



DEADLINE 7

**SUBMISSION OF THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS COMMISSION FOR
ENGLAND (HISTORIC ENGLAND)**

**APPLICATION BY SOLARFIVE LTD
FOR AN ORDER GRANTING DEVELOPMENT CONSENT FOR THE BOTLEY WEST
SOLAR FARM**

APPLICATION REF: EN010147

OUR REFERENCE: PL00794649

**DEADLINE 7 SUBMISSION
CLOSING STATEMENT: 10 November 2025**

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Historic England is more formally known as the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England. We are the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment, including world heritage.
 - 1.2. It is our duty under the provisions of the National Heritage Act 1983 (as amended) to secure the preservation and enhancement of the historic environment. Historic England also has a role advising Government in relation to World Heritage Sites and the implementation of the 1972 'Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage'.
 - 1.3. Throughout our engagement with the project and during the examination, Historic England has focused on those highly designated heritage assets with the potential to experience significant effects.
 - 1.4. We have therefore advised in relation to Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS), Blenheim Palace (Grade I), Blenheim Palace Registered Park and Garden (Grade I), the scheduled monument Roman Villa (Sansom's Platt), the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Church Hanborough (Grade I), the Church of St Peter, Cassington (Grade I), and the Church of St Michael, Begbroke (Grade II*). We considered that the implications of the proposal on the other listed buildings, conservation areas, non-designated sites and undesignated archaeological matters would be provided by the relevant local planning authorities, including the County Archaeologist.
 - 1.5. This submission is Historic England's closing statement in relation to the proposed development consent order application for a solar farm at Botley West. It sets out our advice and position on the designated heritage assets listed above and also addresses the points raised in the Examining Authority's Rule 17 letter.
 - 1.6. From the outset of the examination, we have recognised the importance of projects such as this for the generation of sustainable energy. However, as the proposal lies within a highly sensitive area for the historic environment, our objective throughout the examination has been to ensure that the historic environment – and those assets that we have particularly focused on – are properly taken into account in the determination of the application and that if consented, the appropriate safeguards have been built into the scheme.
 - 1.7. As such, we have engaged extensively with the Applicant. Through our consideration of the scheme, in discussions with the Applicant on those matters that we raised, and in our submissions to the examination, we identified concerns where further information, detail, clarity or amendments were needed, particularly around how the impacts of the scheme would be avoided or minimised.
 - 1.8. We have now completed our review of the key documents within the application relating to the historic environment and we welcome that these concerns have been broadly addressed. We set out concluding advice in more detail below. If consented, we will continue to advise the Applicant and the relevant authorities in relation to the historic environment as appropriate.
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2. Designated Heritage Assets

- 2.1. As noted above, Historic England has focused on the following designated heritage assets - Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS), Blenheim Palace (Grade I), Blenheim Palace Registered Park and Garden (Grade I), the scheduled monument Roman Villa (Sansom's Platt), the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Church Hanborough (Grade I), Church of St Peter, Cassington (Grade I), and the Church of St Michael, Begbroke (Grade II*). These will now be dealt with in turn.

Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS) Blenheim Palace, and Blenheim Palace Registered Park and Garden

- 2.2. Blenheim Palace was conceived as a public 'memorial' in gratitude to John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, following his victory over the French army at Blenheim in 1704. Designed by John Vanbrugh in the Oxfordshire countryside, the house is one of the finest examples of English Baroque architecture and is set within a large 18th century landscape laid out originally by Henry Wise and Vanbrugh. Mid-18th century alterations by Lancelot Brown are acknowledged as one of the best examples of a naturalistic landscape design for which Brown was best known.
- 2.3. The ensemble of the Palace with its designed landscape and stone wall boundary are inextricably linked and as a whole entity form a pre-eminent feature in the landscape. The "property" known as Blenheim Palace was inscribed by UNESCO on the World Heritage List in 1987. The boundary of the WHS almost completely follows the boundary of the Blenheim Palace Grade I Registered Park and Garden with the Grade I listed Blenheim Palace at the centre. As noted in our response to the ExA first set of questions (**REP2-056**) there is no buffer zone for the World Heritage Site and none is currently proposed.
- 2.4. The Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and significance of Blenheim Palace WHS is described in our Written Representations. The contribution of the development site to the setting of the WHS is also described (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.2-5.38**).
- 2.5. The OUV of a site is comprised of three pillars all of which must be met for a site's inscription. A site must: meet at least one of the selection criteria; meet required standards of authenticity and integrity; have proper management arrangements in place.
- 2.6. Our Written Representation refers to the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV). This document, extracts of which are in our Written Representation, sets out: how the property met the criteria for inscription (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.5**); the property's integrity and authenticity at the time of inscription (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.6-5.9**); and its protection and management requirements (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.10- 5.11**).
- 2.7. Our Written Representation also refers to the WHS Management Plan (2017), a key document for the protection and management of the WHS (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.11**). Of particular importance are the property's attributes which are summarised from the text of the SOUV within the WHS Management Plan. These convey its OUV and form the basis against which any impact to that OUV would be assessed. In total 7 attributes have been defined in the WHS Management Plan summarising how its OUV is conveyed (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.12**).
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- 2.8. Our Written Representation (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.12-5.13**) describes the contribution made by the setting of Blenheim Palace to the property's attributes of OUV. This is as follows:
- 2.9. **Attribute 1** - It remains the home of the same aristocratic family, the successive Dukes of Marlborough, for whom it was built;
- 2.10. **Attribute 4** - The surviving special relationship between the important architectural elements and their landscape setting are an exceptional piece of design and, together are greater than the sum of their parts;
- 2.11. **Attribute 5** - The UK has by far the greatest concentration of veteran trees in northern Europe and within High Park, which sits in the south-west section of Blenheim Park, is one of the finest areas of ancient oak-dominated woodland in the country. It is partially descended from the ancient Wychwood Forest, a 12th century deer park and an Anglo Saxon chase;
- 2.12. **Attribute 7** - The park retains a complete, 18th century enclosing stone wall which protects its integrity, but views into and out of the site still provide key linkages between Blenheim Palace and the traditional English countryside and villages surrounding it.
- 2.13. For attributes 1, 4 and 5 our Written Representation considered that these convey "some associative value that could be drawn from the property's setting." (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.13**).
- 2.14. Specifically for Attribute 1, we consider that the associative value is both the influence of the first and successive dukes on the evolution of landscape **and** use to support the running of the estate (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.13**).
- 2.15. For Attribute 4, while we note that the relationship between the architectural elements and landscape is focused within the grounds, we highlight some exceptions (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.13**). In our view associative value derives from the designed and borrowed aspects from outside the park that form an element of the landscape design. This includes the use of the tower of the Church of St Martin, Bladon as an eyecatcher in views from within the park.
- 2.16. For Attribute 5, land within the application site was once part of the ancient Wychwood Forest. It therefore has an association with ancient woodland within the WHS that descends from the same ancient Wychwood Forest (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.13**).
- 2.17. For attribute 7, this specifically mentions the visual relationship with the property's setting "views into and out of the site" (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.12**) with reference to "traditional English countryside and villages surrounding it". This infers a visual relationship that is about looking out from and back towards the WHS, experiencing it within its traditional countryside setting.
- 2.18. Our Written Representations also note that there is a strong interrelationship between the three key designations at Blenheim: the WHS, the Grade I listed Blenheim Palace and the Grade I Registered Park and Garden, Blenheim Palace (**REP1086 paragraph 5.4**). It notes that "the significance of the palace and RPG are drawn out in the detailed Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV)" (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.4**).
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Management of change

- 2.19. The UK is a State Party to the **1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage** (the World Heritage Convention). This sets out the duties of States Parties including their role in protecting, conserving, presenting and transmitting them to future generations (**REP1-086 paragraph 4.3**).
- 2.20. Processes and procedures that a State Party should follow to meet the obligations of the World Heritage Convention are set out in the **UNESCO Operational Guidelines (REP1-086 paragraph 4.4)**. This includes obligations for the management of change to a WHS or its setting.
- 2.21. In practice, the obligations are met through relevant legislation, national and local planning policies and with management plans, all of which should contribute to sustaining the three pillars of a WHS' OUV: How it meets the criteria for inscription, integrity and authenticity, and the requirements for protection and management.
- 2.22. The legislative context for managing change is the Planning Act 2008 (**REP1-086 paragraph 4.1**), while the key policy context is the National Policy Statement for Energy EN-1 (**REP1-086 paragraph 4.2**).
- 2.23. The Blenheim Palace WHS Management Plan, 2017 is a material consideration of the application (**REP1-06 paragraphs 4.6-4.7**). This includes a Setting Study which aims to interpret the setting of the WHS and to provide guidance on ways that the setting contributes to OUV.

Impact of the proposal on significance and OUV and recommendations – Written Representations

- 2.24. Historic England's consideration of impact on significance and OUV was set out at paragraphs 5.39 - 5.47 of our Written Representations (**REP1-086**). Our assessment included the construction and decommissioning phase (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.46**) and when the solar panels would be in place (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.42**).
- 2.25. We concluded that, based on the information provided, the northern and southern sections of the development would not affect the attributes of OUV of the Blenheim Palace WHS or the significance of Blenheim Palace and its RPG (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.40**).
- 2.26. However, we considered that the appearance of large-scale solar arrays in field parcels 2.1, 2.2, 2.5 and 2.20-2.26, within the central section of the development, would change the character of the landscape around the WHS and the ensemble of the Palace and RPG. We noted that the "way that views from surrounding fields help provide an understanding of the park's context (which contributes to Attribute 7) would be eroded" (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.42**).
- 2.27. We also noted that to a lesser degree, the visibility would "also affect the historic and functional relationship which relates to Attribute 1". In our view while the change of use would 'signal' a change in how the land supports the estate, this change would still support maintenance of the property's OUV. We therefore concluded that the functional
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relationship between land and estate that helps convey Attribute 1 would be maintained (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.43**).

- 2.28. We considered it unlikely that the construction and decommissioning phase would impact the OUV and significance of Blenheim but recommended submission of further information, e.g. about temporary lighting or visible construction elements, to enable a fully informed view (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.46**). We recommended specific consideration of an unreferenced field between field parcels 2.25 and 2.8 because the unreferenced field parcel has some intervisibility with the WHS (as the backdrop of a designed view towards the Church of St Martin, Bladon).
- 2.29. Our conclusion on the impact and harm was expressed in NPS terms as a modest level of less than substantial harm to the significance and OUV of the Blenheim Palace WHS, Blenheim Palace and its RPG (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.47**).
- 2.30. Our Written Representation recommendations were:
- To consider the contribution of Attributes 1, 4 and 5 in the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.49**).
 - To assess whether Attribute 4 would be impacted by the proposals (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.50**).
 - To be clearer in the HIA about which land parcels contribute to and which land parcels with panels would harm Attribute 7 (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.51**).
 - To remove solar panels from fields 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 2.20-2.26 to (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.56**).

Current position

- 2.31. During the examination we have continued discussions with the Applicant and made submissions on the various issues relating to the WHS. The following sets out these matters in turn.
- a) Change Request
- 2.32. On 12 September 2025, the Applicant submitted Change Request 2, which comprised 11 Changes to the proposal. Some of these changes related to discussions held with the Applicant. The changes we considered were:
- change 1: Reduction in Order Limits boundary to reduce the solar installation area southwest of Bladon, and removal of solar arrays on land east of Bladon and north of Heath Lane; and
 - change 2: Reduction in Order Limits boundary to reduce the solar installation area near to Oxford Airport.
- 2.33. In our Deadline 6 response (paragraph 2.5) we welcomed the changes brought forward in Change Request 2 (**REP6-092**).
- 2.34. We concluded that the removal of panels (change 1) appears to have minimised harm to OUV and avoided intervisibility with the WHS (**REP6-092 paragraph 2.5**). This conclusion was supported by additional photomontages (**CR2-059**) submitted in the Change 2 Request. Our Deadline 6 response (**REP6-092 paragraph 6.1**) noted that the
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submission “confirms solar arrays would not be visible from within the World Heritage Site or from the fields we have identified as those which have a strong intervisibility and connection to the World Heritage Site.” The recommendation made in **REP1-086 paragraph 5.56** has therefore been addressed.

- 2.35. We also conclude that the removal of panels (change 1) appears to have minimised harm to the significance of the Grade I Blenheim Palace and Grade I Registered Park.
- 2.36. As part of Change Request 2, revised documentation was submitted and this included the Outline Code of Construction Practice. In reviewing this, we considered that any impacts from the construction and decommissioning phases (e.g. noise and lighting) from within the WHS would be minimal (**REP6-092 paragraph 6.8**) and that measures set out in the Outline Code of Construction Practice (**CR2-045; 1.8.15 - 1.8.17**) would address the concern we raised in our Written Representations (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.46**), and would be secured through the DCO.

b) Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)

- 2.37. For the duration of the examination, we have advised the Applicant about the HIA. A HIA is considered by UNESCO to be essential for all interventions to, and a pre-requisite for development projects planned for implementation within or around a World Heritage property (Operational Guidelines paragraphs 110 and 118bis).
- 2.38. It can best be employed as a tool to inform the evolution of a proposal from its earliest stages of design to identify how negative impacts on significance might be avoided or minimised, and positive enhancements maximised.
- 2.39. HIA is intended to be an iterative process. We therefore welcomed the Applicant’s revisions during the examination. However, we have consistently reached different conclusions to the Applicant about the attributes potentially affected by the proposed development (**REP6-092 paragraph 2.6**).
- 2.40. Historic England has identified that there is potential for several of the property’s attributes to be affected by the proposed scheme as explained in our Written Representations (e.g. **REP1-086 paragraphs 5.12-13, 5.24-5.31**), including in relation to the ability to appreciate them from within the property’s setting.
- 2.41. In contrast, the HIA (**CR2-036 – rev 1 clean**) concludes that only attribute 7 has potential to be affected. The assessments at Table 1.1 do not, in our view, provide a robust basis on which to scope out the remaining attributes of OUV from more detailed assessment due to the need for more nuanced explanations of how the property’s setting contributes to each of those attributes. The remainder of the HIA (including Table 1.2) is therefore focused almost exclusively on assessment in relation to the ‘traditional English countryside’ which surrounds the property. There is limited nuanced discussion in the narrative text in the HIA related to attributes of OUV to provide the background to the summarised assessments in Table 1.2.
- 2.42. The HIA is also not entirely consistent in its assessment. It concludes that there would be ‘no change’ to these attributes, despite the change that the proposal would bring within the property’s setting, and consequently no impact. However, despite this it has assessed the decommissioning and removal of the scheme as having a minor positive impact.
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- 2.43. Figure 1.3 does not explain how the sensitivity of each landscape parcel has been assessed in relation to the OUV of the WHS. Ideally the working results behind this assessment would demonstrate analysis related to the attributes, authenticity and integrity of OUV. The Applicant's conclusions regarding the contribution made by the setting of the World Heritage property to its OUV will necessarily have informed this exercise and its results.
- 2.44. Historic England advised of the need for the HIA to address the concerns raised in the initial ICOMOS International Technical Review (March 2024). The second Technical Review from ICOMOS International (August 2025) was also shared for Deadline 4 and we would expect the HIA to respond to its recommendations in detail. However, it has not responded in detail to the specific concerns raised by ICOMOS in those reports regarding the potential impact of the proposals. A third Technical Review from ICOMOS International has now been shared.
- 2.45. The HIA refers to ICOMOS International's recommendation in its August 2025 Technical Review that the State Party should "Undertake a cumulative impact assessment that considers the Botley West Solar Farm alongside other approved or proposed developments in the setting, including recent and planned urban expansions." It concludes that this is aimed at the State Party and not at the Applicant.
- 2.46. All ICOMOS International advice is directed to the State Party. In England the State Party ensures processes are in place to ensure that such assessments are undertaken, which the Planning System provides. The UK State Party devolves responsibility for actions required to manage the World Heritage in its territory in different ways. Some of these are undertaken through the planning process.
- 2.47. Under the planning process the applicant is required to submit a proportionate level of detail to the importance of the heritage assets and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance (NPS EN-1 5.9.10). It therefore remains the responsibility of applicants to bring forward robust cumulative impacts assessments.

c) Historic England and Cumulative Impact

- 2.48. UNESCO is clear in its guidance that when an impact on OUV is assessed, this must be assessed against OUV as defined at the point of inscription. This means with reference principally to the SOUV adopted, in this case retrospectively, in 2013, supported by the information included in the nomination file for the property. The HIA does not assess the cumulative impact of the proposed scheme together with other change that has occurred within the setting of the property, in line with guidance from UNESCO.
- 2.49. Two methodologies are being employed to assess cumulative impact. These are designed to be used in different ways. ICOMOS International, Historic England and the Applicant have employed UNESCO's 2022 methodology in relation to the WHS. The Applicant has also followed guidance issued by the Planning Inspectorate in 2024 (Planning Inspectorate Guidance: Nationally significant Infrastructure Projects: Advice on Cumulative Effects Assessment).
- 2.50. The HIA suggests that the CEA methodology for cumulative assessment impact takes precedence over that recommended by UNESCO in relation to conducting HIA in World
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Heritage contexts. The HIA is a standalone document in the suite of documents considering the historic environment in relation to the proposed scheme. In our view it is entirely appropriate for the HIA to apply a specific methodology in relation to the WHS in isolation. These results can still inform the conclusions of the Environmental Statement as a whole.

- 2.51. Our Written Representations noted that “the proposals may contribute to a cumulative change in the setting of the property as a result of other developments coming forward in the vicinity of the property” (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.55**).
- 2.52. During the course of the examination, the question of cumulative impact has been raised. In our response to the ExA Written Question 2.6.7 (**REP4-066**), we set out our approach to this assessment using The Setting of Heritage Assets Historic Environment Good Practice Advice Note (GPA3).
- 2.53. We specifically noted that “cumulative assessment focuses on the impact that multiple developments would have on the significance of a single heritage asset” (page 4 of **REP4-066**). This approach takes past change which may have compromised significance into account, alongside considering whether additional change will further detract from, or might enhance, that significance.
- 2.54. We went on to say “cumulative impact assessment does not involve aggregating impacts, such as the impact of a single scheme on the significance of multiple different heritage assets” (**REP4-066**).

d) ICOMOS International Technical Review

- 2.55. ICOMOS International has completed three Technical Reviews in its role as an Advisory Body to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The first was completed in February 2024 prior to the submission of the DCO for examination, the second in August 2025 during the examination and a third Technical Review has now also been provided (submitted for Deadline 7). All three have been submitted to the Examining Authority for their consideration.
 - 2.56. In our Deadline 6 response (**REP6-092 paragraph 2.2**) we noted that Historic England was in dialogue with ICOMOS International about their second Technical Review and that we would provide any further relevant correspondence to the Examining Authority. Our Deadline 6 (**REP6-092 2.2-2.3**) commented on the second Technical Review.
 - 2.57. ICOMOS’ third Technical Review has now been shared with the Examining Authority. Historic England has reflected further on all of the ICOMOS Technical Reviews and considers that both Historic England and ICOMOS are in agreement that there is an impact.
 - 2.58. Historic England has continued to engage constructively with the Applicant particularly on matters related to avoiding or minimising harm and ensuring that the laying of cabling does not impact the WHS in any significant way.
 - 2.59. Historic England remains aware of the difference of its own professional judgement to that of ICOMOS International. Our own assessment followed the approach set out by UNESCO in Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context. Our assessment also takes account of how the application site contributes to the
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significance and experience of the WHS, Grade I listed palace and registered park and garden in accordance with GPA3.

- 2.60. Historic England has been in dialogue with ICOMOS International regarding their assessment of the level of harm to the OUV of the WHS. The State Party has also requested further clarification from ICOMOS following their Technical Review. In response ICOMOS has produced a third Technical Review and this has been shared with the Examining Authority for Deadline 7. The Examining Authority will need to carefully consider all of the ICOMOS International Technical Reviews in their determination of this application.
- 2.61. We have approached this application in relation to the English Planning System with reference to international policy and guidance. With this in mind, we have sought to be consistent in our approach to be holistic and appropriate and to do our best to ensure that what is proposed takes into account the OUV. Ultimately it will be for the Examining Authority to determine based on the evidence submitted.

Other Designated Heritage Assets

- 2.62. The proposed development is also within the setting of a number of churches and three scheduled monuments, including the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt. We have focused our advice on the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt and 3 churches. The 3 churches are the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Church Hanborough, grade I, the Church of St Peter, Cassington, grade I and Church of St Michael, Begbroke, grade II*.

The Roman Villa Scheduled Monument (Sansom's Platt)

- 2.63. Although not within the Order Limits, the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt is adjacent to it and the proposal is in its setting. Scheduled as a Roman Villa, the Roman site at Sansom's Platt is accepted to be a small Roman town associated with the Roman road Akeman Street (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.59**). Further details of the significance of the scheduled monument, including the contribution of setting to significance and the impact of the proposed development are set out in paragraphs 5.60-5.67 of **REP1-086**.
- 2.64. In summary we considered that the proposal would harm the scheduled monument due to the impact it would have on the appreciation of "the rural surrounds of the Roman settlement" (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.67**). We concluded that the impact might be considered low adverse, i.e. slightly harmed. We considered that the impact would be greater than the negligible adverse impact set out in the Environmental Statement (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.67**).
- 2.65. Our Written Representations also noted that the geophysical survey that had been submitted with the application showed that the settlement might extend beyond the scheduled area in all directions. Trial trenching would be required to confirm the extent of the Roman settlement.
- 2.66. We also noted that the area of archaeological remains beyond the scheduled area could be of national importance and there was a need for the Applicant to submit the results of the trial trenching in the form of evaluation reports of trial trenching to confirm this (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.69**).
- 2.67. We concluded that if remains of national importance were found beyond the boundary of the scheduled area, these might be subject to the same policies as scheduled
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monuments (National Policy Statement (NPS) EN-1 5.9.6) and in those circumstances, it might be necessary to amend the buffer proposed around the scheduled monument (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.70**).

- 2.68. During the examination, various issues were raised regarding archaeology. As noted in our response to the first Examining Authorities questions (**REP2-056**) we considered that Oxford County Council Archaeological Services were best placed to respond to issues relating to the outline written scheme of investigation. We noted that we did not have any concerns about the designated archaeological sites known as the Rectangular Earthworks, Hensington, and the Blenheim Villa and Associated field system, and our focus was on Sansom's Platt. We also noted that we welcomed the proposed submission of the trial trenching reports and that we would provide comments as soon as we were able to following its submission.
- 2.69. This remained our position at Deadlines 3 and 4 while we awaited the reports, and we considered that to properly inform decision making in respect of the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt, the report should be provided as soon possible (**REP4 page 6**).
- 2.70. However, as there remained a delay in the submission of the evaluation reports to the examination, our Deadline 5 responses provided two constructive options to help resolve our outstanding concerns in respect of the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt (i.e. the suitability of the buffer which was proposed around the scheduled monument).
- 2.71. These options were either to provide Historic England with the evaluation report for the trenches around Sansom's Platt (as opposed to the entire order limits area) or to remove solar panels entirely from fields 1.12 and 1.13 and partly from fields 1.11 and 1.14 (**REP5-098 paragraph 2.4**).
- 2.72. We therefore welcomed sight of the evaluation reports which were subsequently provided to Historic England on Tuesday 14 October 2025. Our review of those reports focused on the results relating to the fields immediately surrounding the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt (fields 1.11 – 1.14). We understand that the County Archaeologist will be considering the evaluation reports in line with their comments to date.
- 2.73. It was clear from the reports that significant archaeological remains extended beyond the current scheduled area. The reports also confirmed that the geophysical survey results were a reasonably reliable indicator of the presence of buried remains. The archaeological remains in the wider area were mostly associated with either cremations or inhumations of the Roman period, which in that period were usually located outside settlement boundaries.
- 2.74. Within fields 1.11, 1.12 and 1.14, the archaeological remains are located within the area of Work No.5 (sensitive archaeological site protection and management), and in our view this proposed buffer is adequate. In field 1.13, significant remains were identified belonging to a rectangular building which seems to have an association with burials, and some archaeological remains actually lay within the area of Works 1 and 6.
- 2.75. The remains in field 1.13 clearly had a visual relationship with the settlement itself, and field 1.13 is also prominent when viewed from the east from Akeman Street. For these reasons we recommended to the Applicant that Works 1, 6 and 8 be removed from this field and that the whole of the field should be covered by Work 5 (sensitive archaeological site protection and management).
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- 2.76. In discussion with the Applicant prior to the submission of this closing submission for Deadline 7, the Applicant has agreed to submit an updated Works Plans which removes Works 1, 6 and 8 from field 1.13. This agreed position is recorded in the Statement of Common Ground.
- 2.77. Our position therefore is that provided the updated Works Plans submitted by the Applicant at Deadline 7 is in line with our recommendation to remove solar panels from field 1.13, Historic England is content that the impact to the monument, based on our evolved understanding of associated buried remains, has been adequately addressed. Overall, our view is that the impact remains low adverse.

Church of St Peter and St Paul, Church Hanborough

- 2.78. Our advice on the significance of the Church of St Peter and St Paul including the contribution of setting to significance, is set out in our Written Representations. This concludes that the church is sited on high ground with a prominent spire that gives it landmark qualities in views from surrounding fields, including the site. These views contribute to an appreciation and understanding of the rural origins of the church and its close connection with surrounding landscape (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.71-5.72**).
- 2.79. In our Written Representations we concluded that the impact of the scheme would be low adverse and in NPS terms modest harm to the significance of the church (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.75**). This conclusion differed from the Applicant who considered the impact would be negligible.
- 2.80. We concluded that there would be clear intervisibility between the development and the church. While this would not impact on the spire's landmark qualities, it would erode the character of the church in a traditional open agricultural setting (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.73**).
- 2.81. Our Written Representations acknowledged that the Applicant proposed landscape screening as mitigation. In our view this was appropriate mitigation (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.76**).
- 2.82. Additional information in the setting assessment was submitted at Deadline 2 and in our Deadline 3 response we welcomed this (**REP3-081 2.4**) but concluded the additional information did not change our view on the impact and level of harm. This remains as described in our Written Representations (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.75**) and is low adverse in EIA terms and modest harm in NPS terms.

Church of St Peter, Cassington

- 2.83. The church of St Peter, Cassington is principally significant as a medieval church. It sits in a landscape depression and its spire is not seen against a clear sky but instead against a backdrop of agricultural fields. The visual relationship between the landscape and church contributes to an understanding of the church's rural origins and its close connection to the landscape (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.78-5.79**).
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- 2.84. Our Written Representations noted the proposed development would change the character of the fields visible in views of the church spire, from agricultural to semi-industrial (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.80**). This would make it slightly more difficult to appreciate the spire's silhouette disrupting its landmark qualities.
- 2.85. We concluded that the impact would be greater than negligible adverse impact identified by the Applicant (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.81**). In our view the impact would be low adverse and in NPS terms amount to modest harm to the significance of the church (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.82**).
- 2.86. We considered the proposed landscape screening was appropriate mitigation (**REP1-086 paragraph 5.83**).
- 2.87. Additional information for the setting assessment was submitted at Deadline 2 and in our Deadline 3 response (**REP3-081 paragraph 2.5**) we welcomed this but concluded this did not change our view on the impact and level of harm. This remains as described in our Written Representations (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.80-5.82**). That impact remains low adverse and in NPS terms modest harm to the significance of the church.

Church of St Michael, Begbroke

- 2.88. Our Written Representations describe the significance of the Church of St Michael and the contribution of setting to significance. The small late 12th century church including its distinctive 14th century tower with saddleback roof is best appreciated in a view along St Michael Lane but is also appreciable from the application site to the north of the church. These views provide an appreciation of the church's rural origins. From within the fields, the church is also visible alongside the former St Philips Priory and church (both Grade II) and altogether these buildings are a focal point in the landscape (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.85-5.87**).
- 2.89. We concluded that the proposed development would, in views from the site, change the experience of the church from a rural character to one that is semi-industrial. This would erode the ability to experience the church in a traditional agricultural context (**REP1-086 5.88**).
- 2.90. We differed from the Applicant in our conclusion on the impact. We considered the impact would be higher than the negligible adverse indicated by the Applicant and would be low adverse and in NPS terms a modest level of harm (**REP1-086 paragraphs 5.89-5.90**).
- 2.91. We recommended expanding the width of the Public Rights of Way (PROW's) to reduce harm by retaining a greater sense of the church's open countryside setting (**REP1-086 5.91**).
- 2.92. At Deadline 2 additional photomontages were submitted relating to the Church of St Michael. We considered that these demonstrated the potential impact of the scheme on the church's rural setting to the west. This reinforced our view that the potential level of harm to the significance of the Church of St Michael Begbroke would be a modest level of harm through development in its setting. (**REP3-081 paragraphs 2.25-2.26**).
- 2.93. As noted above, the Applicant has submitted Change request 2, and of the 11 changes proposed, change 2 proposed the removal of solar panels from fields close to Oxford Airport which lies to the north of the Church of St Michael.
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- 2.94. We reviewed this information and noted in our Deadline 6 submission response noted that the removal of some solar panels from these fields would slightly reduce the harm. However, we considered that the remaining solar panels would still erode an appreciation of the countryside setting afforded to the church in views from within the site (**REP6-092 paragraphs 6.9-6.10**).
- 2.95. An updated version of the Botley West Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan Rev 5 was also submitted as part of the Change 2 request (**CR2-051**). This contained references to the establishment of greenways around existing PROW's (**CR2-051 paragraph 7.2.5**). These are shown indicatively on Indicative Greenway Plan (**CR2-051**).
- 2.96. We welcome this additional information and note that final decisions about greenways will be dealt with in the detailed design stage. While the greenways are an improvement on the PROW's, in that the indicative plans indicate a slightly deeper green buffer either side of a PROW, this small change would not minimise harm in any meaningful way. Therefore, this is not sufficient to change the conclusion we have reached on the level of harm that would be caused to the church of St Michael, Begbroke.

3. Draft Development Consent Order

- 3.1. In our Written Representations (**REP1-086 paragraph 7.3**) we stated that "It may be helpful if there was scope for consultation with Historic England on certain matters (detailed design for the lighting, fencing and landscape in the setting to highly designated heritage assets)..." and that this should be captured in the requirements set out in Schedule 2 to the DCO. These points have been discussed and referred to in our various submissions during the examination as to the details that would be submitted and how this would be secured.
- 3.2. The Applicant in their Deadline 2 response (**REP2- 027**) said they were happy to consider Historic England being a named consultee. We subsequently discussed with the Applicant, changes that might be made in relation to the Requirements set out in the draft DCO for Historic England to be a named consultee.
- 3.3. Historic England asked for inclusion as a named consultee within certain Requirements 5, 6, 8 and 12 of Schedule 2 of the DCO, which reflected the focus on the designated heritage assets that we had highlighted in our Written Representations and our subsequent submissions. These Requirements were considered to deal with the issues we had raised: Requirement 5 (detailed design approval); Requirement 6 (landscape and ecology management); Requirement 8 (fencing and other means of enclosure); and Requirement 12 (operational management plan). This was agreed to and discussion then turned to the appropriate wording to be incorporated into the DCO.
- 3.4. Those discussions regarding the proposed wording for inclusion in the DCO were positive, with the final wording to be agreed once we had reviewed the trial trenching reports and our assessment in relation to implications for Sansom's Platt.
- 3.5. In the discussions, as noted above, we understand that the Applicant will remove all solar pv panels and associated infrastructure proposed in field 1.13. The Applicants are proposing to update the relevant Works Plans to reflect this and submit them at Deadline 7. This is welcomed and in expectation of this we are therefore in agreement with the
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wording set out in Schedule 2 of the DCO for Historic England to be a named consulted in Requirements 5, 6, 8 and 12.

- 3.6. The wording that has been agreed is as follows for each of the above requirements is as follows – *“the approval from the relevant planning authority or relevant planning authorities (as appropriate) pursuant to sub-paragraph (1) is to be in consultation with Historic England insofar as it relates to: (a) Work No. 5; or (b) any parts of Work Nos. 6 or 8 within the setting of either the World Heritage Site, the Church of St Peter and St Paul (Church Hanborough), the Church of St Peter (Cassington) or the Church of St Michael (Begbroke).”*

Statement of Common Ground (SOCG)

- 3.7. We have had constructive discussions with the Applicant for the duration of the examination about the SOCG. These have now been concluded and a final draft of the SOCG will be submitted by the Applicant at Deadline 7. Historic England has reached broad agreement with the Applicant on all the matters covered by the SOCG.

4. Response to Rule 17 notification

- 4.1. The Examining Authority issued a Rule 17 letter on 23 October 2025 requesting further information on multiple issues. Historic England was asked four questions in the Rule 17 letter. These relate to archaeology (paragraphs 11 and 12), compulsory acquisition (paragraph 13) and a request for a clarification around terminology for setting of heritage assets (paragraph 18).

Archaeology

- 4.2. **Paragraph 11.** OHA and Historic England - The Archaeology Assessments provided at D6 have outlined several fields in which anomalies are noted that correlated well to the results of the preceding geophysical survey, although a limited number of additional features were revealed that did not correspond to geophysical survey anomalies or mapped historic boundaries. Please can you confirm whether you are content with the archaeological buffer zones as suggested in the latest Illustrative Masterplans [CR2-026], or whether you consider greater buffers should be applied following this survey.
- 4.3. Specifically, please indicate this in relation to the following field numbers; those marked with an asterisk currently have no buffer zones proposed: North Site: 1.1*; 1.2; 1.4*; 1.5; 1.6; 1.7*; 1.8*; 1.11; 1.12; 1.13; 1.14; 1.17; 1.18*. Central East Site: 2.1; 2.3*; 2.9; 2.10; 2.12; 2.13*; 2.14*; 2.16*; 2.18*; 2.20*; 2.24*; 2.27; 2.30*; 2.37; 2.42; 2.43; 2.45; 2.53*; 2.54. Southern Site: 3.1*; 3.3; 3.10*; 3.11*; 3.13*; 3.15*.
- 4.4. In response to this question, of those field numbers noted in the northern, central and southern sites, Historic England has only provided advice on the archaeological buffer zones for the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt. These are field numbers 1.11, 1.12, 1.13 and 1.14. We have discussed this question with the County Archaeologist and agreed that it would be appropriate for the County Archaeologist to respond to this question in relation to all other archaeological buffer zones.
- 4.5. In respect of the archaeological buffer zone at Sansom's Platt (fields 1.11, 1.12, 1.13 and 1.14) as noted in paragraph 2.74 of this concluding submission, within fields 1.11, 1.12 and 1.14 the proposed buffer zone was adequate. However, for field 1.13, works 1, 6 and

9 should not take place so as to protect archaeology associated with the scheduled monument.

- 4.6. The Applicant has agreed to submit an updated Works Plans which removes Works 1, 6 and 8 from field 1.13. This agreement is noted in the Statement of Common Ground and should be confirmed by the submission of the updated works plans by the Applicant at Deadline 7.
- 4.7. **Paragraph 12.** OHA and Historic England - It is acknowledged that the survey for the Central West Site, carried out by a different contractor, is still in draft form and that Appendix 2 of this report, the Summary of Geophysical Survey Results in particular, is missing detail. Notwithstanding this, at Table 2 the report notes 66 trenches with significant archaeological features and deposits located in the following field numbers.
- 4.8. Therefore please comment on whether you consider greater buffers should be applied following this survey in relation to the following field numbers; those marked with an asterisk currently have no buffer zones proposed 2.63*; 2.65*; 2.66*; 2.70; 2.78; 2.80*; 2.84; 2.89*; 2.92*; 2.95*; 2.100; 2.102*; 2.103*; 2.104; 2.110; 2.114; 2.115*; 2.118* and 2.57*.
- 4.9. Except for non-designated archaeology around the scheduled monument Sansom's Platt, the County Archaeologist has been the lead advisor for non-designated archaeology in the order limits. This approach is reflected in our Responses to the Examining Authority's First Written Questions (**REP2-056**) Written Question 1.6.36 where we noted that the County Archaeologist would lead on advising on the Outline Written Scheme of Investigation and in subsequent responses where we have only commented on non-designated archaeology associated with Sansom's Platt (**REP3-081 paragraphs 2.7, 2.34-2.41, REP5-098 paragraphs 2.1-2.4, RE6-092 paragraph 2.8**) We have discussed this question with the County Archaeologist and agreed that it would be appropriate of the County Archaeologist to respond to this question.

Compulsory Acquisition

- 4.10. **Paragraph 13.** Historic England - There is a voluntary agreement between the Applicant and Blenheim Palace lands that covers the lease of the land via the various trusts for the purposes of undertaking the project and currently there is no expectation that this will not go ahead. However, should the voluntary agreement not progress, the fallback position would be for the Applicant to use compulsory acquisition powers to acquire the land directly from Blenheim Palace. You have noted [RR-0398] that Attribute 1 of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage Site (WHS) "It remains the home of the same aristocratic family" has associative values that can be drawn from the setting. How do you consider that this fallback position would impact on this attribute should it be implemented?
- 4.11. In response to this question Historic England considers that the associative values that can be drawn from the World Heritage property's setting are in part related to its continued ownership as part of the wider Blenheim Estate. Our position in relation to the proposed scheme, including our assessment in relation to the impact on Attribute 1 under the 2017 WHS Management Plan, has taken account of the support that both the land use and its ownership provide to the conservation of this aspect of the property's significance and OUV.
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- 4.12. We understand from the documentation submitted for the examination that there is a voluntary agreement in place between the Applicant and Blenheim Palace, with some ongoing discussions. We would note that the outline decommissioning plan (**REP6-036**) makes it clear (paragraph 1.1.0 - 1.1.1) that the operational life of the project is anticipated to be 37.5 years with the decommissioning phase to be 24 months in duration. The plan goes on to note (paragraph 2.1.1) that the land within the project site boundary is to be returned to landowners and to its original use after decommissioning with all above ground infrastructure removed.
- 4.13. We consider that this provides clarity regarding the ownership position during and post the project lifetime should compulsory acquisition be necessary. We would however anticipate that the matter can be resolved through the voluntary agreement covering the lease of the land, and as noted by the ExA, there is no expectation that this would not go ahead.

Clarification in relation to the DCO

- 4.14. **Paragraph 18.** Applicant and Historic England – in the most recent Development Consent Order, Historic England have been added as a consultee to certain requirements. However, the ExA note some of the wording states: “any parts of Work Nos. 6 or 8 within the setting of either..”. There has been much debate in the Examination as to what setting, particularly of the World Heritage Site, actually entails. Is this wording too ambiguous?
- 4.15. In response to this question Historic England’s Good Practice Advice Note 3 (GPA3) defines setting as “the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced.” The use of the term setting is therefore consistent with good practice, guidance and policy.
- 4.16. In relation to how this term would be interpreted for works 6 or 8, we would expect a Local Authority to reach a view on whether a “work” was within the setting of the World Heritage Site or other heritage asset based on the understanding of the site and in line with the definitions of setting provided in guidance and policy.
- 4.17. Such an approach would be entirely consistent with the professional planning judgement a Local Planning Authority makes in the usual course of considering when to consult with bodies in relation to planning applications. In view of the discussions that have taken place during the examination on this topic, we would expect there to be a close working relationship between ourselves and the relevant planning authorities in dealing with the discharge of the requirements should consent be forthcoming.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. We are the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, known as Historic England, and the Government’s principal statutory adviser on the historic environment.
- 5.2. We have been involved in the application since 2022 providing constructive pre-application advice and statutory responses prior to the submission of the application. We have also advised extensively throughout the examination.
- 5.3. We have focused our advice on those highly designated heritage assets with the potential to experience significant effects from the proposal. These are the Blenheim Palace WHS,
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Blenheim Palace (grade I) Blenheim Palace Registered Park and Garden (grade I), the scheduled monument Roman Villa (Sansom's Platt), the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Church Hanborough (grade I), the Church of St Peter, Cassington, (grade I) and the Church of St Michael, Begbrooke (grade II*).

- 5.4. In relation to the ensemble of the Palace, we highlighted a number of points. These included the impact the proposal would have on the World Heritage property's OUV, noting that it would result in a modest level of less than substantial harm to the significance and OUV of the Blenheim Palace WHS, Blenheim Palace and its RPG. Following further discussions with the Applicant, this has resulted in their submission of Change Request 2, which has removed panels on land east of Bladon and north of Heath Lane. The removal of panels appears to have minimised harm to OUV and avoided intervisibility with the WHS.
 - 5.5. This conclusion was supported by additional photomontages (**CR2-059**) submitted in the Change 2 Request. Our Deadline 6 response (**REP6-092 paragraph 6.1**) noted that the submission "confirms solar arrays would not be visible from within the World Heritage Site or from the fields we have identified as those which have a strong intervisibility and connection to the World Heritage Site."
 - 5.6. Revised documentation was submitted in support of the change request and this included the Outline Code of Construction Practice. In reviewing this, we consider that any impacts from the construction and decommissioning phases (e.g. noise and lighting) from within the WHS would be minimal and that measures set out in the Outline Code of Construction Practice (**CR2-045**) would address the concerns we had raised and would be secured through the DCO.
 - 5.7. We have raised issues regarding the HIA that was submitted and which has been revised during the application. Whilst welcoming the revisions, we have consistently reached different conclusions to those of the Applicant as set out in the HIA regarding the attributes of OUV that would be affected by the proposed development. We would also note that the HIA has not responded in detail to the specific concerns raised by ICOMOS International in its Technical Review reports regarding the potential impact of the proposals. The Examining Authority will therefore need to come to a view regarding the HIA and the conclusions it reaches in light of the points we have made.
 - 5.8. During the examination, the question of cumulative impact has been raised. In our response to the ExA Written Question 2.6.7 (**REP4-066**), we set out our approach to this assessment using The Setting of Heritage Assets Historic Environment Good Practice Advice Note (GPA3).
 - 5.9. Historic England remains aware of the difference of its own professional judgement to that of ICOMOS International. Our own assessment followed the approach set out by UNESCO in Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context. Our assessment also takes account of how the application site contributes to the significance and experience of the WHS, Grade I listed palace and registered park and garden in accordance with GPA3.
 - 5.10. Historic England has been in dialogue with ICOMOS International regarding their assessment of the level of harm to the OUV of the WHS. ICOMOS' Third Technical Review has now been received by the State Party and shared with the Examining Authority for Deadline 7.
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- 5.11. We have approached this application in relation to the English Planning System with reference to international policy and guidance. With this in mind, we have sought to be consistent in our approach to be holistic and appropriate and to do our best to ensure that what is proposed takes account of the OUV. The Examining Authority will need to carefully consider the ICOMOS Technical Reviews in their determination of this application. Ultimately it will be for the Examining Authority to determine based on the evidence submitted.
- 5.12. Following extensive discussion with the Applicant regarding the scheduled monument we welcome the changes that we have agreed with the Applicant. We are of the view that provided, as agreed, the Applicant submits the updated Works Plans removing Works from field 1.13, the harm to the significance of the scheduled monument at Sansom's Platt will be minimised and important archaeological remains outside the scheduled area protected.
- 5.13. In relation to the various churches, we have disagreed with the Applicant on the impact of the scheme (i.e. low adverse rather than negligible harm). However, we are in agreement that it is less than substantial harm.
- 5.14. We have been able to agree with the Applicant the relevant wording in the DCO so that we are a consultee in relation to Requirements 5, 6, 8 and 12 and we welcome this.
- 5.15. It will now be for the Examining Authority to consider these closing submissions in its consideration of the scheme.
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