

# Response to Examiner's Questions.

<b>Prepared by</b>	Lucy Baxter (Senior Planning Officer) Elizabeth Verdegem (Team Leader (Strategic) – Development Management)
<b>Date</b>	November 2025
<b>Purpose</b>	Response to ExQ1 for Green Hill Solar Farm (PINS reference EN010170)

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out MKCC's response to the examiner's initial questions (ExQ1), issued 28 October 2025, due by 7 November 2025.

## 2 Examiner's Questions

### Q1.0.3 - Neighbourhood Plans

*The Applicant's submitted Policy Compliance Document [APP-567] identifies two adopted Neighbourhood Plans (NP) (for Earls Barton and for Lavendon) relevant to the application. Can you confirm that these are the only two NPs which impact on the proposed development, or are there other adopted or emerging NPs which need to be considered as part of this examination?*

**Response:** Lavendon Neighbourhood Plan (LNP) is the only relevant neighbourhood plan within the borough of Milton Keynes. The relevant policies of LNP are set out within MKCC's LIR. There are no other emerging Neighbourhood Plans which need to be considered.

### Q1.0.5 - Cumulative developments

*Do the local planning authorities agree with the identified cumulative developments assessed within each aspect chapter? If not, can they please identify which cumulative developments have been omitted from which assessments and explain why they consider that they should be included.*

**Response:** Agreed.

### Q1.0.6 - Local Development Plans and Policies

*If not in your Local Impact Report (LIR), all local planning authorities are asked to provide full copies of any Development Plan policies referred to in any of your submissions and to confirm the status of the relevant plan. Should you refer to any additional Development Plan policies which have not yet been provided at any time in your future submissions to the ExA, please also submit copies of these into the Examination. The ExA also requests to be kept up-to-date on changes to the status of any Development Plan which a Local Authority has previously relied upon during Examination.*

**Response:** Copies of relevant Development Plan policies are appended to the LIR. MKCC confirms they will update the Examining Authority (ExA) on any changes to the status of any Development

Plan, particularly the emerging Milton Keynes City Plan, which is scheduled to commence its Regulation 19 consultation on 7 November 2025.

#### Q1.0.7 - National and Local Planning Policies

*The Policy Compliance Document [APP-567] assesses the proposed development against national and local policies. Are the local planning authorities content with the applicant's policy analysis?*

**Response:** MKCC has no comments to make regarding analysis of the national policy listed in the Policy Compliance Document [APP-567]. The following paragraphs set out the consideration of Milton Keynes local policy.

Table 13 Plan:MK (2019):

The applicants have assessed all the relevant policies that MKCC have considered in its LIR. In general, it is considered to be an accurate policy analysis of the relevant policies in Plan:MK, subject to the specific comments in MKCC's LIR being taken into account, which relate to Policies CT2, NE2 and NE5 (transport, ecology and landscape).

Table 14 Emerging MK City Plan (Regulation 18 version, 2024):

It is noted that the applicant has thoroughly considered the Regulation 18 version of the emerging Milton Keynes City Plan, and it is considered to be an accurate policy assessment, subject to the specific comments in the LIR being taken into account, which relate to Policies GS10, CEA9, CEA10, CES12 (transport, ecology and landscape).

The applicant and ExA should be aware that MKCC is due to commence consultation on the Regulation 19 version on 7th November 2025.

Table 15 MK Minerals Local Plan (2017):

This table contains an accurate assessment of local minerals policy.

Table 16 MK Waste Development Plan Document (2008):

This table contains an accurate assessment of local waste policy.

Table 18 Lavendon Neighbourhood Plan (2020):

The applicants have assessed all the relevant policies that MKCC have considered in its LIR. In general, it is considered to be an accurate policy analysis of the Lavendon Neighbourhood Plan, subject to the specific comments in MKCC's LIR being taken into account, which relate to Policies E2 and HT1 (ecology and transport).

#### Q1.0.8 - Policy and guidance

*Are you aware of any updates or changes to Government Policy or Guidance (including emerging policies) relevant to the determination of this application that have occurred since it was submitted? If yes, what are these changes and what are the implications for the application?*

**Response:** MKCC is not aware of any updates or changes to government policy or guidance relevant to the determination of this application.

#### Q1.0.9 - Planning applications and consents

*Please provide an update on any submitted planning applications or consents granted since the application was submitted which could either affect the proposed development or be affected by it, and whether these would affect the conclusions reached in the Environmental Statement.*

**Response:** There are no further planning applications or consents granted within the MKCC boundary which would either affect the proposed development or be affected by it.

#### Q1.0.10 - Committed developments

*The applicant has provided Appendix 25.1 Long List of Committed Developments [APP-188] and Appendix 25.2 Short List of Committed Developments [APP-189]. Can the host local authorities confirm whether they are content with the list provided, or whether there are any further projects that they wish to add? Other interested parties, including Statutory Undertakers, are also invited to comment.*

**Response:** The Milton Keynes section of Appendix 25.1 Long List of Committed Developments [APP-188] includes reference to the Wind Turbine Area of Search, Solar Farm Area of Search, and Policy CEA12 (Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character/Special Landscape Areas) in the Regulation 18 version of the emerging Milton Keynes City Plan. The applicant and ExA should be aware that MKCC is due to commence consultation on the Regulation 19 version on 7 November 2025. However, there are minimal changes between the designations in the Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 versions of the emerging plan in this area. The only change of note is a reduction in the Wind Turbine Area of Search, which would not affect this proposal.

In other respects, no committed developments within the borough are mentioned. This is due to the location of the site, to the rural north of the borough, and subsequently, the amount of surrounding development. This is considered accurate and has been agreed previously with the applicant. Recent development in the surrounding area tends to be minor, rural or agricultural in nature, and there are no significant major committed developments in proximity to Site G that are not already built or largely built out.

#### Q1.0.12 - Potential Main Issues for Examination

*The Potential Main Issues for Examination document [APP-568] provides a summary of the principal areas of disagreement between the applicant and local planning authorities and consultees. Are all parties content with the summary of the position provided by the applicant and the principal areas of disagreement identified at time of submission of the application?*

**Response:** The potential main issues relevant to MKCC set out within Examination document [APP-568] include concerns relating to landscape and visual impact (specifically, the provision of additional viewpoints, and concerns over parcels GF9 and GF13), and ecology and biodiversity (relating to bats). As set out within the LIR, MKCC also raise minor concerns relating to transport and access (chapter 13 of ES) which are considered capable of being resolved during the examination process.

The LIR sets out MKCC's views on all issues raised. Areas of agreement and disagreement will also be clearly set out within the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) between MKCC and the applicant.

#### Q1.0.13 - Legal Agreements

*Can the applicant set out what consideration it has given to the need to develop a Section 106 agreement with the host local authorities (HLA)? And, if the applicant feels there is a need for one, what are the topics and issues that the Section 106 Agreement should cover? Can the HLAs confirm their position on the matter, and whether any discussions or consideration have been given to this?*

**Response:** To date, there have been no discussions relating to the need to develop a Section 106 agreement with MKCC. MKCC would wish to ensure that a Biodiversity Net Gain is secured through an appropriate mechanism, and improvements to the access from the A428 (which is adopted highway). These may require a Section 106 agreement or other legal agreements.

#### Q.10.0.4 - Affected Persons (APs) and Interested Parties (IPs)

*Are any APs or IPs aware of any inconsistencies in the Statement of Reasons [APP-019] or Land Plans [APP-007]? If so, please set out what these are and provide details.*

**Response:** MKCC are not aware of inconsistencies in the Statement of Reasons or Land Plans.

#### Q.12.0.4 - Conservation Area Character Appraisals

*The host local authorities are requested to provide the ExA with character appraisals, if available, for the four Conservation Areas scoped in to the applicant's assessment: Castle Ashby Conservation Area; Easton Maudit Conservation Area; Grendon Conservation Area; and Mears Ashby Conservation Area.*

**Response:** The above Conservation Areas are not within the Milton Keynes boundary.

#### Q16.0.2 - Planting Growth Rates

*During ISH1, the applicant explained that, for the purposes of the assessments in relation to planting and visual screening, a uniform growth rate of 0.4m per year, leading to a minimum height of 7.5m in 15 years had been applied. Is this a reasonable rate and are relevant parties content with this assumption?*

**Response:** The Council considers that the success of screening vegetation relies on several factors; speed of plant growth over time, maintenance regime including watering and mulching, exposure/shelter, climate change, increasing risks of future disease (with climate change). Any screening will not be instant and, due to several factors, cannot be relied upon to be permanent. Using a uniform rate of growth is therefore questionable.

The rate of growth should be formally qualified by the applicant to ascertain the evidence it is based on. The rate needs to be evidenced and relevant to the specific location/situation (i.e. geology, soils, available ground water). It also needs to take into account the planting typology and species it is this being applied to, as well as the density and size and specification of planting. A uniform growth rate across all planting types and locations is not appropriate.

In terms of the 15 year assumptions, the 7.5m doesn't appear to allow for pruning or management of planting, particularly formative pruning (e.g. cut back by half at planting) or take into account

pruning regime proposed for each planting typology each year; bearing in mind maintenance good for plant growth can have negative impacts on wildlife benefits (loss of nesting and food in the form of nectar or berries/nuts)? Regular pruning benefits plant establishment and thickens up the planting and is suitable for hedging but not typically used for woodland planting so is typology specific.

MKCC has recommended in the LIR that enhanced landscaping is proposed, and it is assumed that landscape management plans will also be secured by condition, that are specific to each site and area of planting. Landscape management needs to mitigate future diseases which impact on plant growth or survival, bearing in mind there is an increased likelihood of future problems due to biosecurity and climate change stress. Management also needs to include irrigation due to changing climate conditions.

It is noted that this question was raised as a point of discussion at Issue Specific Hearing 1 (ISH1), and if the applicant can point to the evidence base for these assumptions, then MKCC may be able to review their response.

#### Q16.0.3 - Viewpoint and Photomontage Locations

*Are you satisfied that the viewpoints and photomontages provided to date identify the key landscapes and viewpoints that are representative of sensitive visual receptors and that they identify appropriate visual receptors? If not, please indicate which other views or areas should be included in the viewpoints and photomontages and why.*

**Response:** MKCC is currently in discussion with the applicant regarding previously discussed viewpoint locations which have not been included, with a meeting scheduled on 6 November 2025. We have requested additional viewpoints and photomontages looking towards SLA parcel GF13. An agreed viewpoint and photomontage further east than VP34 along the bridleway TP220 looking south towards GF13 should be provided.

#### Q22.0.1 - Impact on sand and gravel allocation M2: Strixton-Bozeat

*ES Chapter 11 [APP-048] identifies that Green Hill F would abut the sand and gravel allocation M2: Strixton – Bozeat. As mitigation, the proposed development seeks to maintain vehicular access to the allocation and has been designed to retain a minimum 30 metre separation between the allocation boundary and the nearest solar panel. Do you have any concerns that this approach would be insufficient?*

**Response:** The above minerals allocation is not within the Milton Keynes boundary.