Green Hill Solar Farm
EN010170

Statement of Common Ground: Natural England Revision B

Prepared by: Clarkson and Woods Ltd.

Date: February 2026

Document Reference: EX5/GH8.3.6_B

Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedure) Rules 2010

Contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Purpose of the Document	4
1.2	Parties to this Statement of Common Ground	4
1.3	Terminology	4
1.4	Topic Referencing for All Matters	5
2	Record of Engagement	6
2.1	Summary of Consultation	6
3	Matters of Discussion	10
4	Signatories	25

Issue Sheet

Report Prepared for: Green Hill Solar Farm

Examination Deadline 5

Statement of Common Ground: Natural England

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Revision	Date	Prepared by	Approved by
Original	19/11/2025	MH	CP
A	17/12/2025	MH	CP
B	26/02/2026	MH	CP

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Document

1.1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared as part of the proposed Green Hill Solar Farm Development Consent Order (the Application) made by Green Hill Solar Farm Ltd (the Applicant) to the Secretary of State for Energy Security & Net Zero (the Secretary of State) pursuant to the Planning Act 2008 (PA 2008).

1.1.2 This SoCG does not seek to replicate information that is available elsewhere within the Application documents. All documents are available in the deposit locations and/or the Planning Inspectorate website.

1.1.3 This SoCG has been produced to confirm to the Examining Authority (ExA) where agreement has been reached between the parties, and where agreement has not yet been reached. SoCGs are an established means in the DCO consenting process of allowing all parties to identify and focus on specific issues that may need to be addressed during the examination.

1.2 Parties to this Statement of Common Ground

1.2.1 This SoCG has been prepared by (1) Green Hill Solar Farm Ltd. as the Applicant and (2) Natural England.

1.2.2 Collectively, Green Hill Solar Farm Ltd. and Natural England are referred to as 'the parties'.

1.3 Terminology

1.3.1 In the tables in **Sections 3** of this SoCG:

- "Agreed" indicates where the issue has been resolved.
- "Not Agreed" indicates a final position, and
- "Under Discussion" indicates where these points will be the subject of ongoing discussion to resolve, where possible, or refine, the extent of disagreement between the parties.

1.4 Topic Referencing for All Matters

1.4.1 All matters agreed, under discussion and not agreed have been given unique references which relate to the topic matter. The referencing system is defined as follows:

Table 2.1: Topic Referencing

Topic	Unique Identifying Code
Ecology and Biodiversity	ECO-xx
Landscape and Visual Impact	LAN-xx
Soils and Agriculture	SOI-xx

2 Record of Engagement

2.1 Summary of Consultation

2.1.1 The parties have been engaged in consultation via Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service (DAS) since January 2024, prior to the non-statutory consultation. A summary of the meetings and correspondence that has taken place between Green Hill Solar Farm and Natural England (NE) in relation to the Application is outlined in **Table 3.1**. A detailed record of statutory consultation is presented in Tables 1 and 2 of the main ES Chapter; Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity (Revision A) **[REP1-033]** and a detailed record of informal consultation through the Natural England Discretionary Advice Service can be found in Appendix 9.4 [**APP-087**] of the same ES Chapter.

Table 3.1: Record of Engagement

Date	Form of Correspondence	Key Topics Discussed and Key Outcomes
Ecology and Biodiversity		
16th January 2024 – 11th March 2025	Discretionary Advice Service (DAS) emails and meetings.	See ES Chapter 9, Appendix 9.4 **[APP-087]** for detail. The principal focus of the DAS was to discuss the potential impacts on the bird populations associated with the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA and the identification of, and mitigation for, potential impacts on Functionally Linked Land (FLL). Initial conversations indicated that a single year of survey effort was sufficient to underpin assessment, which was subsequently revised to two seasons of wintering bird surveys or precautionary mitigation in lieu of this. Subsequent discussions endeavoured to agree an acceptable approach to assessment of impacts on the SPA and FLL and the adoption of a proportionate precautionary approach via the provision of mitigation land.
20th August 2024	EIA Scoping Consultation. See **[APP-074]** Ref 9.1 for original.	NE highlight the potential for impacts upon the populations of birds designated under the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA through the reduction or degradation of land that plays a supporting role in the provision of foraging or sheltering habitat for these birds. So-called Functionally Linked Land should therefore be assessed within the EIA, with particular reference to golden plover and lapwing. The context of recent monitoring of population declines for these species is introduced.

Date	Form of Correspondence	Key Topics Discussed and Key Outcomes
		NE advised that consideration of alternatives should be factored into the site selection process. General principles for the preparation of the ES are given and the recommended general scope of an assessment of cumulative effects is provided. NE indicate that a Habitats Regulations Assessment is likely to be necessary to test for likely significant effects on the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Ramsar/SPA/SAC. NE list ten local SSSIs which may be at risk of impacts from the proposals which should feature within the EIA and states that Local Sites should also be considered. NE recommend that all phases of the development should be assessed for impact on protected species and standing advice is provided. Recommendations for the presentation of habitat and species data collected from the site and from third parties is given. Sources of information on ancient woodland and trees is given. Biodiversity Net Gain is introduced as a principle for the delivery of biodiversity enhancement through development.
19th December 2024	S42 Statutory Consultation response and comments on PEIR. See **[APP-031]** for original.	NE state that an HRA screening exercise must be carried out to fully assess the potential impact of the development on the UNVGP SPA, with particular reference to the proposed BESS site. NE introduce the 1% threshold for significance in determining likely significant effects upon the SPA, in that, where over 1% of the SPA population of a certain species stands to be impacted, significant effects are considered likely to occur. Similarly, this threshold can be used to determine the location of FLL within a proposed development site. Additionally, NE introduce the importance of taking up to date monitoring data into account in order to avoid misrepresenting recent population changes. NE state they concur with the methodology of the bird surveys but that where a full suite (i.e. at least 2 years) of survey data cannot be obtained then a precautionary approach to needs to be taken which may require mitigation for loss of FLL. NE state that this matter is a principal topic of discussion within the DAS.

Date	Form of Correspondence	Key Topics Discussed and Key Outcomes
		NE signpost to research reports to be referred to when assessing the proposed development for impacts on birds. NE introduce the Letter of No Impediment process which can be used if it is apparent during design and examination that a Natural England protected species licence may be required subsequent to granting a DCO. Further general guidance on BNG, as well as assessment of impact on local sites, priority habitats and species and ancient woodland is given.
6th October 2025	Microsoft Teams meeting – Natural England, Clarkson & Woods, Lanpro	Discussion of NE's Relevant Representation response and resolution of the issues highlighted therein. NE brought Jess James (Regional NSIP Manager) and Gillian Fisher (Ornithology expert) to discuss the key issues with respect to the Applicant's assessment of FLL. Clarkson & Woods (Applicant's ecologist) summarised the survey methodology and results for Gillian Fisher's benefit, then explained their approach to assessment of FLL, as per the approach detailed in the **Habitats Regulations Assessment (Revision A) [REP1-153].** The mitigation strategy set out by the Applicant was also discussed, which concludes that a greater quantum of mitigation habitat is provided than the total area of FLL lost as a result of the Scheme (including both confirmed areas of FLL and areas of land categorised as FLL on a precautionary basis, given the lack of a full two seasons' of survey effort across Green Hill F and G). The approach was received positively by NE and, pending their further review of detailed survey data (provided in **Environmental Statement Appendix 9.9 Wintering Bird Surveys [APP-092]**), was accepted. Mitigation fields were confirmed by NE to be able to comprise either arable or grassland habitats, with invertebrate richness being a key element in either case. Other matters in the Relevant Representation response **[RR-1242]** were agreed to have been resolved, with the Applicant's ecologist having made available to NE a draft Statement of Common Ground and unredacted version of the **Outline Ecological**

Date	Form of Correspondence	Key Topics Discussed and Key Outcomes
		Protection and Mitigation Strategy [REP4-010], and having confirmed that a Letter of No Impediment would not be needed for the Scheme.
Soils and Agriculture		
20th August 2024	EIA Scoping Consultation. See **[APP-074]** Ref 9.1 for original.	NE highlight the importance of soils, set out general planning guidance on the matter and recommend that an Agricultural Land Classification survey is undertaken.
19th December 2024	S42 Statutory Consultation response and comments on PEIR. See **[REP1-019],** for original.	NE state that they were not able to review PEIR Chapter 20: Agricultural Conditions at the time of writing.
Landscape and Visual Impact		
20th August 2024	EIA Scoping Consultation. See **[REP1-019],** Ref 9.1 for original.	NE recommend the use of Landscape Character Assessment in the assessment of the landscape and visual impact of the proposals within the EIA, and that reference to the National Character Areas should be made. Cumulative impacts in combination with other relevant developments should be undertaken.

2.1.2 It is agreed that this is an accurate summary of the key meetings and consultation undertaken between (1) Green Hill Solar Farm Ltd. and (2) Natural England in relation to the issues addressed in this SoCG.

3 Matters of Discussion

3.1.1 Table **4.1** below details by topic the matters agreed, under discussion, or not agreed with Natural England.

Table 4.1 Matters of Discussion

Matter Ref.	Matter	Details of Matters for Discussion	Applicant Position	Consultee Position	Status
Ecology and Biodiversity					
ECO-1	Methodology: General Principles in ES preparation	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	All listed elements covered in the preparation of ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]** unless otherwise covered in 'Matters Under Discussion' or 'Matters Not Agreed'.	EIA scoping response **[REP1-035]** sets out General Principles to follow in the preparation of the ES, as well as those covering cumulative and in-combination effects, nationally designated sites, locally and regionally important sites, protected species and Biodiversity Net Gain.	Agreed
ECO-2	Methodology: Nationally Designated Sites	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	All SSSIs and Local Nature Reserves within 5km of the Order Limits have been fully assessed within ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]**. The assessment methodology is considered appropriate and proportionate.	As stated in the S42 Consultation Response **[REP1-019],** NE agree with the preliminary assessment of Nationally Designated Sites.	Agreed
ECO-3	Methodology: Local sites, Priority Habitats and Species	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	All Local sites (Local Wildlife Sites, County Wildlife Sites, Wildlife Trust Reserves and Biological Notification Sites) within 2km of the Order Limits	NE's S42 Consultation response **[REP1-019],** recommends the assessment of impacts on Local sites, Priority Habitats and Species and consultation with any	Agreed

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			have been fully assessed within ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]**. A full impact assessment of all these items is contained within ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]** and North Northamptonshire's LNRS has been referred to and consulted for guidance in the process (especially in Section 9.9.91). The assessment methodology is considered appropriate and proportionate.	Local Nature Recovery Strategy applicable to the proposals.	
ECO-4	Methodology: Bird survey scope for determining impact on SPA	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	Despite initial agreement, the changed approach has informed the latest wintering bird survey protocol and as such all efforts have been made to complete a full two-year suite of surveys at all sites within 10km of the SPA. Shortfalls in survey effort below the amended two-year survey requirement have been communicated to Natural England via the DAS, such that the level of survey effort completed at the point of the	Initial consultation with NE via the DAS confirmed the suitability of a single season of bird survey (see Item 1 in ES Appendix 9.4) **[APP-087].** However, subsequently a need for two seasons of survey was communicated by Natural England. In the S42 Consultation response **[REP1-019]**, it is stated that, *"Having engaged with the applicant through our Discretionary Advice Service, while we concur with the methodology of the*	Agreed

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			DCO submission is clear with all parties.	*aforementioned surveys, our advice to date has been that where a full suite (i.e. at least 2 years) of wintering bird surveys are not possible/feasible, a precautionary approach will need to be taken, which may require the delivery of mitigation for the loss of FLL.* ***Therefore, Natural England advise that we do not agree with the statement that 'one year of survey information would be sufficient to inform an assessment of potential impacts upon the SPA'. Further information is needed before a HRA conclusions can be agreed."*** Furthermore**,** within the DAS process (Item 6 in ES Appendix 9.4) **[APP-087]** NE stated that, *"The scope of the surveys has been agreed and survey data thus far has not indicated any functional linkage and is ongoing"*	

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ECO-5	Use of Up to Date Population Data for Assessing Potential Impacts on SPA.	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	While initial DAS discussions indicated that bird population numbers given in the SPA citation would be sufficient for impact assessment, and the determination of the 1% significance threshold, it was later confirmed that more recent census data which lists lower numbers should be used to more accurately reflect recent population declines. The latest data provided by NE and based on survey data collated by the British Trust for Ornithology has been used within the assessment in ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]** to provide a realistic and current impact assessment and determination of any mitigation required. The methodology is considered appropriate and proportionate.	NE's S42 Consultation response recommended that the 1% of SPA population significance threshold should be revised using up to date population census totals, in order to avoid misrepresenting recent population declines.	Agreed
ECO-6	Biodiversity Net Gain	**ES Appendix 9.13 Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment [REP1-153]**	The ES is supported by a BNG Assessment **[REP1-153]** which is underpinned by, and written in accordance with, the standards and principles noted. The BNG Assessment	NE's S42 Consultation response **[REP1-019],** recommended the adherence to British Standard and industry good practice	Agreed

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			demonstrates a net gain of at least 10% in all unit types, in accordance with suggested targets, despite BNG not being mandatory for NSIPs.	principles in preparation of a BNG assessment. DAS correspondence (Item 7 in ES Chapter 9 Appendix 9.4) **[APP-087]** acknowledges that, while BNG is not mandatory for NSIPs and no timeline for BNG guidance for NSIPs is known to NE, a BNG of at least 10% is encouraged.	
ECO-7	Green Infrastructure (GI) and FLL Mitigation		This distinction has been borne in mind within the design of both new GI enhancement and the provision of FLL mitigation in that sufficient open fields suitable for foraging wintering golden plover have been secured, with the maintenance of open sightlines and suitably-low ground cover being top priority in these locations. Measures set out are considered appropriate.	NE's S42 Consultation response pointed out that enhancement for GI will need to be mindful of any necessary mitigation for FLL as the two may not be spatially compatible.	Agreed
ECO-8	Methodology: Definition of FLL	**Habitat Regulations Assessment [REP1-153]**	Advice from Natural England within the DAS indicated that FLL would be defined as land within the 10km SPA consultation zone within which significant numbers (>1%) of	In NE's S42 Statutory Consultation response **[REP1-019]**, it is stated that, *"In order to take both alone and 'in combination' effects (i.e. the combined value of*	Agreed

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			either golden plover or lapwing were recorded on more than one occasion over the survey period (pattern use). The spatial scale for evaluating FLL was not made clear by Natural England, however, this was taken to be the level of individual fields for this assessment. FLL is defined as areas of land outside the SPA which are essential or important to its ecological function; with pattern use of such areas being a critical factor. The individual field level was the most logical scale to determine both pattern use of the same area and to have a granular approach to identifying important areas for target species. Furthermore, this acknowledges that the ultimate selection of foraging areas by birds is done at the level of individual fields. Summing birds across multiple fields, in terms of determining if the Scheme impacts a significant proportion of the SPA population as a whole, is	*many separate land parcels), the sum of all birds recorded across multiple fields potentially affected by development proposals must be taken into account. Where individual land parcels are not contiguous and survey effort is not coordinated, peak counts of birds can be added where recorded on separate dates. This sum total is typically considered to be a significant percentage of a SPA/Ramsar population of non-breeding birds if where it exceeds 1% of the SPA population of a given species".* Natural England have reviewed the survey methodology and data and agree with the final assessment.	

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			understood, but this presents issues if used to determine areas of FLL, where pattern use of discrete areas is a critical factor, as discussed above. This also has implications for determining the extent of mitigation land required, with advice from NE being that any FLL would need to be mitigated on a 'like-for-like' basis (or else a smaller quantum of higher value habitat provided). It is therefore not possible to determine a proportionate quantum of mitigation land if counts are summed across fields. All survey effort was contiguous in that surveys were conducted within as narrow a window as possible; typically over two to three consecutive days, with proximate Sites surveyed on the same day. This minimised the likelihood of double-counting mobile flocks, which may roam widely in the landscape. Summing peak counts where survey areas are not contiguous and survey effort is not		

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			coordinated poses risks of double-counting and erroneously inflating the baseline and generating a meaningless number. For these reasons, it is considered that using the approach given by NE is not an effective, proportionate or robustly accurate method of determining FLL and also does not factor in the behavioural choices in habitat selection made by the bird species in question. The assessment methodology put forward by the applicant is considered appropriate and proportionate. During the Teams meeting on 6th October 2025, the methodology put forward by the Applicant was discussed with Natural England and agreed to be acceptable. The quantum of mitigation land offered by the Applicant equates to 96.62ha of land, against a total of 67.49ha of land either confirmed as FLL via survey or considered FLL on a		

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			precautionary basis (see ECO-9). Thus, an excess of land is provided. This is secured via the OLEMP **[REP3-062]** which is in turn secured by requirement 7 in the DCO.		
ECO-9	Proposed Mitigation: Precautionary approach to mitigate for partially complete wintering bird survey dataset.	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033], Habitat Regulations Assessment [REP1-153]** and **Outline Landscape and Ecological Protection and Mitigation Strategy [REP4-010]**	Green Hill A lies beyond 10km of the SPA. Similarly, Green Hill A.2 lies almost entirely beyond 10km. As such, a single season only of diurnal wintering bird surveys was completed at Green Hill A and A.2, with no nocturnal surveys at these Sites. The majority of the remaining development parcels within the Order Limits will have received a full two years of wintering (diurnal and nocturnal) bird surveys. Two full seasons of diurnal and nocturnal wintering bird surveys have been completed across Green Hill B-E, plus Green Hill BESS. However, due to the later addition of Green Hill F and G to the Scheme and the fixed submission timescale for the project, the only parcels which	NE indicated within the DAS process (Item 6 in ES Appendix 9.4) **[APP-087]** that, "*Bearing in mind the project timeframes, and the later introduction of some parcels to the Scheme, [Green Hill Solar Farm] would be unable to provide a full two year's survey effort by the point of submission. As such, NE has suggested that a degree of precautionary provision of mitigation land would be required, taking into account the data from completed surveys.*" Natural England have reviewed the survey methodology and data and	Agreed

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			for which a two year dataset is not complete are: • Green Hill F: two diurnal wintering bird visits not completed. • Green Hill G: one season (of two) of nocturnal wintering bird visits not completed. As such, a degree of **precautionary** mitigation for FLL loss in lieu of the full survey suite, comprising 73.79ha of suitable open fields secured for the ongoing use of golden plover, has been put forward in accordance with NE's recommendations. This mitigation land has been targeted to be located over Green Hill E, with additional fields in C, D, and F. Further information is detailed within ES Chapter 9 and the **Habitats Regulations Assessment (Revision A) [REP1-153].** The mitigation proposed will be secured through implementation of the OLEMP	agree with the final assessment.	

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			[REP3-062] as part of Requirement 7 in the DCO. The Applicant believes that the quantum of precautionary mitigation provision is more than sufficient to compensate for the relatively small gap in the dataset. During the Teams meeting on 6th October 2025, the quantum of mitigation land put forward by the Applicant was discussed with Natural England and agreed to be acceptable, subject to a review of detailed survey data by Natural England. At present the matter remains under discussion.		
ECO-10	Methodology	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	The assessment methodologies and significance criteria which are detailed in Section 9.4 of ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]** have been derived from the information obtained through consultation with stakeholders and by reviewing relevant guidance and studies. The assessment methodologies are	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed

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			considered appropriate and proportionate.		
ECO-11	Baseline Conditions	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	The baseline conditions which are detailed in Section 9.5 of ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]** are representative of the baseline site conditions. The assessment is considered appropriate.	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed
ECO-12	Proposed Mitigation	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	The proposed mitigation measures set out within Section 9.8 (embedded mitigation) and 9.9 (additional mitigation) of ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]** are considered proportionate and justified and are to be secured through relevant Requirements of the Draft Development Consent Order.	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed
ECO-13	Assessment of Effects	**ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [REP1-033]**	The assessment of effects is set out within Section 9.9 of ES Chapter 9 **[REP1-033]** and is based on baseline data and Scheme designs. Conclusions are assessments of residual effects are considered fully ecologically justified.	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed

Matter Ref.	Matter	Details of Matters for Discussion	Applicant Position	Consultee Position	Status
ECO-14	Decommissioning	**Outline Decommissioning Statement [REP1-135]**	An Outline Decommissioning Statement **[REP1-135]** has been prepared which sets out the need for a Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan and Decommissioning Traffic Management Plan to be produced prior to commencement of the decommissioning phase. This will be secured through DCO Requirement 7. Measures set out are considered appropriate and proportionate.	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed
ECO-15	Landscape and Ecological Management Plan	**Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan [REP3-062]**	Outline measures set out are considered appropriate and proportionate, but it is noted that it may be useful to obtain further advice from NE in due course to aid in the refinement of habitat management and enhancement proposals within the LEMP, post-consent. DCO Requirement 7 will ensure that the Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan **[REP3-062]** will be finalised with all necessary details for the	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed

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			achievement of its objectives during operation of the Scheme.		
Soils and Agriculture					
SOI-1	Methodology	**ES Chapter 20: Agricultural Circumstances [APP-057]** and **ES Appendix 20.1 Agricultural Land Classification Technical Report [APP-172]**	The assessment methodologies and significance criteria which are detailed in ES Chapter 20 [**APP-057**] and Appendix 20.1 Agricultural Land Classification Technical Report **[APP-172].** The assessment methodologies are considered appropriate and proportionate	NE is in agreement on this matter**.**	Agreed
SOI-2	Agricultural Land Classification	**ES Appendix 20.1 Agricultural Land Classification Technical Report [APP-172]**	The assessment methodologies and significance criteria which are detailed in ES Chapter 20 [**APP-057**] and Appendix 20.1 Agricultural Land Classification Technical Report **[APP-172].** The assessment methodologies are considered appropriate and proportionate	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed
Landscape and Visual Impact					
LAN-1	Methodology	**ES Appendix 8.1_LVIA Methodology [APP-079], ES Appendix 8.4_Landscape Character Area**	The assessment methodologies and significance criteria which are detailed in: ES Appendix 8.1_LVIA Methodology **[APP-079];** ES Appendix	NE is in agreement on this matter.	Agreed

Matter Ref.	Matter	Details of Matters for Discussion	Applicant Position	Consultee Position	Status
		Descriptions [APP-082] and **ES Appendix 8.3_ES LVIA Assessment Sheets [REP1-041].**	8.4_Landscape Character Area Descriptions **[APP-082]**; and ES Appendix 8.3_ES LVIA Assessment Sheets **[REP1-041**]. The assessment methodologies are considered appropriate and proportionate.		

4 Signatories

4.1.1 The above SoCG is agreed between Green Hill Solar Farm Ltd (the Applicant) and Natural England as specified below.

Duly authorised for and on behalf of **Green Hill Solar Farm Ltd**

Name:	[redacted]
Job Title:	Project Development Manager
Date:	22/01/2026
Signature:	[redacted]

Duly authorised for and on behalf of **Natural England.**

Name:	[redacted]
Job Title:	NSIP Senior Officer
Date:	29/01/2026
Signature:	[redacted]