

Steeple Renewables Project

8.35 BMV Note

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BMV Note

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STEEPLE RENEWABLES PROJECT

EN010163

NOTE REGARDING AVOIDANCE OR MINIMISATION OF USE OF BEST AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND

Date: 21 January 2026

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This short document responds to the comments of Natural England [RR-054] and the Examining Authority's (ExA) written questions and request for information (ExQ1) published 11 December 2025, especially Q12.0.3. This responds to the approach in NPS EN-1 (December 2025) paragraph 5.11.12 to seek to minimise impacts on the best and most versatile agricultural land (land in Grades 1, 2 and 3a), and preferably use land of poorer quality (grades 3b, 4 and 5). A similar approach is set out in the NPPF.
- 1.2 The issue addressed is to explain how the project has sought to minimise use of or avoid land of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) quality, at a macro and micro-siting level.
- 1.3 This document is structured as follows:
 - (i) section 2 deals with wider, macro-siting issues, as described at ISH1;
 - (ii) section 3 deals with micro-siting of fixed equipment and ecological enhancement works;
 - (iii) section 4 deals with micro-siting of short-term construction works.

2 Macro-Siting Issues

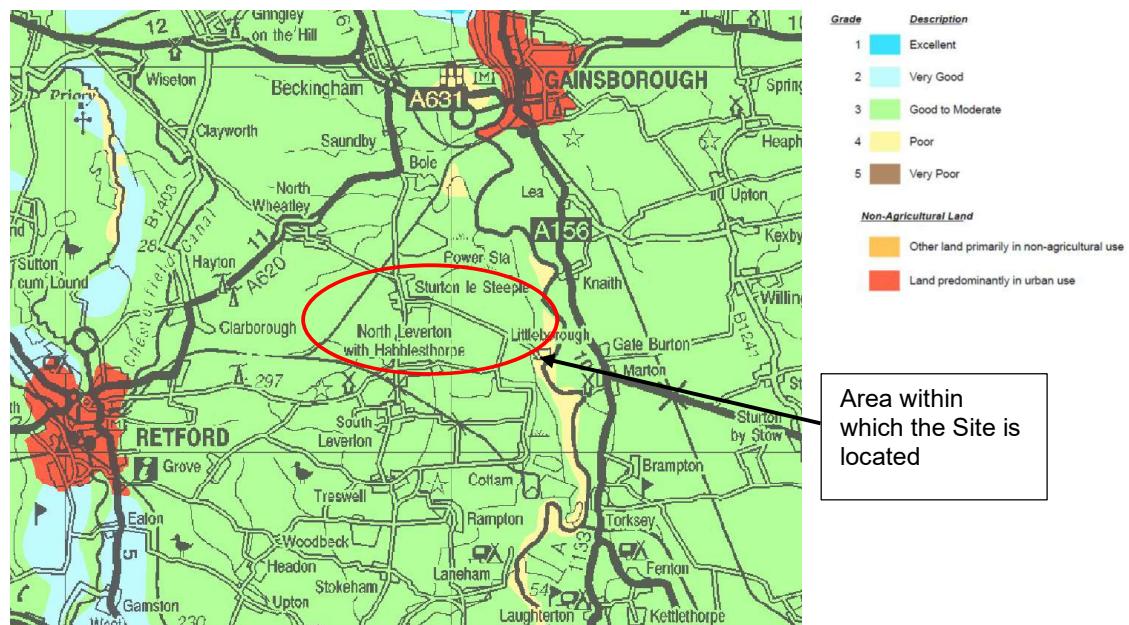
- 2.1 The Site is shown as undifferentiated Grade 3 "good to moderate" quality agricultural land on the 1:250,000 scale "provisional" ALC maps from the 1970s, as shown in Chapter 15 of the ES [APP-072], with Figure 15-1 reproduced below. There is a small area shown as Grade 4 at the very eastern edge of the site. With the exception of the riverside Grade 4,

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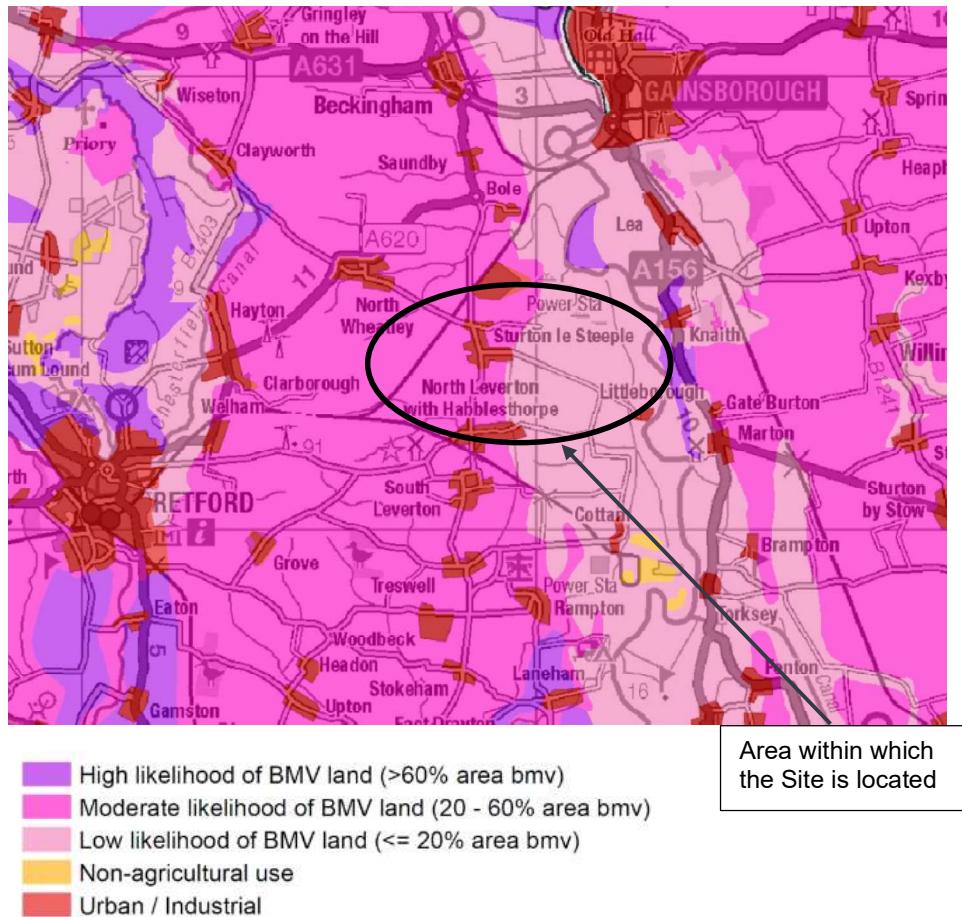
then undifferentiated Grade 3 is the lowest land quality in the wider area based on the provisional ALC.

Insert 1: Figure 15-1 from ES Chapter 15



2.2 The site is shown as partly in the “low likelihood of BMV” and partly in the “moderate likelihood of BMV” on the 1:250,000 Natural England plans, see Figure 15.2 of Chapter 15, reproduced below. The low likelihood is the lowest in the area. Part of the site is in the moderate likelihood of BMV category, which as can be seen on Insert 2 is widespread in the wider area.

Insert 2: Figure 15.2 from ES Chapter 15

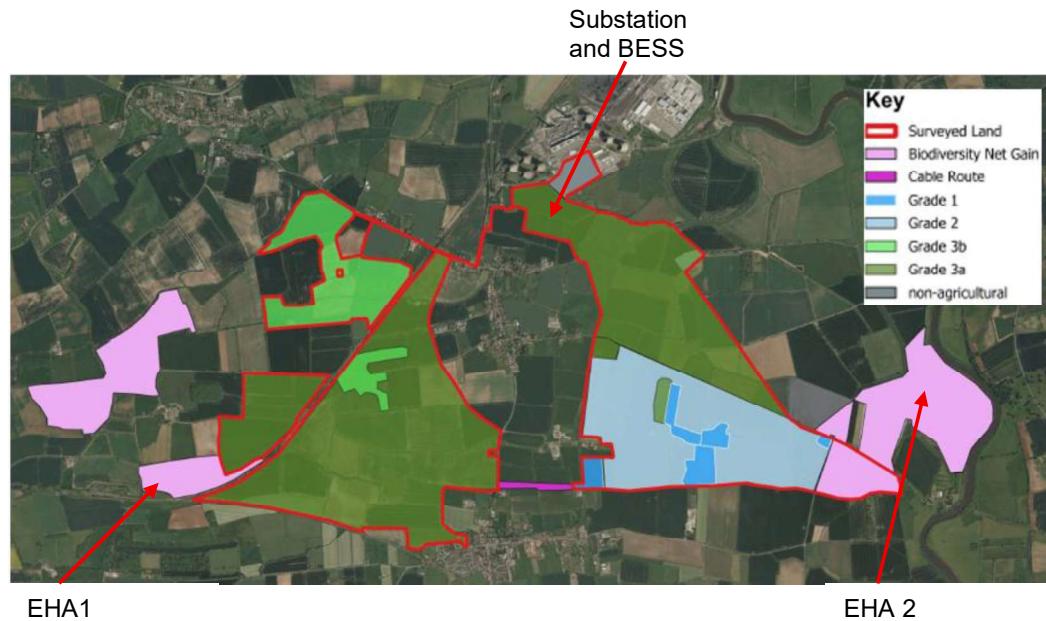


2.3 As explained at ISH1, the initial site selection was (in part) chosen for involving the lowest likelihood of BMV, based on published information.

3 **Micro-siting of Fixed Equipment and Environmental Enhancement Areas**

3.1 For ease of reference, the ALC grade of the Site is shown below, being based on Figure 15.4 from Chapter 15, of the Environmental Statement [APP-072]. The location of the Substation and BESS, and the two ecological enhancement areas (EHA) where small ponds are proposed, are identified on the Insert below.

Insert 3: Figure 15.4 from ES Chapter 15



- 3.2 **Substation and BESS.** Fixed equipment assessed in Chapter 15 is described in 15.7.10 as the on-site 400kV substation and BESS compound. These involve 3.3 ha of Subgrade 3a, as described in ES Chapter 15 paragraph 15.7.12 [APP-072].
- 3.3 The location for these items is immediately adjacent to the power station and point of connection. To avoid BMV land it would be necessary to move a not-inconsiderable distance to the southwest, to Subgrade 3b land. This would necessitate a location on the west side of the railway line. This has significant cost and practical implications.
- 3.4 The use of BMV was considered, but other considerations resulted in the micro-siting on Subgrade 3a land.
- 3.5 Section 11 of the revised Outline Soil Management Plan (oSMP) dated 21 January 2026 shows the works proposed close to the point of connection.

Inserts 4 and 5: Proposed Substation, BESS and ALC Plan Extract



3.6 **Tracks and Power Conversion Units.** The land involved, temporarily, for tracks and small power conversion units is set out in ES Chapter 15 and amounts to 12.1 ha of BMV land. As can be seen on the Landscape and Ecological Mitigation Plans [APP-160] tracks are mostly sited along field edges. This minimises the potential disruption to the structure of the farmed landscape, but it is not possible from a practical perspective to only locate tracks on non-BMV land. Therefore the use of BMV land for this temporary works considered and recognised the use of BMV land, but could not avoid it.

3.7 **Ponds and Woodland Planting.** Land to the west of the Order Limits (referenced EHA 1 above) is proposed for grassland and arable cropping, with some woodland/copse planting, and some small ponds. This section is shown below. The land quality is not known but will be assessed prior to works commencing, as set out in the revised oSMP, and soil will be retained should these areas need to be restored to farmland on decommissioning.

Insert 6: Western Area, Planting and Ponds



3.8 Land to the east (shown as EHA2 on Figure 3 above) will be managed as a mixture of continued arable cropping, grassland mix and species rich grassland seed mix. In addition, new pond creation (intended to be permanent) and scrub planting (also intended to be permanent) are proposed. The details are not fully refined, but are indicated on the extract from the Landscape and Ecological Mitigation Strategy (Sheet 6 of 6) as shown on the insert below.

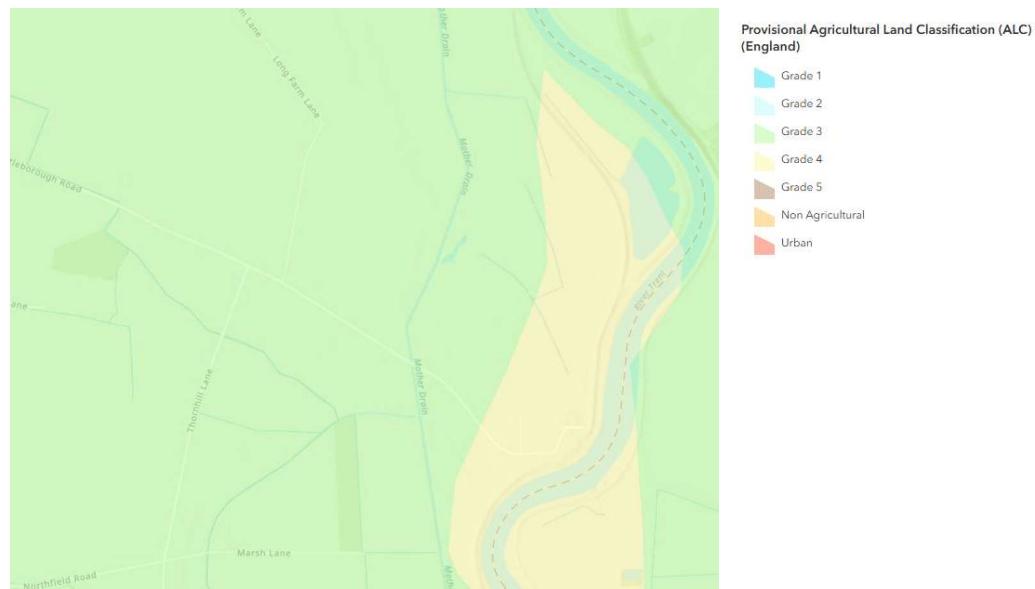
Insert 7: Extract from Landscape Plan



3.9 These areas are not yet determined with accuracy. These areas have not been surveyed, pending final design consideration. The revised oSMP proposes that the land quality of these small areas be determined pre-construction, and a methodology included in the SMP (to be controlled via the DCO) to enable the areas to be fully restored. The areas of known non-BMV land are not suitable for these enhancements. The area involved is small.

3.10 As shown on the extract from the digitised provisional ALC maps, the eastern-most panels are on land shown as Grade 4, with the western panels on land shown as undifferentiated Grade 3. The area is shown as "low likelihood of BMV" on the map extract at Insert 2.

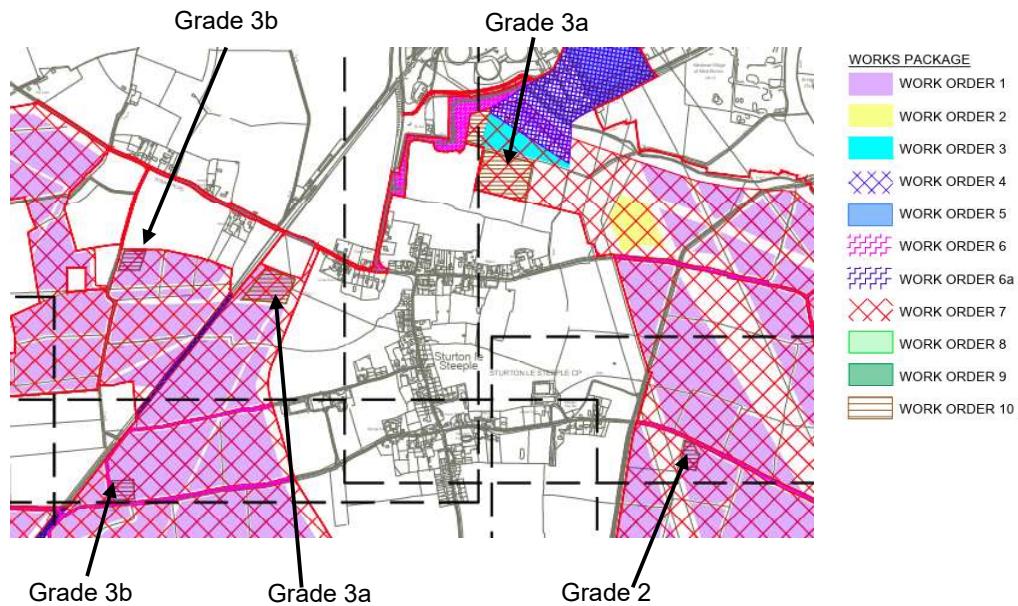
Insert 8: Extract from Digitised ALC Map



4 **Temporary Construction Compounds**

4.1 Temporary construction compounds are located on land of Grades 2, 3a and 3b, as shown on Insert 9 (from Insert 5 of the revised oSMP).

Insert 9: Location of Temporary Construction Compounds



4.2 Given the distribution of ALC grades (see Insert 3) only the temporary compound on Grade 2 could potentially be moved to lower grade land, as there is Subgrade 3a to the north of Littleborough Road. This would necessitate crossing the road, with traffic implications. On balance, and given that both sites are BMV (and so BMV is not avoided) and that both

options can be restored without loss or downgrading of land quality, operational benefits outweighed the negligible adverse BMV impacts.

5 **Conclusions**

- 5.1 This short document explains the considerations given to minimising the use of BMV for disturbing activities. There was little potential to avoid the use of BMV, but BMV has been considered and its use minimised where possible.
- 5.2 This document therefore sets out the Applicant's response to Q 12.0.3 and provides the information on the approach to minimising the use of BMV land, using poorer quality land in preference, and justifying where BMV land is used. This provides the information to comply with EN-1 (December 2025) paragraph 5.11.12 and 5.11.34.
- 5.3 The economic effects are addressed in the ES Chapter 15 [**APP-072**].