THE DROVES
SOLAR FARM

The Droves Solar Farm

outline Soil Management Plan

Prepared by: Kernon Countryside Consultants and LDA Design
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1 Introduction

This Document

1.1 This outline Soil Management Plan (oSMP) has been prepared on behalf of The Droves Solar Farm Limited ('the Applicant') to set out the principles for handling soil in relation to the Development Consent Order (DCO) Application for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of The Droves Solar Farm (hereafter referred to as the 'Scheme').

1.2 This oSMP sets out the measures that will be developed in more detail in the detailed SMP, the production of which is secured through the **draft DCO [APP/3.1]**, as well as setting out the monitoring and recording activities to ensure that these measures are carried out.

1.3 The detailed SMP will be produced for the Scheme following the appointment of the contractor and prior to the commencement of construction. This oSMP provides the structure of the detailed SMP and the types of controls that are anticipated to be included to deliver the Scheme.

The Scheme

1.1.1 The Scheme comprises the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating station and Associated Development comprising Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), a Customer Substation, and Grid Connection Infrastructure, including a new National Grid Substation. The Scheme would allow for the generation and export of over 50MW Alternating Current (AC) of renewable energy, connecting into the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS) overhead line that passes through the Site.

1.1.2 As the Scheme would have a generating capacity in excess of 50MW, it is considered to be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008.

1.1.3 The Scheme would be located within the Order limits, also referred to as 'the Site'. The Order limits contain all elements of the Scheme comprising the Solar PV Site, the Customer Substation, the National Grid Substation, the BESS , Grid Connection Infrastructure, Mitigation and Enhancement Areas, and the Highway Works (shown in **ES Figure 3.1: Scheme Location [APP/6.3]** and described further in **ES Chapter 3: Order limits and Context [APP/6.1]**).

1.5 The land required for the Scheme is in agricultural use, with a mixture of arable crops and grassland. Areas have been used for outdoor pig rearing and free-range poultry, but those uses would be removed prior to construction.

Project team roles and responsibilities

1.6 Specific roles and responsibilities in managing the soil resource will be set out in the detailed SMP, but is likely to include the following staff:

- An Agricultural Liaison Officer (ALO) who will act as a liaison between the landowners and the contractor; and
- A suitably qualified soil practitioner who will undertake such tasks as on the Site assessments of soil suitability for handling, or who will otherwise be able to instruct the contractor on how to undertake the necessary tests.

Structure of this outline Soil Management Plan

1.7 This oSMP includes:

- Details of relevant guidance relating to soil resources and their management;
- Relevant background information, including climate, geology, altitude, topography, soil type and land use, and descriptions of the soil resources identified in the survey work undertaken across the Scheme;
- Appropriate soils handling methods for stripping, stockpiling and reinstatement of soils; and
- Monitoring procedures.

2 Relevant Guidance and Scope

2.1 This section lists available guidance on soil handling and movement, and its relevance. It then sets the scope of the advice adopted in this oSMP.

2.2 The following documents are relevant, for the reasons given:

- Defra Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites (**Ref 1**). This document provides information about handling soils and provides information about the construction of soil storage bunds short-term and long-term
- Institute of Quarrying, Good Practice for Handling Soils in Mineral Workings (**Ref 2**). The IQ document now contains work notes on soil assessment and handling. This document is particularly relevant because it sets out test for determining if different soil types are suitable for being moved or trafficked
- Natural England, Guide to assessing development proposal on agricultural land (**Ref 3**). Natural England's guide provides generic advice on soil management
- British Society of Soil Science, Working with Soil Guidance Note Document 3: Benefitting from Soil Management in Development and Construction (**Ref 4**). The BSSS Guide sets out basic guidance on what should be included in a detailed SMP; and
- Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP, formerly IEMA) Guide: A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Assessment (**Ref 5**). The ISEP Guide is directed principally at Environmental Assessment, but does contain a

comprehensive description of soils and soil functions, and the many varied roles that soil plays in the environment.

Scope

2.3 The detailed SMP will apply to the management of soils during the construction phase of the Scheme. Although most soil resources that will be affected are in agricultural use, the detailed SMP will apply to all soil resources in all land uses.

2.4 Although principally designed for the construction phase, the soil protection measures contained within the detailed SMP will also be applied to any monitoring, maintenance, repair or replacement works that need to occur during the operation of the Scheme and that affect soil resources. The measures will also be relevant to works during the decommissioning phase, subject to relevant good practice measures in place at that time.

2.5 Soil management methodologies to be included within the detailed SMP, include:

- Soil handling methods (stripping, stockpiling and reinstatement) for any soils that will be disturbed by the construction of the Scheme;
- Monitoring procedures required for all soils (disturbed or those left in situ) during the construction of the Scheme, including details of roles and responsibilities;
- Restoration methods for land that is disturbed temporarily during construction and subsequently returned to agricultural use for the operation of the Scheme;
- Any measures required to ameliorate soils to ensure the original land quality is achieved upon reinstatement; and
- Monitoring required during the operation of the Scheme.

2.6 An outline of these methodologies is provided for in this oSMP.

3 Soil Resources

Sources of information

3.1 An Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) (**Ref 6**) survey has been completed across the areas for which PV panels are proposed. This has involved sampling the soil at 100m intervals on a grid pattern, using a hand-held soil auger, and sampling down to 1.2m, where practicable.

3.2 The auger sampling was supplemented by the digging of 26 trial pits to better describe soil profiles and to help with measuring stone size and content.

Climate

3.3 The climate for the area reflects its location in eastern England. Average annual rainfall, using the data set for ALC, is 702mm per annum, and soils are at field capacity (when they are replete with water) for 144 days per annum, mostly over the winter period.

Soils Identified

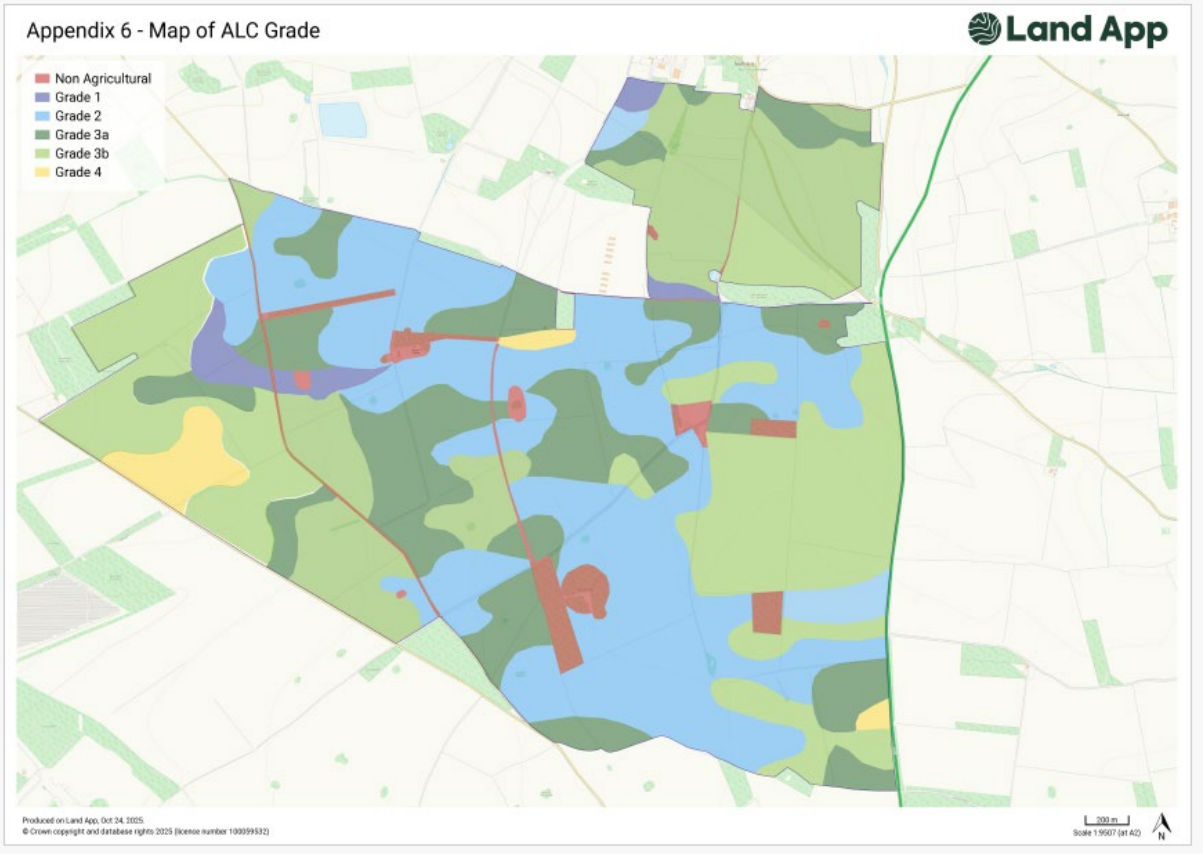
3.4 Soils are described on the National Soil Map as deep, well-drained sandy soils with some shallow, well-drained calcareous sandy and coarse loamy soils over chalk or chalk rubble.

3.5 The ALC survey found that soils vary considerably over short distances. Most topsoil was found to be medium sand, loamy medium sand or medium sandy loam, varying over short distances. Around 5% of the site was sandy clay loam.

3.6 The soils resource information is set out in the ALC. This provides the auger location plan, sample data records and photographs of many of the sample locations. This provides the information on the particular soil type across the whole of the site.

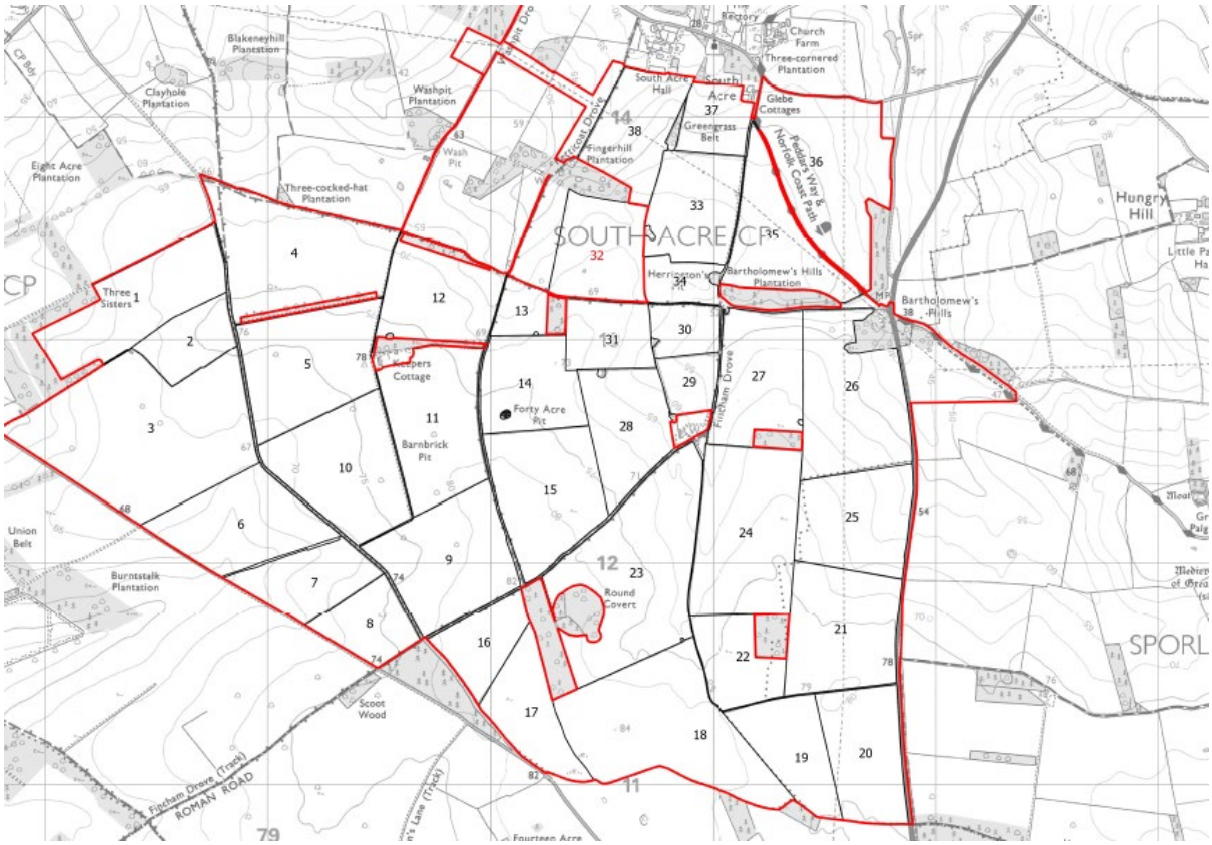
3.7 The ALC mapping shows the considerable variation in land quality over short distances. The reasons for limitations to ALC grade on this site were complex, so the ALC map cannot be used to describe soils. The ALC mapping for the Site has been reproduced below.

Insert 1: ALC Map



3.8 Examples of soils from across the Site are provided below. The field identification plan is at Insert 2.

Insert 2: Field Identification Plan



Insert 3: Examples of Soils

Grade 2 Soils (Field 5)

Grade 3a Soils (Field 10)

Grade 3b Soils (Field 25)

3.9 In places, such as Field 1 as shown in Insert 4, the soils are shallow over limestone.

Insert 4: Shallow Soils

Shallow over Limestone (Field 1)

Characterisation of Soil Type

3.10 The sensitivity of soils to handling, stockpiling and reuse is determined by their texture, wetness class (WC) and local agro-climatic conditions, particularly the number of days when soils are at field capacity and can accept no further rainfall.

3.11 Soils, when in a wet condition, generally have a lower strength and less resistance to compression and smearing than when dry. Lower strength when soils are wet also affects the bearing capacity of soils and their ability to support the safe and efficient operation of machines than when in a dry state.

3.12 In terms of resilience and susceptibility to soil wetness, the clay content of the soil largely determines the change from a solid to a plastic state (the water content at which this occurs is the plastic limit). This is the point at which increasing soil wetness reduces the cohesion and strength of the soil and its resistance to compression and smearing.

3.13 Whilst coarse textured sandy soils are not inherently plastic when wet, they are still prone to compaction when in a wet condition. Hence, handling all soils when wet will have adverse effects on plant root growth and soil profile permeability.

3.14 ISEP has characterised the sensitivity of topsoil and subsoil resources based on its resilience to structural damage, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Sensitivity of Soil Types (from ISEP (Ref 5))

Sensitivity of topsoil and subsoil	Soil texture, Field Capacity Days and Wetness Class
High sensitivity (low resilience to structural damage)	Soils with high clay and silt fractions (clays, silty clays, sandy clays, heavy silty clay loams and heavy clay loams) and organo-mineral and peaty soils where the Field Capacity Days (FCD) are 150 or greater. Medium-textured soils (silt loams, medium silty clay loams, medium clay loams and sandy clay loams) where the FCDs are 225 or greater. All soils in WC V or VI.
Medium sensitivity (medium resilience to structural damage)	Clays, silty clays, sandy clays, heavy silty clay loams, heavy clay loams, silty loams and organo-mineral and peaty soils where the FCDs are fewer than 150.

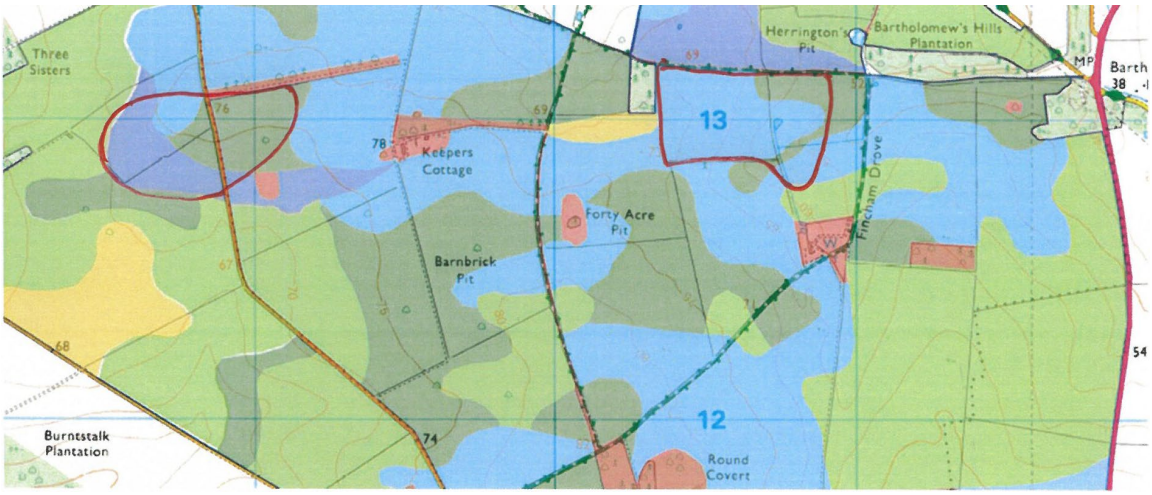
Sensitivity of topsoil and subsoil	Soil texture, Field Capacity Days and Wetness Class
	Medium-textured soils (silt loams, medium silty clay loams, medium clay loams and sandy clay loams) where FCDs are fewer than 225. Sands, loamy sands, sandy loams and sandy silt loams where the FCDs are 225 or greater or are in WC III and IV.
Low sensitivity (high resilience to structural damage)	Soils with a high sand fraction (sands, loamy sands, sandy loams and sandy silt loams) where the FCDs are fewer than 225 and are in WC I and II.

3.15 The number of FCDs across the Site is below 150, which is typical for lowland England (150). Therefore no soils are within the high sensitivity category due to their texture in this climatic area.

3.16 There are no soils in WC V or VI within the Order limits; therefore, no soils are categorised as high sensitivity solely on their wetness class. Most soils are in WC I or II, with a few places in WC III.

3.17 Two patches of sandy clay loam were identified in the centre of the Site, as identified below, in Fields 2, 3 and 5, and in Fields 29, 30 and 31. A few other isolated auger samples identified sandy clay loam, but being isolated these are not capable of separate management, nor would it be necessary. Sandy clay loams are of medium sensitivity.

Insert 5: Areas of Medium Sensitivity Soils (outlined in red)



3.19 Across the rest of the site the soils are all sandy soils that fall into the low sensitivity category (high resilience to structural damage).

4 Soil Disturbance and Handling

Soil disturbance

4.1 Topsoil stripping would be required from areas proposed for Access Tracks, Temporary Construction Compound locations, the BESS, Conversion Units, the Customer Substation and National Grid Substation, and Grid Connection Infrastructure. There is a potential requirement for localised site levelling, which would also involve stripping of topsoil prior to regrading. This disturbance to the topsoil would be temporary, except for the National Grid Substation and Grid Connection Infrastructure, mostly long-term, spanning the lifespan of the Scheme. The specific areas and volumes of topsoil and subsoil of each soil type to be excavated from these areas will be confirmed in the detailed SMP and the detailed design of the BESS, Customer Substation, and National Grid Substation will seek to minimise topsoil and subsoil disturbance as far as practicable. The Temporary Construction Compounds would be a short-term disturbance only.

4.2 The detailed SMP will also describe where and for how long these soils would be stockpiled; how soil within the stockpiles would be managed, having regard to different soil types and neighbouring land uses; and how and when any of the soils would be restored.

4.3 The proposed method of the cable installation across the agricultural land is primarily open cut excavation (other than where trenchless crossings impact on agricultural land). Open cut excavation would involve stripping the topsoil and subsoil and placing it next to the cable route within the same land holding where practicable, installing the cables, then backfilling the exposed trench with the original soils in the correct sequence. This disturbance is temporary and short-term.

Soil Handling Methods

Soil stripping methods and suitability criteria

4.4 Soil stripping, handling, storage and reinstatement procedures will conform with the relevant guidance set out in **Section 2** (or any replacement guidance) of this oSMP, particularly the Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites and the Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils in Mineral Workings (**Ref 1 and 2**). Although the Good Practice Guide is designed specifically for mineral workings, it is the replacement of the earlier Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Good Practice Guidance for Handling Soils (2000), and has wider applicability to developments other than mineral workings.

4.5 The main impacts on soils during the construction phase occur as a result of trafficking by vehicles and plant, and excavating and handling soils in inappropriate conditions, largely when the ground conditions and soils are too wet. Travelling over wet soils, or moving them when they are wet, and replacing them when wet, can result in damage to the soil structure, and with clay soils especially a smearing of the surface. This can be difficult to ameliorate.

4.6 The following general good practice measures should be adopted and employed by the contractor to avoid damage to soil structure, and should be included in the detailed SMP:

- Suitably qualified soil scientists will be appointed by the contractor to oversee and define all soil management good practice measures set out in this oSMP
- Soil resources will be clearly identified (usually by texture and/or colour) to avoid mixing of topsoils with subsoils when excavating and filling the trenches
- No trafficking of vehicles/plant or materials storage will occur on reinstated soil, wherever practicable
- Disturbance to soils will be minimised at all stages; for example, avoiding unnecessary repeat movements over the same ground
- The movement of vehicles and plant will be restricted to designated access and haul routes
- Multiple handling of soils will be avoided
- Soil handling, including tracking over the soil with machinery, will only take place in suitable soil moisture and weather conditions
- Soils will only be stored in designated stockpiles
- Long-term (over 6 months) stockpiles will be seeded to prevent wind and water erosion; and
- Records of soil handling operations and stockpiles will be kept.

Soil moisture conditions for handling

4.7 Handling soils in appropriate moisture conditions will avoid damage to soil structure, particularly from compaction and smearing. Whilst no high sensitivity and low resilience soil textures have been found within the Site, adherence to the moisture conditions for handling is extremely important.

4.8 The Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils provides indicative regional summaries of the optimal times for soil handling based on soil moisture deficits, FCD and soil textures. Within this model, the Scheme is within climatic zone 2. The indicative months when soils might be in a sufficiently dry condition to move are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Indicative months when soils are sufficiently dry for handling (from Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils)

Soil clay content	Handling window
Topsoil (0-30cm) <10% clay	Late March to early November

Soil clay content	Handling window
10-27% clay	Early May to early November
>27% clay	Not given
Upper subsoil (30-60cm)	
<10% clay	Mid-April to early November
10-27% clay	Early May to early November
>27% clay	Early June to early November
Lower subsoil (>60cm)	
<10% clay	Mid-April to early November
10-18% clay	Early May to early November
18-27% clay	Early June to early November
>27% clay	Early June to mid-October

4.9 This guide is intended to assist with planning soil handling and movement operations at an early stage and broad scale for projects. It will also assist in communicating the likely requirements for access with landowners. It will not be relied on in practice when deciding operationally whether to proceed with soil handling on the ground, given the actual variation in weather events and soil moisture conditions from year to year and within years.

4.10 Nevertheless, in planning soil handling operations for the Scheme, it is evident that there is generally likely to be a smaller window when the heavier textured subsoils are suitable for handling. For most of the PV panel areas, the subsoils will not be disturbed and the soils will only be trafficked in suitable soil moisture and weather conditions. For the installation of Cabling, it is important that subsoils are reinstated in a suitably dry condition as otherwise the reinstatement could lead to compaction and poor drainage at depth which would be difficult to remedy. If soils are wet when due for reinstatement, they should be moved into smaller windrows prior to reinstatement to enable them to dry to a suitable moisture condition.

4.11 It is important to note that soil handling operations will be completed in time to enable a new vegetation cover to become established on reinstated land (or on the surface of a stockpile) prior to the onset of winter in order to keep the soils in as dry a condition as practicable and prevent erosion over winter.

4.12 The above gives a broad indication of when soils are likely to be suitable to be moved but the contractor must set out the procedures for assessing on site whether soils are in a suitably dry condition for handling in the detailed SMP.

4.13 The initial testing will be carried out by professional soil surveyors but suitably trained site operatives can carry out and record the testing during operations, with periodic reviews undertaken by the professional soil surveyors.

4.14 The tests will be undertaken in the field, with samples taken from at least five locations in the soil handling area and at each soil horizon to the full depth of the horizon to be stripped. The tests comprise visual examination of the soil and physical assessment of the soil consistency. The criteria are taken from the Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils and set out below in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3 Visual examination test for suitably dry soils (from Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils)

Visual examination	Action
If the soil is wet, films of water are visible on the surface of soil particles or aggregates (e.g. clods or peds)	No soil handling to take place
If a clod or ped is squeezed in the hand and readily deforms into a cohesive 'ball'	No soil handling to take place
If the sample is moist (i.e. there is a slight dampness when squeezed in the hand) but it does not significantly change colour (darken) on further wetting, and clods break up/crumble readily when squeezed in the hand rather than forming into a ball	Soil handling can take place
If the sample is dry, it looks dry and changes colour (darkens) if water is added, and it is brittle	Soil handling can take place

Table 4 Consistency test for suitably dry soils (from Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils)

Consistency tests (not applicable to sands and coarse loams)	Action
First test: Attempt to mould soil sample into a ball by hand	
Impossible because soil is too dry and hard	Soil handling can take place
Impossible because soil is too loose and dry	Soil handling can take place
Impossible because the soil is too loose and wet	No soil handling to take place

Possible - Go to second test	
Second test: Attempt to roll ball into a 3mm diameter thread by hand:	
Impossible because soil crumbles or collapses	Soil handling can take place
Possible	No soil handling to take place

4.15 The contractor must also include a rainfall protocol in the detailed SMP for stopping and restarting soil handling operations. The following guidelines are commonly used and are taken from the Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils, assuming that the soils are in a suitably dry condition (following the above tests) before the rainfall event:

- In light drizzle, soil handling may continue for up to four hours unless the soils are already at/near to their moisture limit
- In light rain, soil handling must cease after 15 minutes; and
- In heavy rain and intense showers, soil handling shall cease immediately.

4.16 Once the rainfall event has passed, the visual examination and consistency tests should be applied to determine if soil handling operations can restart, provided that the ground is free from ponding and ground conditions are safe to do so.

4.17 These are general guidelines, and decisions to proceed or stop should be made at the local site level and based on the actual wetness state of the soils being handled.

Preparatory works

4.18 Before commencing any work on site that involves vehicles running over ground, the contractor will ensure that the following areas are marked and signposted within the Site:

- Construction exclusion zones around trees
- Areas from which soils will be stripped
- Locations of topsoil and subsoil stockpiles; and
- Access routes.

Topsoil stripping methods

4.19 Any areas required for Temporary Construction Compounds, machinery storage etc., will normally be stripped of topsoil. Topsoil will be stripped in accordance with good practice as set out in the Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils or any subsequent revision, and which will be described further in the detailed SMP.

4.20 Likely plant required will include excavators, tracked dozers and dump trucks.

4.21 The locations and depths of topsoil to be stripped will be confirmed in the detailed SMP.

Subsoil stripping methods

4.22 Subsoils will be stripped in accordance with good practice as set out in the Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils or any subsequent revision, and which will be described further in the detailed SMP.

4.23 Likely plant required will include excavators, tracked dozers and dump trucks.

4.24 The locations and depths of subsoils to be stripped will be confirmed in the detailed SMP.

Stockpiling

Locations of Stockpiles

4.25 The locations of topsoil and subsoil stockpiles will be determined in the detailed SMP as the information becomes available.

Building stockpiles

4.26 Stockpiles will be built according to the good practice methodologies as set out in the Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils or any subsequent revision, and which will be described further in the detailed SMP.

4.27 Stockpiled soils may need to be sampled and the nutrient status ascertained in order to inform potential suitability for re-use.

Maintenance of stockpiles

4.28 For each stockpile a plan must be kept and maintained, detailing:

- Material type (topsoil or subsoil)
- Date/time when soil was stockpiled and weather conditions
- Volume of material
- Stockpile location
- Source location of material; and

- Management of stockpile, particularly in respect of weed control and other biosecurity considerations.

Reinstatement

4.29 Reinstatement of soils from any compound areas and Access Tracks that have been stockpiled should involve excavating and replacing the soil according to good practice guidance set out in the Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils or any subsequent revision, and which will be described further in the detailed SMP.

4.30 Reinstatement of soils disturbed by cable installation should occur as soon as reasonably practicable after installation of the cable such that the soil handling conditions are likely to be similar at the point of excavation and reinstatement.

4.31 Liaison will take place between the ALO and contractor to agree the timing and management of the reinstatement of soil over the cable.

4.32 The soils must be reinstated in order, i.e. subsoil first then topsoil. Normally, any surplus material from the cable void that would need to be removed from site would be subsoil, retaining the full topsoil resource on site. These matters would be set out in the detailed SMP.

Monitoring procedures during construction

4.33 This section of the detailed SMP will set out the mitigation and management measures to be included as a minimum during construction.

4.34 Monitoring procedures during construction will apply to all soils that are to be reinstated.

4.35 Guidelines for monitoring the soil resource during construction will be included in the detailed SMP. Continuous, live monitoring by the contractor of soil handling/weather conditions, as well as visual monitoring of ground conditions, will be required.

4.36 Compaction will be monitored during construction by inspecting the soil following installation of piles but prior to fixing the PV panels. If compaction is identified, remedial action must be taken while the ground remains accessible to the machinery required to relieve compaction and before the PV panels are fixed.

4.37 Monitoring the soil resource during construction will primarily involve the contractor who is responsible for ensuring the detailed SMP is adhered to. Periodic monitoring by a suitably qualified soil practitioner may also be required.

4.38 All reinstated soils will be assessed by or on behalf of the contractor and signed off by the contractor to record that the soils and land are in a suitable condition. Any defects identified and agreed between the contractor and ALO will be ameliorated by the contractor prior to handing back the land.

5 Operational Phase

5.1 During the operational phase, the requirement to travel over land with vehicles will be limited. Normal management will require:

- Vehicles to stay on Access Tracks as far as practicable
- Avoidance of travelling on unsurfaced land when the soils are wet and vehicles are causing rutting; and
- Soil is not moved (e.g. for repairs) when wet unless this cannot be avoided.

5.2 Regular maintenance, such as PV panel cleaning, will be programmed to take place in summer months when ground conditions are suitable.

5.3 Any localised repairs that involve movement of soils should follow the guidance in **Section 4**, and any unavoidable soil disturbance should be repaired when ground conditions are suitable.

6 Decommissioning

6.1 During the decommissioning phase, soils and land will be disturbed due to the removal of all infrastructure except for the National Grid Substation and Grid Connection Infrastructure. Soil mitigation measures during the construction stage outlined in this outline SMP would still apply during the decommissioning phase in principle. However, a detailed SMP will be needed to be in place to reflect weather, soil and land conditions to ensure the Site is returned to its original use and condition as far as practicable. The detailed SMP for the decommissioning phase will primarily include the following but not limited:

- Site preparation
- Soil stripping
- Soil stockpiling
- Soil reinstatement:
  - Soil profiles to be reinstated will be designed to ensure soils/land to be restored to previous condition
  - Treatment of overburden and placement by subsoiler/ripper especially for BESS where the ground has been sealed
  - Restore field drainage where required to avoid waterlogging; and
  - Soil placement,
- Soil aftercare and any remediation required.

References and Glossary

Ref 1 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, “Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites,” 2009.

Ref 2 Institute of Quarrying, “Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils in Mineral Workings,” 2021.

Ref 3 Natural England, “Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land”, 2021.

Ref 4 British Society of Soil Science, “WWS3 - Benefitting from Soil Management on Development and Construction”, 2022.

Ref 5 Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP) Guide “A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Assessment,” 2022.

Ref 6 Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, “Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales. Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land”.

Glossary

Term	Acronym	Definition
Agricultural Liaison Officer	ALO	A liaison between the landowners and the contractor
Field Capacity Days	FCD	The number of days when the soil moisture deficit is zero
Wetness Class	WC	Indication of the depth and duration of waterlogging in the soil profile.

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