



WHITESTONE
solar farm

WHITESTONE SOLAR FARM

Volume 6: Environmental Statement

6.20 Appendix 15.1: Policy, Legislation and Guidance

Application Document ref. EN0110020/APP/6.20

Revision 01

June 2026

Planning Act (2008)
Infrastructure Planning (Applications:
Prescribed Forms and Procedure 2009
Regulations 5(2)(a)

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ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Document Status					
Version	Purpose of Document	Authored by	Reviewed by	Approved by	Review Date
Rev01	DCO Submission	ERM	DWD, Pershing, TLT, Whitestone Net Zero Ltd	JT	01/06/2026

Approval for issue			
Whitestone Net Zero Ltd			1 June 2026

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Whitestone Net Zero Ltd

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Glossary

Term	Meaning
<i>Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)</i>	A system of classification of agricultural resource value of soils in England devised by Natural England, from Grade 1 (best quality) to Grade 5 (poorest quality), and based on criteria including soil characteristics (depth, structure, texture, chemistry, stoniness) as well as climate and site aspects.
<i>Best and Most Versatile (BMV)</i>	“Agricultural land is land with an Agricultural land Classification of Grade 1 – Grade 3 (subgrade 3a)” (National Planning Policy Framework).
<i>Cable Corridor</i>	Corridors within which the high voltage cables would be constructed.
<i>Environmental Statement (ES)</i>	The Environmental Statement which presents the environmental information relating to the Proposed Development. The ES has been prepared to present information for formal consultation in accordance with current EIA regulation.
<i>Gross Value Added (GVA)</i>	GVA is an economic metric that measures the contribution of a producer, industry, or sector to an economy, essentially representing the value of goods and services produced less the cost of inputs used in the production process.
<i>Order Limits</i>	Maximum extent of the Proposed Development comprising the Site and Cable Corridors.
<i>The Applicant</i>	Whitestone Net Zero Ltd.
<i>The Proposed Development</i>	The proposed Whitestone Solar Farm.
<i>The Site</i>	The land planned to be used for solar PV array and associated infrastructure, BESS, substations, and landscaping and habitat enhancement. The Site is split into W1, W2, and W3.
<i>Whitestone 1 (W1)</i>	The northern parcels of the Whitestone Solar Farm.
<i>Whitestone 2 (W2)</i>	The middle parcels of the Whitestone Solar Farm.
<i>Whitestone 3 (W3)</i>	The southern parcels of the Whitestone Solar Farm.

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
BMV	Best and Most Versatile Land
DESNZ	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
DMRB	Design Manual for Roads and Bridges
ES	Environmental Statement

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Acronym	Meaning
<i>FTE</i>	Full Time Equivalent
<i>HM</i>	His Majesty
<i>IEMA</i>	Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
<i>ISEP</i>	Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals
<i>LPA</i>	Local Planning Authority
<i>NPPF</i>	National Planning Policy Framework
<i>NPS</i>	National Policy Statement
<i>NSIP</i>	Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project
<i>PRoW</i>	Public Right of Way
<i>PV</i>	Photovoltaic
<i>SIA</i>	Social Impact Assessment

Units

Units	Meaning
<i>ha</i>	Hectares

15.1 Legislation, Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy

Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (NPS EN-1) (December 2025)¹

- 15.1.1 The Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) provides the government policy on energy Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), how planning applications relating to energy will be assessed, and the way in which any impacts and mitigation measures will be considered.
- 15.1.2 Part 5, Section 5.11 of this policy statement sets out the Land Use impacts that should be considered. This is inclusive of Open Space, Green Infrastructure, and Green Belt.
- 15.1.3 Part 5, Section 5.13 of this policy statement sets out the socio-economic impacts that should be considered.
- 15.1.4 Paragraph 5.11.1 states:
“An energy infrastructure project will have a direct effect on the existing use of the proposed site and may have indirect effects on the use, or planned use, of land in the vicinity for other types of development. Given the likely locations of energy infrastructure projects there may be particular effects on open space including green and blue infrastructure.”
- 15.1.5 Paragraph 5.11.8 states that an Environmental Statement (ES) should:
“Identify existing and proposed land uses near the project, any effects of replacing an existing development or use of the site with the proposed project or preventing a development or use on a neighbouring site from continuing. Applicants should also assess any effects of precluding a new development or use proposed in the development plan. The assessment should be proportionate to the scale of the preferred scheme and its likely impacts on such receptors. For developments on previously developed land, the applicant should ensure that they have considered the risk posed by land contamination and how it is proposed to address this.”
- 15.1.6 Paragraph 5.11.13 states:
“Applicants should seek to minimise impacts on the best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification) and preferably use land in areas of poorer quality (grades 3b, 4 and 5).”
- 15.1.7 Paragraph 5.13.4 states:
“The applicant’s assessment should consider all relevant socio-economic impacts, which may include:
- The creation of jobs and training opportunities. Applicants may wish to provide information on the sustainability of the jobs created, including where they will help to develop the skills needed for the UK’s transition to Net Zero;*
 - The contribution to the development of low-carbon industries at the local and regional level as well as nationally;*
 - The provision of additional local services and improvements to local infrastructure, including the provision of educational and visitor facilities;*

- *Any indirect beneficial impacts for the region hosting the infrastructure, in particular in relation to use of local support services and supply chains;*
- *Effects (positive and negative) on tourism and other users of the area impacted;*
- *The impact of a changing influx of workers during the different construction, operation and decommissioning phases of the energy infrastructure. This could change the local population dynamics and could alter the demand for services and facilities in the settlements nearest to the construction work (including community facilities and physical infrastructure such as energy, water, transport and waste). There could also be effects on social cohesion depending on how populations and service provision change as a result of the development; and*
- *Cumulative effects - if development consent were to be granted for a number of projects within a region and these were developed in a similar timeframe, there could be some short-term negative effects, for example a potential shortage of construction workers to meet the needs of other industries and major projects within the region."*

15.1.8 Additionally, the statement states that, it should be considered how impacts correlate with local planning policies as well as how socio-economic impacts are linked to other impacts e.g. visual.

National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (NPS EN-3) (December 2025)²

- 15.1.9 The guidance in National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) refers specifically to renewable energy sources, and references the general guidance provided in EN-1 with further considerations that are technology specific.
- 15.1.10 The NPS sets out the impacts that should be considered on agricultural land which is covered in paragraphs 2.10.29 to 2.10.34. It outlines that where possible previously developed land, including; brownfield, contaminated and industrial land should be utilised. If the use of agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, the use of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land should be avoided where possible.
- 15.1.11 The NPS states in paragraph 2.10.33 that the "*Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) is the only approved system for grading agricultural quality in England and Wales and, if necessary, field surveys should be used to establish the ALC grades in accordance with the current, or any successor to it, grading criteria and identify the soil types to inform soil management at the construction, operation and decommissioning phases in line with the Defra Construction Code.*"
- 15.1.12 The NPS also sets out the impacts that should be considered on Public Rights of Way (PRoW) which is covered in paragraphs 2.10.41 to 2.10.45. Notably paragraph 2.10.45 states "*applicants should set out detail on how public rights of way would be managed to ensure they are safe to use in an outline Public Rights of Way Management Plan.*"

National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure (NPS EN-5) (December 2025) ³

15.1.13 The National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure (EN-5) provides advice to operators on the electricity transmission and distribution networks and in section 2.6 it describes land rights and land interests in relation to electricity network developments. Paragraph 2.6.1 states, that:

- *“In order to lawfully install, inspect, maintain, repair, adjust, alter, replace or remove an electricity line... applicants must:*
- *Own the land on, over or under which the relevant activity is to take place;*
- *Hold sufficient rights over or interests in that land (typically in the form of an easement); or*
- *Have permission for the activity from the present owner or occupier of that land (typically in the form of a wayleave).”*

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024⁴

15.1.14 The NPPF was introduced in March 2012 and most recently revised in December 2024. The NPPF sets out the government’s planning policies for England and provides a framework for sustainable development planning. In line with previous versions there is emphasis on sustainable development centred around three objectives:

- **Economic objective:** to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- **Social objective:** to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **An environmental objective:** to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

15.1.15 The NPPF outlines that its framework is underpinned by a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

15.1.16 Section 14 is focused on “*meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change*” which outlines considerations for decisions regarding a low carbon future. This includes helping increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, in doing so plans should;

- Provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, and their future re-powering and life extension, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed appropriately (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts);

- Consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and
- Identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers.

Build Back Better: Our Pan for Growth⁵

15.1.17 The His Majesty (HM) Treasuries Build Back Better Plan underlined the need for investment to meet net zero targets, and the opportunities for economic growth and job creation associated with low carbon goods and services. This has since been withdrawn.

UK Modern Industrial Strategy⁶

15.1.18 The UK Modern Industrial Strategy supersedes the Build Back Better, is a 10-year plan aimed at making the UK a more competitive, secure, and resilient economy by boosting business investment, simplifying regulation, and accelerating innovation.

Local Policy

South Yorkshire's Growth Plan⁷

15.1.19 The Growth Plan was published in September 2025 and outlines the regions economic strategy, superseding the Strategic Economic Plan. The Growth Plan establishes a long-term vision to deliver a bigger, better and more resilient regional economy. It aims to establish South Yorkshire as a key contributor to national priorities including;

- Clean energy;
- Advanced manufacturing; and
- Net-zero transition.

15.1.20 The Growth Plan is structure around four long-term missions to 2035;

- **Our Businesses:** supporting a strong and diverse business base, with emphasis on productivity, innovation and growth sectors including advanced manufacturing, clean energy and low-carbon industries;
- **Our Places:** creating connected, vibrant and investable places, supported by strategic infrastructure and regeneration to attract investment and support economic activity;
- **Our People:** improving access to skills, training and employment, with a focus on inclusive growth and ensuring local communities benefit from economic development; and
- **Our Future:** strengthening regional resilience through sustainable infrastructure, future-proofed energy networks, environmental enhancement and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

15.1.21 The Growth Plan adopts a place-based approach – identifying growth areas and the role of major infrastructure and energy investment in unlocking development,

supporting inward investment and generating employment. It recognises the contribution of large-scale energy and infrastructure projects to local supply chains, skills development and long-term economic resilience, alongside their role in supporting national clean energy objectives

Doncaster Local Plan 2015-2035⁸

15.1.22 The Doncaster Local Plan was adopted in September 2021 and sets out the vision and strategic policies for the local authority's growth and development over the period to 2035.

15.1.23 Policy 18 is relevant to Public Rights of Way and states the following:

- *“Where new developments affect public rights of way, the public right of way should be retained and wherever possible be on the legally recorded alignment. Where a public right of way is affected the development should be designed to accommodate the route following the principles outlined in Policy 19 (below);*
- *Where development leads to the diversion of an existing right of way, a suitable alternative must be established, following the principles outlined in Policies 19 and 20 (below);*
- *Development will not normally be allowed to lead to the closure of a public right of way unless a suitable replacement can be established; and*
- *Developers will be expected to consider any unrecorded public paths that cross development sites and treat them in the same way as definitive public rights of way.”*

15.1.24 Policy 19 is relevant to access design and layout of Public Rights of Way and states that proposals will be expected to meet the following:

- Developers will be expected to incorporate the principles of least restrictive access in the design and layout of public rights of way as part of the development;
- Wherever possible, any existing or alternative route alignments through development sites should run through open, landscaped areas and should;
 - “avoid the use of estate roads;
 - avoid alignments enclosed by fencing with little or no surveillance from adjacent buildings;
 - be free from sharp bends which could provide blind spots and hiding places;
 - be suitably surfaced to a specification agreed with highway authority; and
 - be free from barriers. Barriers should be considered as a last resort and will only be authorised where there is clear justification. Agreed structures will need to be the least restrictive and conform to the British Standard for Gaps Gates and Stiles.
 - *Where paths are not enclosed, minimum widths of 2 metres for footpath and 4 metres for bridleway and restricted byways should be provided. If it is necessary for the path to be enclosed by fencing, hedging or buildings, then minimum widths of 3 metres for footpaths, 5 metres for bridleways and 6 metres for restricted byways should be provided;*

- *Any new routes or altered alignments through development should link into the surrounding public rights of way network or adopted highway network to maintain and improve connectivity and ease of movement; and*
- *New routes should have formal status and be recorded on the appropriate legal record. This will secure the long-term protection of the route and formalise responsibility for maintenance.”*

15.1.25 Policy 20 outlines the stance on PRow crossing roads, railways, canals and rivers. It states that if a development will give rise to a significant increase in the use of PRow's where there are crossroads present, *“it must show that all safety and accessibility considerations have been taken into account to ensure use of the crossing can be retained.”*

15.1.26 Policy 58 low carbon and renewable energy highlights the councils plan to increase the supply of low carbon and renewable energy. Proposals will be supported where they *“have undertaken community engagement and demonstrate how they will deliver environmental, social and economic benefits”*.

Rotherham Local Plan Core Strategy, 2013-2028⁹

15.1.27 A new Local Plan is in preparation, but no adopted replacement currently exists.

15.1.28 Policy CS 3 from the Rotherham Local Plan on location of new development outlines relevant criteria including:

- Ideally on previously developed (brownfield) land;
- Potential to relieve deprivation;
- Potential to maintain and create links to green infrastructure; and
- Ability to limit the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1,2 and 3a).

Dinnington Neighbourhood Plan¹⁰

15.1.29 The Plan outlines the need to increase the skills and qualifications locally. As such Community Action 3: in the Dinnington Neighbourhood Plan states that proposals that create employment and business opportunities will be actively supported, especially where there is:

- *“The promotion of local employment and training opportunities such as through local labour agreements, including as part of a Section 106 agreement or similar; and*
- *Setting up or improving initiatives to develop skills and employment opportunities for local people, including the provision of small and starter units for new businesses.”*

Wickersley Neighbourhood Plan¹¹

15.1.30 The Plan was officially adopted in May 2022 and outlines the towns strategic vision up until 2028. While the Plan does not reference socio-economic issues it outlines that there is a desire to *“conserve and enhance green and open spaces and secure green infrastructure provision in new developments.”*

Maltby Neighbourhood Plan¹²

15.1.31 The Plan was adopted in February 2024 and runs up to 2028 and the Plan “seeks to shape and address the development challenges and opportunities that face the parish of Maltby. It focuses on those areas where the evidence has identified the most pressing need for action and on which the Plan can have the greatest impact.” One of the Plan’s policies relates to protecting and enhancing the important green spaces and countryside. It further outlines that “all of these statutory and non-statutory designations seek to protect and improve the quality of the natural environment and provide strong general protection against unsympathetic development”.

North East Derbyshire Local Plan 2014-2034¹³

15.1.32 The Plan aims to shape “the places where we live, work, shop and spend our leisure time. North East Derbyshire District Council is required by legislation to prepare a Local Plan setting out its vision, objectives and policies to guide the future sustainable growth and development of the area.”

15.1.33 The policies below are considered relevant to socio-economics and land use.

15.1.34 Policy ID7: Green Infrastructure: “Development proposals should conserve and where appropriate improve and extend the Green Infrastructure Network running through and beyond North East Derbyshire.”

15.1.35 Policy ID8: Greenways and Public Rights of Way; “Proposals that would result in the loss of, or deterioration in the quality of existing Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) will not be permitted unless equivalent alternative provision is made. Where diversions are required, new routes should be direct, convenient and attractive, and should not have an unacceptable adverse impact on environmental or heritage assets.”

15.1.36 Policy SS1: Sustainable Development:

- “Promote the efficient use of land and the re-use of previously developed land (including the remediation of contaminated land) buildings and existing infrastructure in sustainable locations”;
- “Support the local economy by contributing towards business expansion and growth, attracting and supporting a skilled labour force, and improving skills and access for local people to job opportunities including targeted recruitment and training, and the use of Local Labour Agreements”;
- “Promote the social and economic wellbeing of North East Derbyshire’s communities and contribute to reducing social disadvantages and inequalities”;
- and
- “Protect the productive potential of the District’s best quality agricultural land, and avoid sterilisation of mineral resources”.

Guidance

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) (2025), Solar Roadmap¹⁴:

15.1.37 The UK Solar Roadmap was published in June 2025 and is a strategy aimed at rapidly scaling up solar energy deployment across the UK in order to meet the

UK's 2030 clean power goals. There are a number of key aims outlined to achieve this;

- Including strengthening the UK solar supply chain and its workforce;
- Ensuring community benefits from solar developments; and
- Tripling the solar capacity by 2030.

15.1.38 The roadmap outlines the solar skills within the net-zero sector. It provides estimations of employment, with the UK solar sector employing approximately 9,000 direct full-time equivalents (FTEs) and 8,500 indirect FTEs in 2022. The roadmap further expands on this stating that the sector could account for up to 35,000 direct jobs in 2030.

HM Treasury Green Book¹⁵

15.1.39 The HM Treasury Green Book is the UK government's official guidance on how to appraise and evaluate policies, programmes, and projects. It provides detail on how to track performance and assess outcomes before, during and after implementation. As such the Green Book offers guidance on discounting, which means "*all values in the economic dimension are expressed in real prices relating to the first year of proposal*". The Green Book discount rate used in UK government appraisal is currently set at 3.5% in real terms for the first 30 years of a proposal.

15.1.40 Section 2 of the Green Book provides a non-technical introduction to appraisal and evaluation. In section 2.1 it states that "*appraisal is the process of assessing the costs, benefits and risks of different options for achieving government objectives. Its purpose is to help decision makers understand the potential impacts and trade-offs of different options, base on robust evidence and analysis. Practitioners have a duty to provide objective, honest and impartial advice to decision makers.*"

A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Impact Assessment¹⁶

15.1.41 The guidance from the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP) (formerly the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (IEMA)) aims to improve how land and soil are considered in EIAs. It encourages a shift to a broader understanding of soil functions, ecosystem services, and natural capital. This guidance is a call to action for EIA practitioners to treat land and soil as critical environmental assets, not just development constraints. It supports better decision-making and contributes to the UK's broader sustainability and biodiversity goals.

Guide to Assessing Development Proposals on Agricultural Land¹⁷

15.1.42 The guide from Natural England helps developers and local planning authorities (LPAs) assess how proposed developments may affect agricultural land and soils, with a focus on protecting the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land and promoting sustainable soil management.

15.1.43 The key principles outlined in the guide for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are;

- Protecting BMV land and consider the economic and environmental value of BMV land and priorities development of poorer quality land;
- Sustainable soil management and that soil is recognised as a natural capital asset; and
- ALC data should be used to inform planning decisions.

Design Manual for Roads and Bridges LA109 – Geology and Soils¹⁸

15.1.44 The manual sets out the requirements for assessing and reporting the effects of highway projects on geology and soils. It replaces earlier Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) documents and aligns with the EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. In paragraph 3.11 the manual gives direction as to the value (sensitivity) of receptors and offers a sensitivity matrix for classifying the significance and in Section E/2 it outlines the typical magnitude matrix. Section E/1 states that consultation shall be undertaken with Natural England where development:

- *“Is not for agricultural purposes;*
- *Is not in accordance with the provisions of a development plan; and*
- *Involves the loss of not less than 20 hectares of grades 1, 2 or 3a agricultural land (BMV) which is for the time being used (or was last used for agricultural purposes.”*

The Land Use Framework for England¹⁹

15.1.45 The Land Use Framework for England was published in March 2026 and sets out how land can be used more effectively in future. In relation to renewables, it recognises that the change in land use required will be small in percentage terms, and that there will be opportunities to continue farming alongside solar and wind generation, such as continued livestock grazing or the integration of solar with arable farming. Analysis presented in the framework estimates that, as an upper-bound estimate, the area of land required for renewables by 2035 could be up to 129,000ha, which would account for 1% of land in England and 2% of the Utilised Agricultural Area.

Social Impact Assessment in Environmental Impact Assessment in the UK²⁰

15.1.46 Recent UK guidance published by ISEP emphasises that Social Impact Assessment (SIA) provides a structured framework for identifying, assessing and managing the social and socio-economic effects of major development, including effects on employment, economic activity, housing, community wellbeing, social infrastructure and sense of place. The guidance highlights the importance of proportionate, evidence-based assessment informed by relevant national and local policy objectives, robust baseline conditions, and professional judgement, and recommends consideration of effects across the full project lifecycle. It also recognises that social effects may vary spatially and across different population groups, and that both positive and adverse effects should be considered alongside opportunities to maximise social benefits, consistent with the mitigation hierarchy and wider sustainability objectives.

Solar PV on Agricultural Land²¹

15.1.47 Recent guidance published by the ISEP highlights the need for a more consistent and evidence-based approach to assessing the socio-economic and land-use implications of large-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) development on agricultural land. Issued in response to the rapid expansion of UK solar capacity and increasing pressure on rural areas, the guidance emphasises the importance of protecting the UK's BMV agricultural land while balancing renewable energy delivery with food security, rural livelihoods and environmental sustainability. It sets out clear expectations for Agricultural Land Classification, soil assessment, biodiversity net gain, pollution risk management and socio-economic analysis, including consideration of effects on farming activity and the long-term productivity of land.

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