visual containment provided by woodland belts.

1.3.48 The valuable landscape features would be preserved and enhanced as part of the Landscape Strategy, as described and shown on the Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.1a to 2.4d.

1.3.49 Direct perceivable effects on the landscape character would be predominantly contained within the site or in the immediate proximity of the development, and its local context up to approximately 0.5 km. Beyond this distance, effects on landscape character would rapidly decrease to a Negligible scale (Viewpoint 19, 21, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 40). Also, the ZTV is limited and fragmented,

as shown in Figure 8.7, 8.8, 8.8a and 8.9 to 8.11. It is judged that the intrinsic and prevailing characteristics of the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open rolling vale farmland LCT would not be discernibly affected through the introduction of the Project.

Significance of Effect

Year 1

1.3.50 The effects upon completion would be of a Low magnitude, resulting in Moderate/Minor and not significant effects. It is judged that the impact would be adverse due to the noticeable change from an agricultural landscape to a solar farm development, where visibility would be available.

Year 15

1.3.51 Long-term effects, as proposed mitigation planting matures, further enhancing the existing landscape structure, would reduce to a Low-negligible magnitude, resulting in Minor/Negligible and not significant and neutral effects, with effects reducing in accordance with distance from the site's boundaries, as the proposed planting establishes and filters/screens the Project to a greater degree.

1.3.52 It is considered that the Project would not affect how the landscape character of the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open flat vale farmland LCT as a whole would be perceived within the study area. The visible portions of the Project appear as unobtrusive elements within the wide landscape context.

Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT

1.3.53 Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT of the Eynsham Vale LCA extends in between the Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland LCT and Open flat vale farmland LCT within the centre section of the Project. Most of this area is allocated for new planting / areas for enhancement (Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.2C).

Sensitivity

1.3.54 The Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT is not covered by any statutory landscape designations. This is a distinctively flat and low-lying medium value cultivated land within the floodplain.

1.3.55 Susceptibility of the Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland LCT for landscape enhancement and Community use is considered low, resulting in medium-low sensitivity.

Magnitude of change

1.3.56 Allocation of 120ha landof the River Evenlode valley for Community Food Growing and new planting / areas for landscape enhancement (Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.2C) is considered a large-scale improvement. This is considered to generate a medium-high magnitude of impact, as it would comprise almost the entire LCT.

Significance of Effect

Year 1

1.3.57 The medium-high magnitude of change upon a medium-low sensitive landscape would result in **Moderate** and significant effects. The nature of these effects would be direct, medium-term, and **beneficial.**

Year 15

1.3.58 It is expected that the magnitude of beneficial impact would increase over time as the proposed landscape enhancement is established, resulting in **Major/ moderate** and significant effects at Year 15. The nature of these effects would be direct, long-term, and **beneficial.**

Vale Edge Slopes/ Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT 9G

1.3.59 The southern section of the Project, which contains the Project Main Substation and approximately 50 ha covered by Solar Panels, is located within the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT.

Sensitivity

1.3.60 The Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT is not subject to any landscape designations within the LVIA Study Area.

1.3.61 This is a landscape that is actively used for agricultural cultivation as well as for recreation. The landscape is valued for its openness, allowing wide panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. It is a landscape that has been considered highly sensitive to a large-scale solar farm development by the 'South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study Landscape Sensitivity Assessment'.

1.3.62 In the locality, sensitivity is considered reduced to high-medium, due to the existing transmission line, urban influence, strong pattern of woodland blocks and hedgerows.

1.3.63 Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT is evaluated as having a **high-medium sensitivity** to the Project.

Magnitude of change

1.3.64 High magnitude of change would occur within the extent of the site, given that there would be a change in the existing landscape character from agricultural fields to a solar farm development. High magnitude effect of the Project on landscape character, where the land use would be notable different from the current agricultural uses, would be contained to within the Site and its immediate proximity, occurring only in a localised extent of the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT in the Medium-term, until such time as the proposed mitigation planting develops and matures.

1.3.65 The Project would introduce several man-made objects, comprising solar panels, converter stations and Project Substation, as described in Table 8.15, into the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT.

1.3.66 The Substation is located on the bottom slope of Smith Hill, next to Bushy Leaze Lane, within the context of the existing transmission line. It is backed by mature vegetation to the north west, which provides screening in views across the Farmoor Reservoir. Smith Hill Copes to the south provides screening in views from Cumnor Road /B4017. Therefore, the perceptual

imprint of the substation, and therefore its impact on the perceivable character of the landscape, would be limited.

1.3.67 The landscape of the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT would retain its overlooking aspect, important panoramic views to Wytham Woods to the north. The Project would have limited impact on its rural character.

1.3.68 The valuable landscape features would be preserved and enhanced as part of the Landscape Strategy, as described and shown on the Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.1a to 2.4d.

1.3.69 Direct perceivable effects on the landscape character would be predominantly contained within the site or in the immediate proximity of the development, and its local context up to approximately 0.5 km. Beyond this distance, effects on landscape character would rapidly decrease to a Negligible scale (Viewpoint 46, 47, 51, 52, 53). Also, the ZTV is limited and fragmented, as shown in Figure 8.7, 8.8, 8.8a and 8.9 to 8.11. It is judged that the intrinsic and prevailing characteristics of the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT would not be discernibly affected through the introduction of the Project.

Significance of Effect

Year 1

1.3.70 The effects upon completion would be of a Low magnitude, resulting in **Moderate** and significant effects. It is judged that the impact would be adverse due to the noticeable change from an agricultural landscape to one of a solar farm development.

The change in landscape character of the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT would be the most noticeable on the Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT boundary transition to the River Valley LCT.

Year 15

1.3.71 Long-term effects, as proposed mitigation planting matures, further enhancing the existing landscape structure, would reduce to a Low-negligible magnitude, resulting in **Moderate/Minor** and not significant effects, with effects reducing in accordance with distance from the site's boundaries, as the proposed planting establishes and filters/screens the Project to a greater degree.

River Valley LCT / Farmoor Reservoir Lower Valley LCT 14A

1.3.72 The northernmost edge of the southern section of the Project, including 1.6km cable corridor is located within the River Valley LCT.

Sensitivity

1.3.73 The River Valley LCT is not subject to any landscape designations within the LVIA Study Area.

1.3.74 This is a flat lowland landscape with small woodlands and hedgerows creating an enclosed character. The landscape has limited long-distance views and does not have prominent skylines; however, it is often visible from higher areas of adjacent Oxford West Ridge Hilltops LCA (7B) and Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT (9G). It is a landscape that has been considered highly sensitive

to a large-scale solar farm development by the 'South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study Landscape Sensitivity Assessment'.

1.3.75 In the locality, sensitivity is considered reduced to medium, due to the flat topography, urban influence of Farmoor and Botley, the A420, and large-scale fields defined by hedgerows.

1.3.76 River Valley LCT is evaluated as having a **medium sensitivity** to the Project.

Magnitude of change

1.3.77 Although a small portion of the Project would be located within the River Valley LCT, a High magnitude of impact would occur within the extent of the site, given that there would be a change in the existing landscape character from agricultural fields to a solar farm development. High magnitude effect of the Project on landscape character, where the land use would be notable different from the current agricultural uses, would be contained to within the Site and its immediate proximity, occurring only in a localised extent of the River Valley LCT in the Medium-term, until such time as the proposed mitigation planting develops and matures.

1.3.78 The Project would have limited impact on the character of River Valley LCT, as demonstrated by Viewpoints 46, 47, 49, which are within the LCT and also in views from the adjacent Vale Edge Slope LCT, which overlook the River Valley LCT, such as Viewpoints 52, 53 and 54.

1.3.79 The valuable landscape features would be preserved and enhanced as part of the Landscape Strategy, as described and shown on the Illustrative Masterplan Figure 2.1a to 2.4d.

1.3.80 Direct perceivable effects on the landscape character would be predominantly contained within the site or in the immediate proximity of the development, and its local context up to approximately 0.5 km. Beyond this distance, effects on landscape character would rapidly decrease to a Negligible scale (Viewpoint 46, 47, 49) and from elevated more distant views from the neighbouring Northern Vale Edge Slopes LCT .

1.3.81 It is judged that the intrinsic and prevailing characteristics of the River Valley LCT would not be affected through the introduction of the Project.

Significance of Effect

Year 1

1.3.82 The effects upon completion would be of a Low-negligible magnitude, resulting in **Minor** and not significant effects. It is judged that the impact would be adverse due to the noticeable change from an agricultural landscape to one of a solar farm development.

Year 15

1.3.83 Long-term effects, as proposed mitigation planting matures, further enhancing the existing landscape structure, would reduce to a Negligible magnitude, resulting in **Minor/negligible** and not significant effects, with effects reducing in accordance with distance from the site's boundaries, as the proposed planting establishes and filters/screens the Project to a greater degree.