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Planning Inspectorate
c/o QUADIENT
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Via email to: botleywestsolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

9 June 2026

Dear Examining Authority,

Your reference: EN010147
Site: Botley West Solar Farm

Thank you for consulting the Forestry Commission on this application. Our response to the request for further information dated 20 April 2026 is provided below.

Woodland connectivity

We welcome the request to the Applicant to update the Outline Landscape Ecological Management Plan (oLEMP) to include native woodland planting in the areas north and south of Burleigh Lodge, in line with our advice. We can provide further advice on the detailed planting proposals once they have been prepared.

We also welcome the request to the applicant to update the oLEMP to highlight the area between Bladon Heath and Burleigh Wood which will be kept free of panels and be managed to ensure connectivity between the woodlands, along with detail of the management proposed.

Strategic Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement

We appreciate being invited to comment on the Strategic Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement submitted at Deadline 6.

We recommend that comprehensive site-wide tree surveys are undertaken in accordance with BS5837:2012 to inform a robust arboricultural impact assessment and the preparation of a detailed Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS). This is

particularly important where ancient and veteran trees and woodland are present, as these require site-specific and carefully considered arboricultural measures. The findings of the survey should directly inform the design process, ensuring that the mitigation hierarchy (avoidance, mitigation, compensation) is appropriately applied.

The following points should be considered:

- Root Protection Areas (RPAs) must be fully safeguarded. These areas should remain free from excavation, trenching, level changes, vehicular access, material storage, and the installation of built infrastructure (including solar arrays), unless otherwise agreed through a site-specific AMS.
- It is essential to avoid any trenching within the RPAs of ancient and veteran trees, as well as within the buffer zones of existing woodland, particularly ancient woodland.
- Where the installation of below-ground services is required, trenchless techniques such as horizontal directional drilling (HDD) should be utilised, where feasible, to minimise disturbance to rooting environments and soil structure.
- Where HDD is proposed beneath woodland and associated buffer zones, a minimum installation depth of 2 metres should be achieved, unless otherwise justified by site-specific conditions, to reduce the risk of adverse impacts on tree roots and soil ecology.
- The potential indirect impacts of HDD must also be taken into account. For example, temporary compounds and working areas should be located outside RPAs.

Further guidance on policy and legislation relevant to ancient woodland is set out in the appendix to this letter.

If you have any questions regarding our advice or concerns that are not covered by the above, please contact us again.

Yours sincerely,

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Local Partnership Advisor

Annex 1: Policy Framework, Related Guidance and Sources of Further Information

Policy and Guidance:

Keepers of Time – A Statement of Policy for England’s Ancient and Native Woodland (updated May 2022). Includes definitions of ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, and sets out the importance of these habitats.

Policy Principles and Strategic Objectives include:

- *Maintaining and enhancing the existing area of ancient woodland*
- *Conserving and enhancing the existing resource of ancient and veteran trees.*

National Planning Policy Framework (published December 2024)

Paragraph 193(c) – irreplaceable habitats.

Paragraph 136 – street trees, trees within developments, and retention of existing trees.

Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees (first published October 2014, revised January 2022)

This advice, issued jointly by Natural England and the Forestry Commission, is a material consideration for planning decisions across England. It provides advice on how to avoid and mitigate impacts, and on compensation schemes where the tests set out in the NPPF are met. The Standing Advice also includes an Assessment Guide, which can help planners assess the impact of the proposed development on the ancient woodland.

National Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment Guidance. (updated July 2019)

This Guidance outlines the Forestry Commission’s role as a non-statutory consultee and supports the implementation and interpretation of the National Planning Policy Framework in relation to ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, and clarifies that existing woodland condition should not affect the planning authority’s consideration of proposals.

Felling Licences and Environmental Impact Assessment

Felling Licences - Under the Forestry Act (1967) a Felling Licence is required for felling more than 5 cubic metres per calendar quarter. Failure to obtain a Licence may lead to prosecution and the issue of a restocking notice.

Environmental Impact Assessment - Under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999, as amended, some proposals involving afforestation, deforestation, forest roads or forestry quarries may require ‘stage 2’ Consent from the Forestry Commission before they can be carried out. For these project types the applicant should determine if their proposal needs Consent (referring to guidance as necessary), or approach the Forestry Commission for a ‘stage 1’ opinion as to whether or not Consent is required.