

# DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE JULY 2025

**Case No:** 24/00883/FUL  
**Proposal:** Construction of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure, including a substation and underground cable to provide a connection to the grid.  
**Location:** Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road  
**Applicant:** Mr Alan Connolly, Bluefield Renewable Developments Ltd  
**Grid Ref:** (E) 510322 (N) 270381  
**Date of Registration:** 24/07/2024  
**Parishes:** Stow Longa, Catworth, Spaldwick and Kimbolton & Stonely

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## RECOMMENDATION –

**Delegated powers to APPROVE subject to conditions and an acceptable unilateral undertaking to secure BNG monitoring fees.**

**This application is referred to the Development Management Committee (DMC) in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation as the officer recommendation is contrary to the recommendation of Stow Longa, Spaldwick, Kimbolton & Stonely and Leighton Bromswold Parish Councils.**

### 1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

#### **Application site**

- 1.1 The application site comprises approximately 94ha of agricultural land which is currently split into circa 7 no. agricultural fields which are delineated by hedgerow and trees.
- 1.2 The application site includes 2 parcels of land which are connected by a thin strip of land. The more northerly of the 2 parcels measures circa 1.2ha and is proposed to accommodate a UKPN substation which will connect to an existing overhead power line. The more southerly of the 2 parcels measures approximately 87ha and is proposed to accommodate the solar panels and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). The thin strip of land connecting the two parcels is proposed to accommodate the underground cable connecting the solar panels to the UKPN substation.
- 1.3 Accounting for areas of open space between and around the panels, the net area of the application site to be covered by solar panels is circa 64.9ha.

- 1.4 The area proposed for the UKPN substation is located approximately 0.8 miles west of Spaldwick, approximately 0.7 miles north of Stow Longa and approximately 1.4 miles east of Catworth.
- 1.5 The area proposed for the solar farm and BESS is situated to the west and southwest of the village of Stow Longa. Kimbolton is located approximately 0.9 miles to the south, Tilbrook approximately 1.3 miles to the south west and Spaldwick approximately 1.5 miles north east of the solar farm. Leighton Bromswold is located approximately 2.4 miles north of the area proposed for the solar farm and BESS.
- 1.6 The proposed solar farm wraps around an existing field of solar panels which operate as 'Rookery Farm Solar Farm'. Rookery Farm Solar Farm (5MW capacity) was approved in February 2013, under planning application reference 1201638FUL.
- 1.7 The application boundary is located within the following Parish Council areas: Stow Longa (access from Stow Road / Spaldwick Road, UKPN substation, BESS and some solar panels), Catworth (underground cable), Spaldwick (access from Thrapston Road and access track) and Kimbolton (majority of the solar panels).
- 1.8 The area proposed for the solar panels and BESS contains generally flat land which gradually slopes down from the west to the north. The UKPN substation site is also generally flat land which is lower in elevation than much of the surrounding land.
- 1.9 There are no conservation or environmental designations on the application site itself. There are conservation areas and listed buildings within Stow Longa, Spaldwick, Catworth, Kimbolton and Tilbrook. In addition, there are several County Wildlife Sites within the locality.
- 1.10 There are public footpaths and bridleways which cross the application site.
- 1.11 The application site is entirely located within Flood Zone 1 (at the lowest risk of fluvial flooding) with the exception of a small section of the site, which is within Flood Zone 2/3, - no development is proposed in the area of flood risk, however the existing farm track which will serve the UKPN substation passes through this area (no changes are proposed to the existing track).

### **The proposal**

- 1.12 As noted above, the proposal includes a UKPN substation in addition to an area of solar panels and BESS. An underground cable will connect the solar panels to the UKPN substation which will provide the grid connection by connecting into an existing overhead power line.
- 1.13 The UKPN power station is to be accessed from Thrapston Road, via an existing access track associated with West Lodge Farm. The solar farm and BESS will be accessed from Stow Road / Spaldwick Road via existing access tracks associated with Rookery Farm and the existing Rookery Solar Farm.
- 1.14 Apart from the proposed UKPN substation, which is to be retained permanently (as part of the UKPN electricity network), the development

is a time-limited scheme which is proposed to be removed after a period of 40 years (removal can be secured by condition).

#### *Solar panels*

- 1.15 A total of 114,338 solar panels are proposed to be installed. Each solar panel consists of a layer of silicone cells within a glass casing, mounted on a fixed aluminium frame. The panels will be dark blue or black and will face due south.
- 1.16 The solar panels will be arranged in straight rows or 'arrays' from east to west across the field enclosures with a gap of between 2.5m and 8m between the rows. An array would have a maximum height of 3m above ground level and outside of archaeologically sensitive areas would be screw / pile driven into the ground (i.e. no traditional foundations required). Within archaeologically sensitive areas the arrays will be attached to concrete ballasts which sit atop the ground.
- 1.17 The insulated DC cables from the solar panels will be routed in channels fixed on the underside of the framework and will run along the entire underside of each row. Outside of archaeologically sensitive areas, cabling required to connect the PV panels to the inverters and then to the main substation will be concealed through shallow trenches backfilled with fine sands and excavated materials to the original ground level. Within archaeologically sensitive areas all cables will be kept above ground.

#### *BESS*

- 1.18 Batteries are a key component of the government's strategy for clean energy provision in the UK. Batteries can be used to store electricity when it is plentiful and low cost, such as during low demand periods when solar output is high, for use when electricity generation is less plentiful or during times of peak electricity demand. Batteries can also reduce the amount of generation and associated network that needs to be built to meet peak demand.
- 1.19 The proposed BESS has an export capacity of 50 megawatts. The BESS consists of multiple rows of battery storage containers within an enclosed acoustic / security fence plus additional plant and equipment to control the site and to connect the site to the grid network. Other features include swales and an attenuation pond adjacent to the BESS and acoustic fencing.
- 1.20 Each battery storage container measures 6.06m (L) x 2.44m (W) x 2.90m (H) and has the general appearance of a shipping container. A total of 32 no. battery storage containers are proposed – they are arranged in pairs, forming two rows of 16.
- 1.21 In front of each pair of battery storage containers is a BESS interface cabinet and a Power Conversion System & Transformer Unit. The interface cabinet is small electrical cabinet which measures 1.8m (L) x 0.8m (W) x 1.8m (H). The Power Conversion System & Transformer Units have the same outward appearance as the battery storage containers – shipping containers measuring 6.06m (L) x 2.44m (W) x 2.90m (H).

- 1.22 At the end of the two rows of batteries, the following are proposed (within the acoustic fencing enclosing the BESS):
- 2 no. BESS Operation and Maintenance buildings which are rectangular shaped, flat roofed cabins measuring 6.10m (L) x 2.5m (W) x 2.60m (H);
  - 1 no. BESS control room. A rectangular, flat roofed, cabin measuring 15.12m (L) x 5m (W) x 3.10m (H);
  - 1 no. BESS Welfare office which has the general appearance of a shipping container, measuring 12.20m (L) x 2.44m (W) x 2.90m (H).
- 1.23 The BESS equipment is laid out on an area of hardstanding (required for fire safety), which is to be located in a wider 'Biodiversity Enhancement Area' (BEA). The BEA will comprise an area of Tussocky Grassland and native planting which is capable of supporting native wildlife.

*Associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure*

- 1.24 To support the operation of the solar farm 11 no. Inverters are proposed to be dotted throughout the area of solar panels (to be accessed via tracks of crushed stone). Inverters convert the direct current (DC) generated by the panels into alternating current (AC). Inverters are housed in prefabricated metal containers, finished in either a grey or green colour, and measuring approximately 6.5m (L) x 3m (W) x 3.2m (H).
- 1.25 Just outside of the acoustic fencing enclosing the BESS are additional plant and equipment required to control the solar farm:
- 2 no. PV Welfare offices which has the general appearance of a shipping container, measuring 12.20m (L) x 2.44m (W) x 2.90m (H);
  - 1 no. DNO control room. A flat roof cabin style building measuring 8.10m (L) x 4m (W) x 3.45m (H);
  - 1 no customer substation. A flat roof cabin style building measuring 12.5m (L) x 4m (W) x 3.10m (H);
  - 1 no. PV Operations & maintenance building. A flat roof cabin style building measuring 6.10m (L) x 2.5m (W) x 2.60m (H);
  - 2 no. parking spaces.
- 1.26 The UKPN substation includes a variety of electrical equipment including transformers, disconnectors, circuit breakers and busbars enclosed within an acoustic security fence. The tallest equipment are the high level disconnectors which measure circa 7.6m in height. Four floodlighting columns are proposed inside the acoustic security fence to provide emergency lighting over the electrical equipment. The floodlighting columns are moveable on their axis but when not in use will be stowed vertically with a height of circa 10m.

*Officer note: once built, the substation will be handed over to UKPN (which is the District Network Operator for the site). The substation must therefore be built to the specification required by UKPN. During the course of the application, in light of concerns raised by the Parish Councils and local residents, the applicant discussed the proposed floodlighting columns with UKPN who advised that these were not negotiable. The floodlighting will only be turned on in the event of an emergency, which UKPN advises is a 1 in 10-year probability event.*



- 1.27 Just outside of the acoustic fencing surrounding the UKPN substation, the following structures are proposed:
- 1 no. Customer switchroom and meter kiosk which has the appearance of a cabin style building measuring 11.3m (L) x 4.36m (W) x 4.94m (max H);
  - 1 no. Compost toilet which is housed within a steel frame covered with wooden cladding, measuring 1.43m (L) x 1.28m (w) x 2.55m (H)
  - 1 no. communications tower measuring 25m in height ;
  - 1 no. SSEN 11kV auxillary unit substation which has the appearance of an electrical cabinet measuring 3.11m (L) x 2.27m (W) x 2.35m (H).
  - SSEN Relay / Control Room and meter kiosk which has the appearance of a cabin style building with pitched roof measuring 10.3m (L) x 4.48m (W) x 4.97m (max H);

*Amendments received*

- 1.28 During the course of this planning application the following amendments have been received in response to consultee comments:
- Rights of Way: the applicant provided a cross section drawing of the proposed relationship between the development and footpaths/bridleways to demonstrate that the widths of the paths can satisfy the requirements of Cambridgeshire County Council Definitive Maps team.
  - Landscape: Following comments from the Council's Landscape Officer, the LVIA was updated to include additional viewpoints and amend the magnitude of change expected for some viewpoints. Additional trees were added to the proposed planting scheme throughout the proposed development site and climbing plants added on the BESS acoustic fence.
  - Ecology: In response to comments provided by the Council's Ecologist, the applicant updated the submitted Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment and accompanying metric, as well as the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan. In addition, the applicant included off site skylark mitigation (on land within their control) in the form of 14 skylark plots.
  - Archaeology: Following comments from the County Archaeologist the applicant has undertaken trial trenching on the site and subsequently removed an area of solar panels from the northeastern part of the site which was the most archaeologically sensitive area. In addition, ballasted foundations are now proposed in other archaeologically sensitive areas of the site to avoid any below ground works in these areas.
  - Drainage: Following comments from the LLFA, a series of perimiter drains were added to the proposals to accommodate surface water. This necessitated the removal of a number of solar panels.

- 1.29 Following receipt of these amendments, a full 21 day reconsultation was completed including consultation with neighbours, Parish Councils and the publication of a press notice.

**Planning Act 2008**

*Capacity of the proposed solar farm*

1.30 The Planning Act 2008 defines a 'nationally significant infrastructure project' (NSIP). An NSIP requires consent from the Secretary of State as opposed to the relevant Local Planning Authority.

1.31 In the case of solar farms, the Planning Act 2008 defines electricity generating stations as an NSIP if "its capacity is more than 50 megawatts".

*Officer note: The Government has committed to increasing the NSIP threshold for solar farms to 100 megawatts. The Planning Act 2008 will be amended with this change coming into effect from December 2025.*

1.32 National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3), as updated in January 2024, explains the technicalities around solar farm capacity and sets out guidance on how to consider the capacity of a solar farm. Paragraph 2.10.53 of EN-3 clarifies that for the purposes of the Planning Act 2008, "the maximum combined capacity of the installed inverters (measured in alternating current (AC)) should be used for the purposes of determining solar site capacity."

1.33 Solar panels generate electricity in direct current (DC) form. The electricity is converted to AC by inverters (external to the panels) before it is exported to the grid (after the voltage is stepped-up by on site transformers).

1.34 The applicant has confirmed that the proposals benefit from a 49.99MW alternating current (AC) grid connection which has been agreed with UKPN. The proposal includes eleven inverters, ten with a capacity of 4.6MW and one with a capacity of 3MW, resulting in a combined AC capacity of 49MW. This is therefore slightly below the UKPN agreed grid connection of 49.99MW.

1.35 As the AC capacity of the proposed solar farm does not exceed 50MW, it does not represent an NSIP, as currently defined by the Planning Act 2008.

#### *Relationship with the adjacent operational solar farm*

1.36 As noted above, the proposed solar panels wrap around the existing 5MW Rookery Solar Farm, which is owned by the applicant of the current application. Officers have considered whether the proposed solar farm should be considered as an extension of the existing solar farm (for the purposes of the Planning Act 2008).

1.37 Similar issues have been explored by LPAs and in the courts elsewhere. A High Court decision dated June 2023<sup>1</sup> found that a solar farm proposed adjacent to an existing operational solar farm, was a separate generating station (for the purposes of the thresholds set by the Planning Act 2008) having regard to the fact that: the projects were developed separately at different times; they had separate distribution and connection agreements and were separately metered; they could operate independently of one another; they had separate substations

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<sup>1</sup> R (on the application of (1) Durham County Council; (2) Hartlepool Borough Council) v Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (D); Lightsource SPV 206 Limited and Lightsource Development Services Limited (IPs) [2023] EWHC 1394.

(albeit the substations are part of the apparatus for transmitting and distributing electricity, not generating it) even though the substations utilised the same connection cable to the grid.

1.38 In this case:

- The existing solar farm is operational and the proposed solar farm represents an entirely separate construction project; and
- The applicant has confirmed that the operational solar farm connects into the existing 11kV electricity network to the south of the solar farm. The point of connection for the proposed solar farm is the 132kV high voltage overhead line to the north of the site. The two sites will therefore have separate grid connection points and can be metered separately.

1.39 On this basis, whilst physically adjacent, the two solar farms will be operated and managed independently of one another with separate substation infrastructure. Officers are therefore satisfied that for the purposes of the current Planning Act 2008 the proposal does not represent an extension of the existing operational solar farm and does not represent an NSIP; as such it remains for HDC to consider and determine the application as the Local Planning Authority.

## **2. NATIONAL GUIDANCE AND POLICY AND RELEVANT LEGISLATION**

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework Dec 2024 (NPPF) sets out the three economic, social and environmental objectives of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF confirms that 'So sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development...' (para. 10). The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for, amongst other things:

- delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
- achieving well-designed places;
- conserving and enhancing the natural environment;
- conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

2.2 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), the National Design Guide 2019 (NDG) and the Noise Policy Statement for England (NPSE) are also relevant and a material consideration.

2.3 For full details visit the government website.

2.4 Relevant Legislation;

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

2.5 Relevant National Policy Statements:

- Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (January 2024)
- National Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure (EN-3) (January 2024)

*Officer note – National Policy Statements are primarily produced to support the National Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) regime. However, the EN-1 makes it clear that the NPSs may be a material planning consideration in standard planning applications, but it is for the decision maker to consider the level of weight that should be attributed to them in each circumstance. Noting the scale of development proposed, in this case (49.99MW), Officers consider the adopted local plan policies should take primacy in consideration, however the NPSs can be afforded significant weight as a material consideration.*

2.6 The following legislation / documents relating to the UK Government's legally binding commitment to tackling and responding to climate change are relevant material considerations to the determination of this application for a ground mounted solar farm:

- Climate change Act 2008 (as amended 2019) and associated Carbon Budgets
- Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- British Energy Security Strategy (2022)
- Powering up Britain (2023)
- Planning for solar farms, house of commons Research Briefing (May 2024)
- Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (December 2024)

### **3. LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES**

3.1 Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)

- Policy LP3 – Green Infrastructure
- Policy LP4 – Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
- Policy LP5 – Flood Risk
- Policy LP10 – The Countryside
- Policy LP11 – Design Context
- Policy LP12 – Design Implementation
- Policy LP14 – Amenity
- Policy LP15 – Surface Water
- Policy LP16 - Sustainable Travel
- Policy LP17 – Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
- Policy LP29 – Health Impact Assessment
- Policy LP30 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Policy LP31 – Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
- Policy LP35 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
- Policy LP37 – Ground contamination and ground water pollution

3.2 Neighbourhood Plan

- There is no 'made' or draft Neighbourhood Plan for Stow Longa, Catworth, Spaldwick or Kimbolton

3.3 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)

- Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment – Adopted 2022
- Huntingdonshire Design Guide – Adopted 2017
- Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD – Adopted 2017
- RECAP Waste Management Design Guide (CCC SPD) – Adopted 2012

- Developer Contributions – Adopted 2011 (Costs updated annually)

3.4 For full details visit the Council's website [Local policies](#).

## 4. PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 There is no planning history on the application site with the exception of the screening opinion issued prior to the submission of the current application:

- 23/70087/SCRE – Screening report for installation of a solar farm and battery storage facility and associated infrastructure on land at Rookery Farm, Stow Road, Stow Longa, Huntingdon. – EIA not required.

4.2 As noted above, there is an existing Rookery Farm solar farm which was permitted in 2013:

- 1201638FUL – Development of solar farm to include photovoltaic panels, inverters and substation, access and associated infrastructure – permission granted 24.01.2013.

## 5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Stow Longa Parish Council:

22.08.2024 (copy attached) – Objection on the following grounds:

- Too big relative to the size of Stow Longa village, which has already accommodated the existing solar farm;
- The proximity and impact upon Grade II\* listed St Botolph's Church;
- Impacts of noise and light pollution on local residents;
- Inadequate provision of buffering zones and distance in proximity to existing village buildings;
- Light pollution;
- Noise pollution;
- Loss of agricultural land;
- Health and safety risks / risk of fires associated with the BESS;
- Loss of amenity and visual impact for users of PRoW;
- Damage to roads and risks to road safety during construction;
- Impact on archaeology;
- Impacts upon wildlife including loss of feeding grounds for birds

26.01.2024 (copy attached) – Maintain the previous objection but recommend conditions in the event of an approval.

5.2 Spaldwick Parish Council (copy attached) – Objection on the following grounds:

- Highway safety concerns in particular regarding school hours and conflict between construction and agricultural traffic;
- Possible damage to listed buildings as a result of HGV traffic.

5.3 Catworth Parish Council (copy attached) – Neutral but raise noise pollution and fire risks associated with the BESS as key concerns for consideration.

- 5.4 Kimbolton & Stonely Parish Council (copy attached) – Objection. It is considered that this application is premature, as further information should first be provided relating to work done to examine the archaeology of the site, including archaeological investigations by trenching.

*Officer note: Trial trenching has been completed at the site (following a scheme of investigation agreed with the County Council Archaeologist).*

- 5.5 Tilbrook Parish Council (neighbouring parish) – no comments received.

*Officer note: For the avoidance of doubt, no development is proposed within Tilbrook Parish Council. Tilbrook Parish Council was however consulted on this application owing to the fact that the proposed solar panels directly border the parish boundary.*

- 5.6 Leighton Bromswold (neighbouring parish) – Objection on the following grounds:

- The proposal is within clear view of the village of Leighton Bromswold and will introduce industrial development into a rural landscape causing harm to the conservation area of Leighton Bromswold and the visual amenity of residents within the village;
- Light pollution in a dark skies area contrary to Local Plan Policy LP10;
- Loss of public rights of way;  
*Officer note: The development will not result in the loss of any Public Rights of Way - all will remain in situ and no diversions are proposed.*
- Loss of agricultural land;
- The scale of development is too large and does not respect the natural landscape, conservation area or listed buildings;
- LVIA does not capture all direct views over the site from Leighton Bromswold.

*Officer note: For the avoidance of doubt, no development is proposed within Leighton Bromswold Parish. The nearest proposed development is the UKPN substation which is circa 1.7 miles south of the village of Leighton Bromswold. Following a request from the Parish Clerk comments from Leighton Bromswold Parish Council were accepted and considered by Officers.*

- 5.7 Natural England – No objection. If the development is temporary, as described, it is unlikely to lead to significant permanent loss of BMV. Whilst some components may be permanent (e.g. the substation) this would be limited to small areas. Conditions recommended.

- 5.8 Environment Agency – No comment provided. The application site is not within a Special Protection Zone.

- 5.9 Historic England – No objection. Having reviewed the documentation submitted with the application Historic England concur with the conclusions reached by the applicant; namely that the proposed development would cause harm to the significance of the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Botolph at a low level of less than substantial harm as a result of the change to its setting. Historic England also accept that the proposal would not cause harm to the significance of the Stow Longa

Conservation Area or the Grade II Listed Parish Church of St James at Spaldwick.

- 5.10 Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) – Objection. The proposal is damaging to the countryside, to the landscape, to local heritage assets and to local communities in many ways and there is little evidence that alternative methods of providing the same levels of renewable energy or alternative, more sustainable locations have been looked at (e.g. rooftops). The proposal results in the loss of high quality agricultural land. The UKPN sub-station will be retained permanently and results in an unacceptable change to the Northern Wolds Landscape Character Area. Concern is raised about the impact of the proposal on the local road network including glint and glare for drivers and the impact of construction traffic. The proposal will impact upon the character and setting of the conservation area of Stow Longa and St Botolph's Church, and residential amenity, including glint and glare and noise impact. Security measures including CCTV and lighting will be harmful to residents, walkers and wildlife. There is a fire risk from the BESS. A decommissioning fund must be available, and a full carbon lifecycle analysis is required – without which the proposal cannot claim to be sustainable. The proposal does not comply with national or local planning policies.
- 5.11 Huntingdonshire Ramblers Group – Objection. Serious concerns are raised about the impact of the proposals upon the numerous Rights of Way in the area which are well-used. Walking is recognised as being beneficial to a person's physical health and mental well-being. These proposals present potential detriment to walkers' access to the Rights of Way, loss of visual amenity, a negative impact on wildlife, increase in noise pollution and industrialisation of the countryside.
- 5.12 Cambridgeshire Constabulary – It is important that appropriate and proportionate security measures, are considered on a site-specific basis. Basic crime prevention is about putting layers of security in place to delay and deter criminals. As well as physical security measures such as fencing, there must be sufficient natural surveillance, monitored electronic security measures, or both prompting an appropriate response. Fencing – should be anti-cut, anti-climb close welded mesh panel fencing. Keeping hedgerows to 1m also provides defensible planting. CCTV – should be remotely monitored.
- 5.13 Huntingdonshire Fire Service – No objection subject to securing fixed details of the batteries and a battery/fire safety management plan. Fire Service guidance provided has outlined key areas regarding the prevention of fire in BESS installation and the actions and protective measures required for fire service personnel, employees and the public in the event of a fire occurring.
- 5.14 CCC Definitive Maps Team – No objection subject to conditions. During the course of the application the applicant has provided a cross sectional drawing to demonstrate that the width of the public footpaths and bridleways can meet the requirements of the Definitive Maps Team. It has also been confirmed that any changes required to the surface of the rights of way will be minimal and only required where access tracks cross the rights of way. Pre commencement conditions are recommended to secure a Public Rights of Way dilapidations Survey and a public rights of way scheme.

- 5.15 CCC Local Highway Authority (LHA) - No objection subject to conditions.
- 5.16 CCC Transport Assessment Team – No objection.
- 5.17 CCC Archaeology – No objection subject to conditions. Following the completion of trial trenching (as requested by the County Archaeologist) and the submission of an evaluation report, the County Archaeologist is satisfied that sufficient information has been provided about the archaeological potential of the site. Development has been removed from the area of the site found to contain Iron age and Roman remains of regional significance. In addition, a ballasted 'no dig' solution, with above ground cabling is proposed in the remaining area of archaeological sensitivity to ensure that remains are preserved in situ. Two conditions are recommended to secure the long term management of archaeological remains to be preserved in situ and to secure a Written Scheme of Investigation.
- 5.18 Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) – No objection subject to conditions. The documents submitted demonstrate that surface water from the proposed development can be managed through the use of a series of swales and the applicant has outlined maintenance and adoption details. Water quality has been adequately addressed when assessed against the Simple Index Approach outlined in the CIRS SuDS Manual.
- 5.19 Alconbury and Ellington Internal Drainage Board – informative recommended to make the applicant aware that land drainage consent may be required.
- 5.20 HDC Conservation Officer – The proposal results in less than substantial harm to the setting of Stow Longa Conservation Area and listed buildings in Stow Longa, including the Church of St Botolph. Less than substantial harm to a heritage asset can only be outweighed by public benefit (Para 208) which is so great that it can outweigh the statutory duty of Huntingdonshire DC under s66 and s72 of the 1990 Act to “have special regard” to the preservation of Listed Buildings and their settings and Conservation Areas and their settings. In the event of an approval, conditions are recommended.
- 5.21 HDC Environmental Health Officer (EHO) – No objection subject to conditions securing the noise mitigation measures referred to within the submitted Noise Assessment and a Construction Environmental Management Plan to consider construction noise.
- 5.22 HDC Tree Officer – no objection subject to a proposed pre commencement condition.
- 5.23 HDC Ecology Officer – No objection subject to conditions. Amendments made to the Biodiversity Gain Assessment and LEMP are welcomed. The submission of a Skylark Mitigation Strategy to deliver adequate mitigation, in the form of off-site plots for Skylark, is welcomed and addresses the concerns raised by the council's Ecologist.
- 5.24 HDC Landscape Officer – No objection. During the course of the application the LVIA was amended to include additional viewpoints and amend the magnitude of change predicted for some viewpoints. The changes and additions to the LVIA are welcomed, as is the additional



proposed planting (including a substantial number of trees and native species). Further information has been provided in relation to external lighting to address the concerns raised.

5.25 Active Travel England – No comment.

5.26 Bedford Borough Council - The site would not be visible from the administrative boundary of Bedford Borough Council, and the access is within the boundary of Huntingdonshire. Therefore, Bedford Borough provide no specific comments regarding the application

*Officer note: no response was received from the following consultees: National Grid, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue, British Horse Society.*

## **6. REPRESENTATIONS**

6.1 Representations have been received from 15no. unique addresses (13no. objections, 1no. neutral representation, 1no. supporting representation), raising the following summarised material points;

- There is a clear national need for renewable energy;
- The benefits of the proposal outweigh the adverse impacts;
- The proposal will result in harm to a scenic landscape and the Northern Wolds Character Area, Contrary to the aims of HDCs Landscape and Townscape SPD 2022 and HDC Local Planning Policy;
- Adverse impact for users of the public rights of way, including the Three Shires Way, which will be enclosed by development either side;
- The solar farm represents industrial scale development which will enclose the village of Stow Longa, affecting its setting;
- Construction traffic will adversely impact local residents amenity (noise and vibration);
- Kimbolton Fire Station is relied upon in the applicant's fire safety strategy but it is under threat of closure;
- Loss of high quality agricultural land will threaten UK food security and is contrary to HDC Local Plan Policy 10;
- Adverse impact on residential amenity from glint and glare, noise and light pollution during operation of the proposed development;
- Adverse impact upon the setting of heritage assets including Stow Longa Conservation Area, Leighton Bromswold Conservation Area, views of St Botolph's Church Tower;
- Adverse impacts for wildlife including loss of habitat, loss of wildlife commuting routes and loss of birds;
- Production of waste (including toxic waste) during the lifespan of the development);
- Adverse impacts upon the condition and safety of local roads due to construction traffic;
- Archaeological remains are not adequately mitigated for;
- The modest renewable energy gains do not outweigh the considerable and irreversible environmental, historical and amenity harm.

6.2 The following points have been raised that are not material considerations. Officer notes are *italicised* for explanation where necessary;

- Other land included within the blue line is within the control of the applicant and could be used to extend the proposed solar farm.  
*In accordance with national planning guidance, the application site should be edged clearly with a red line on the location plan. A blue line should be drawn around any other land owned by the applicant, close to or adjoining the application site. No development is proposed within the blue line by the current planning application. Land within the blue line is proposed to be used for skylark mitigation, however this involves no built development. Any future development on land adjacent to the current application site would need to be subject to a new planning application.*
- The development boundary is within 0.7 miles of residential properties, the minimum distance should be 1 mile.  
*There is no national or local guidance which stipulates a minimum distance that development, including solar farms, should be located from residential properties. The impact of the proposal upon residential amenity has been assessed.*
- Thieves will be encouraged to the area which will impact upon local residents  
*Solar farms will be subject to security systems which are designed to deter any criminal activity within the site itself. Officers are not aware of any evidence to suggest that the presence of a solar farm increases the risk of thieves entering local residences.*
- Reduced property prices in the area  
*Any impact of a development proposal upon property values is a civil matter and is not a material planning consideration.*
- Negative impact on rural businesses that rely on scenic quality of the area.  
*No evidence has been provided to suggest that the proposal would result in a direct impact upon an existing business.*
- Residents of Leighton Bromswold were not consulted by the developer.  
*Whilst the NPPF encourages applicants to engage with the local community before submitting their application, there is no statutory requirement for such in this case. The applicant submitted a Statement of Community Involvement which confirms that they conducted a programme of public consultation and stakeholder engagement prior to submission of the planning application.*
- No defined location or design of the grid connection, substations, or cable route  
*The UKPN substation will connect into the existing overhead line. Plans showing the location and design of the substation have been submitted and can be conditioned. The exact alignment of the cable between the UKPN substation and the overhead line is labelled as 'indicative' as it is subject to final agreement with UKPN (a statutory undertaker) at the point of construction. The underground cable route between the UKPN substation and the solar farm/BESS is included within the red line and labelled on the Planning Layout. Locations and elevations of substations within the solar farm have been submitted and can be conditioned*

## 7. ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:
- Principle of Development

- Character and Landscape
- Impact on Public Rights of Way
- Highway and transport Impacts
- Ecology and Biodiversity
- Drainage and Flood Risk
- Heritage Impacts
- Agricultural land
- Glint and glare
- Impacts to Neighbouring Amenity
- Other Matters

- 7.2 The starting point for proposals, in accordance with section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 is that developments shall be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

### **Principle of Development**

- 7.3 This section is concerned with the broad principle of development for a renewable or low carbon energy generating scheme in the open countryside. More detailed, site-specific matters are considered elsewhere in the report.
- 7.4 The application site is located outside a built-up area and is therefore located within the countryside for purposes of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan. In such a location development is restricted under policy LP10 to those that are provided for in other policies within the Local Plan. The supporting text to that policy notes that this is in order to balance support for a thriving rural economy and land-based business, while protecting the character and beauty of the countryside and to reflect the importance of protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 7.5 Of particular relevance in this instance is policy LP35 which states that “a proposal for a renewable or low carbon energy generating scheme, other than wind energy, will be supported where it is demonstrated that all potential adverse impacts including cumulative impacts are or can be made acceptable”.
- 7.6 LP35 provides support in principle for renewable and low carbon energy generation and is therefore considered by Officers to be one of the specific opportunities for development in the countryside supported in the local plan, subject to a detailed assessment of the proposal and its impacts. Notwithstanding further assessment in respect of potential adverse impacts, it is therefore considered that there is in-principle policy support for the proposal in this countryside location.
- 7.7 As demonstrated by the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended 2019), associated Carbon Budget and British Energy Security Strategy 2022, it is clear that solar energy is a key component of the government's legally binding commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.
- 7.8 The government's ‘Clean Power 2030 Action Plan’ targets 45-47 GW of solar power, complemented by 23-27GW of battery capacity in the UK by 2030.

- 7.9 The delivery of this proposed scheme would generate up to 49.9MW of solar energy and battery capacity of 50MW. This would contribute towards government targets for clean energy and Huntingdonshire's Climate Strategy.
- 7.10 The applicant has confirmed that a connection to the national grid has been secured with UK Power Networks and it is anticipated that the solar farm would be connected to the grid by 2028/29. The proposal will therefore make a significant contribution towards the delivery of additional solar generated electricity and battery capacity nationally before 2030.
- 7.11 National policy contained in EN-1 (January 2024) and EN-3 (January 2024) makes clear that large scale solar farms (defined as a form of critical national priority infrastructure) should be assessed on the basis that the government has already established an urgent need for renewable energy. There is therefore no requirement for the applicant to demonstrate a need for the proposal in this location. Nevertheless, national guidance contained in the NPPG and national policy contained in EN-1 (January 2024) and EN-3 (January 2024) recognise that large scale solar farms will inevitably have environmental impacts, particularly if sited in rural areas. Planning has an important role in securing the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure in locations where the local environmental impact is acceptable
- 7.12 These material considerations further support the principle of development and the approach required by Local Plan Policy LP35. A full assessment of the environmental impacts associated with the proposed solar farm follows.

### **Landscape and Countryside Character**

- 7.13 Local Plan policy LP35 supports proposals for renewable energy where all potential adverse impacts, including cumulative impacts, are or can be made acceptable. When identifying and considering landscape and visual impacts regard will be had to the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2022).
- 7.14 The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment which assesses the impact of the proposal (including the cumulative impacts associated with the existing Rookery Farm solar farm) upon the landscape character as well as its impact upon visual amenity from viewpoints within the landscape. The LVIA has been reviewed by HDC's Landscape Officer and the applicant submitted an amended LVIA (including an additional viewpoint) in direct response to comments made by the Landscape Officer.

### **Landscape Character**

- 7.15 The site character is of gentle undulating land and shallow valleys decreasing in elevation from the west to the north. High voltage power lines (and associated pylons) run through the landscape immediately north of the application site (it is this power line that the proposed substation will connect to), whilst lower voltage power lines (and associated pylons) run along the western site boundary, through the southern half of the application site (adjacent to Bridleway No. 25 Kimbolton), and along the southern boundary of the site. Part of the

southern extent of the site was associated with the former land use of the RAF Kimbolton airfield (the majority of which was located to the south of the application site).

- 7.16 It is agreed that the landscape in the area of the application site is not a 'valued landscape' in planning terms (as referred to by NPPF paragraph 180a).
- 7.17 The majority of the site is located within the Northern Wolds Landscape Character Area (LCA), as defined by the HDC Landscape and Townscape SPD 2022. A very small area to the north of the site at the access connection to Thrapston Road lies within the Southern Wolds LCA.
- 7.18 Within the Northern Wolds LCA the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022) states that development proposals should:
- Protect key views towards the distinctive skyline of ridge tops, church towers and woodland.
  - Protect and enhance historic settlement character through careful siting and design of new buildings.
  - Improve the nature conservation value of the streams and immediate valley sides.
  - Conserve both designated and non-designated heritage assets with improved public access and interpretation where appropriate.
  - Conserve or where appropriate enhance the significance of the heritage assets including any contribution made to significance by their settings.
  - Conserve the archaeological heritage dispersed throughout the landscape. Protect and enhance the distinctive characters of the valley and plateau landscapes through maintenance of field patterns and long distance views from the upland areas and protection of ancient hedgerows and oak trees within the valleys.
  - Protect the parkland setting to Kimbolton village and School.
- 7.19 The proposal will significantly change the character of the application site itself, linked to the change in land use from arable agriculture to an area of renewable energy generation and storage. This should not however result in large scale changes in terms of aesthetic or perceptual aspects to the wider Northern Wolds LCA, or Southern Wolds LCA.
- 7.20 The tallest elements of the proposal are located at the UKPN substation in the north. The UKPN substation has been positioned in a topographic bowl (on land which is lower than the majority of the surrounding land) and close to a number of existing electricity pylons which are greater in height and the proposal will be read in this context.
- 7.21 During the course of the planning application, additional planting has been proposed to help assimilate the proposed development within the landscape, including additional boundary hedgerows, a substantial number of trees and climbing plants on the acoustic fencing proposed around the BESS. This planting will help to create layered vegetation throughout the site so as to filter views of the proposed equipment from adjacent land.

- 7.22 The proposed planting and its maintenance in the long term (including replacement in the event of any planting failing to establish) can be secured by the imposition of planning conditions.
- 7.23 Having regard to the aims of the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022):
- Owing to the nature of the proposals (no buildings and a limited number of structures above 3m in height), in accordance with the aims of the proposal will not prevent views towards the higher ground to the north or towards the church towers of the Church of St Botolph in Stow Longa or St James Church in Spaldwick. However, the proposed trees and screening vegetation within the site may interrupt some of these views from within the site itself, particularly during summer months;
  - The proposal does now include adequate mitigation planting to help soften the impact of the development, increase the sites biodiversity value and improve the nature conservation value of the application site in accordance with the aims of the SPD;
  - The impact of the proposals upon the designated and non designated heritage assets, including archaeological heritage will be considered in detail below in the Heritage section of this report;
  - The proposal is sufficiently distant to avoid an impact upon the setting to Kimbolton village and School.
- 7.24 The Council's Landscape Officer has confirmed that the submitted LVIA is acceptable and generally concurs with the overall conclusions reached. With regards to landscape character effects, the LVIA concludes that:
- the significance of effect on the Northern Wolds LCA is of a moderate adverse effect at year 1 (operation), reducing to minor adverse at year 15; and
  - the significance of effect on the site and its immediate context is also of a moderate adverse significance of effect at year 1 (operation), whilst also reducing to a minor adverse significance of effect at year 15.
- 7.25 In accordance with Local Plan Policy LP11, the proposal has been designed to respond positively to its context, including careful positioning of taller structures within the site to minimise their impact, in addition to mitigation planting. In accordance with Policy LP35 it is considered that the proposal has mitigated, as far as possible, its impact upon the landscape character, to make this impact acceptable. Nevertheless, it is accepted that the proposal will have an adverse impact upon the receiving landscape (notwithstanding this is deemed to be an acceptable impact) and this is a matter which attracts some negative weight in the overall planning balance.

#### Visual amenity

- 7.26 The LVIA demonstrates that the visual envelope of the application site is restricted by existing vegetation and topography. The generally flat but elevated topography within the majority of the solar site and in its immediate context reduces the likelihood of gaining views of potential development.

- 7.27 The LVIA has assessed the visual impact of the proposals upon a range of recreational and residential receptors. The Council's Landscape Officer broadly agrees within the conclusions of the LVIA.
- 7.28 Overall, the proposed development would result in only limited effects on local visual amenity, with notable effects limited to locations within or immediately adjacent to the solar site, or to receptors within elevated storeys within residential properties at short distances to the solar site.
- 7.29 Within longer distance views towards the site from the surrounding area, including views from Leighton Bromswold, the proposed development is either unlikely to be visible in the view, or if visible not adversely prominent.
- 7.30 It is noted that residents of Leighton Bromswold and Leighton Bromswold Parish Council have raised concern that views of the proposal from Leighton Bromswold have not been adequately assessed by the LVIA and that the proposal will result in harm to the visual amenity of residents of the village. The LVIA does contain 2 viewpoints taken from the footpaths which run south of Leighton Bromswold (these are long distance views). The council's Landscape Officer did not consider any additional viewpoints from within Leighton Bromswold were justified. Owing to the intervening distance, topography and vegetation, direct (uninterrupted) and complete views of the solar farm from Leighton Bromswold would be unlikely and it would be views of the taller elements, located at the UKPN substation which would be most visible from these viewpoints. These would be viewed in the context of the existing high voltage power line and associated pylons. In relation to the 2 viewpoints assessed from Leighton Bromswold, the LVIA concludes that the impact on visual amenity in the long term would be negligible and the Council's Landscape Officer does not disagree with the findings of the LVIA.
- 7.31 The receptors most impacted by the proposals, particularly in the short term, are residential properties along Church Walk, Church Lane, The Lane, and Stow Road, and users of the PRow network within the application site. In both cases however the overall impact is assessed to be 'minor adverse' by year 15, once the mitigation planting matures.
- 7.32 With regard to the nearest residential properties, views of the proposed built form from within the ground floor of these dwellings are expected to be limited to glimpses over existing field boundary vegetation. On the taller storeys of these properties, it is expected that broader views will be gained of the proposed development due to the current height of the existing field boundary vegetation, however these will still be filtered by existing intervening mature trees. Having regard to the distances between the nearest residential properties and the proposal, existing screening and proposed screening, it is not considered that the proposal will result in any unacceptable impacts upon the level of visual amenity experienced by the nearest residential properties, which would justify refusal of the proposal. The proposal does not conflict with the development plan in this regard. Nevertheless, it is accepted that at least in the short term the proposal will result in a moderate adverse impact upon the visual outlook of these properties.
- 7.33 With regard to users of the PRow, whilst solar panels and energy infrastructure are not a new sight for users of PRow in the local

landscape (the existing Rookery Farm solar farm already adjoins some of the PRoW and the existing high and low voltage power lines are a dominating feature in immediate and wider views), the proposal will increase the length of PRoW from which solar panels are visible. Thus, visitors that are moving through the landscape on the PRoW will experience sequential cumulative adverse visual effects, particularly during the first 10 years of the proposal, whilst the proposed mitigation planting is maturing.

- 7.34 Planning Officers consider that these effects would be localised and experienced for a short distance, relative to the entire length of the route. Furthermore, solar farms are becoming a more common sight within open countryside landscapes and are a temporary form of development (conditions can secure restoration of the site after the 40 year lifespan of the proposal).
- 7.35 In accordance with Local Plan Policy LP35, it is acknowledged that the applicant has taken steps to mitigate the degree of harm to the PRoW as far as possible, including setting the PRoW within green corridors (which maximise the offset of the panels from the path) which include hedgerow and tree planting to screen views of the panels.
- 7.36 Having regard to the existing energy infrastructure within the landscape, and the temporary nature of the proposals it is not considered that the proposal will result in any unacceptable impacts upon the level of visual amenity experienced by PRoW users. Furthermore, it is accepted that, in accordance with Local Plan Policy LP10, the proposal will not prevent the use or enjoyment of the PRoW / countryside. On this basis, subject to conditions, the proposal does not conflict with the development plan.
- 7.37 Nevertheless, it is accepted that the proposal will result in a degree of adverse harm to the visual amenity of the nearest residential receptors and some stretches of PRoW, at least in the short term, before the mitigation planting matures. This is a matter which attracts negative weight in the overall planning balance.

### **Public rights of way**

- 7.38 A number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) run through and adjacent to the application site:
- Public Footpath No. 15, Stow Longa runs through the south eastern corner of the application site. As a result of the proposals it will pass directly through the solar farm (with panels either side) for a length of approximately 280 metres.
  - Public Footpath No. 12 Stow Longa which connects into Public Footpath No. 11 Stow Longa runs along the southerly edge of the application site. As a result of the proposals users of these footpaths will pass solar panels on at least one side for a length of approximately 700 metres.
  - Bridleway No. 13 Stow Longa which connects into Bridleway No. 25 Kimbolton passes east-west through the southern half of the site for a length of approximately 1,160m. Users of this bridleway will pass through the solar farm (with solar panels on one side or both) and pass adjacent to the BESS;
  - Public Footpath No. 26 Kimbolton 26 passes through the southern half of the application site for a length of approximately 500m providing a connection between Footpath No. 25 Kimbolton and



Church Lane, Stow Longa. As a result of the proposals, this footpath will pass directly through the solar farm (with panels either side);

- Public Byway No. 13, Catworth intersects with the proposed underground cable route for a length of approximately 25m;
- Public Byway No. 12, Catworth will pass adjacent to the proposed UKPN substation for a length of approximately 400M.
- Public Bridleway No. 5, Spaldwick, Public Bridleway No. 7, Stow Longa and Public Byway No. 6, Stow Longa intersect with the access route to the UKPN substation, however this is an existing farm access track and no changes are proposed to the appearance of this existing track.

- 7.39 Local Plan Policy LP3 supports proposals which maintain and where appropriate enhances the rights of way network. The NPPF at paragraph 105 requires that: "Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails".
- 7.40 NPS EN-3 recognises that due to their size, solar sites may affect the provision of local footpath networks and PRoW. However, it notes that it should be the applicant's intention to keep all PRoWs that cross the site open, to minimise as much as possible the visual outlook from existing footpaths and maximise opportunities for the public to access and cross proposed solar development sites (whether via the adoption of new public rights of way or the creation of permissive paths).
- 7.41 The Framework Construction Management Plan confirms that PRoWs will remain open during construction, with arrangements made to ensure the safety of PRoW users where construction traffic may interact with a PRoW.
- 7.42 Once operational, the routes of the PRoW crossing through the application site will be maintained (no diversions are proposed) and a change of surface will only occur in 4 places where access tracks serving the solar farm (measuring 3.5m in width and comprising crushed aggregate) cross the PRoW. On this basis, Cambridgeshire County Council Definitive Map Team confirmed that they do not require a change of surface authorisation application.
- 7.43 The applicant has submitted indicative cross sections for bridleways and footpaths which show the minimum widths which will be applied where the paths pass through the solar farm (resulting in solar development on either side). These cross sections confirm that: for bridleways, a minimum useable path width of 4m will be maintained; and for footpaths a minimum useable path of 2m will be maintained. The path will run within a green corridor measuring a minimum of 10m - the boundary of the corridor will be marked by deer proof fencing, in front of which a hedgerow will be planted. A minimum offset of 2m will be provided between the edge of the useable path edge and the hedgerow. As illustrated by the Site Wide Masterplan, in the case of Bridleway No. 13 Stow Longa, the minimum width of the green corridor, through which the PRoW will pass, is much wider than the minimum 10m – ranging from between circa 15m and 35m in width.
- 7.44 Subject to conditions securing: delivery of footpaths and bridleways in accordance with the submitted cross-sections; and a Public Rights of

Way Dilapidations Survey and submission of a Public Rights of Way Scheme prior to the commencement of development, the Definitive Map Team has no objection to the proposal.

- 7.45 No new public rights of way or permissive paths are proposed, however whilst the provision of such is encouraged by the NPPF and NPS EN-3, it is not a strict requirement. In this case, the proposal does keep all PRoW which cross the site open and there will be no adverse impact upon the accessibility/useability of the PRoW. By the provision of green corridors through which the paths will run, and the provision of hedgerows in front of the security fencing, the applicant has sought to minimise the impact of the proposal upon the visual outlook from existing paths. On this basis, the proposal broadly complies with the aims of Local Plan Policy LP3, the NPPF and NPS EN-3. Notwithstanding this, clearly there will be changes to the outlook for users of the PRoW which has the potential to adversely impact upon the visual amenity value of the PRoW. This has been considered above under landscape and visual impacts.

### **Transport Impacts**

- 7.46 The application is accompanied by a Transport Statement and Framework Construction Traffic Management Plan which have been reviewed by Cambridgeshire County Council in their capacity as Highway Authority.
- 7.47 Two points of existing vehicular access are proposed to serve the development:
- The solar farm and BESS will be accessed (for both construction traffic and operational maintenance visits) from the existing Rookery Farm access on Stow Road. This access was approved as the access for the existing solar farm. Since this access was used for the construction of the existing solar farm, the speed limit along this section of Stow Road has been reduced to 40mph. The visibility splays required for this access cross land within the applicant's control (land within the blue line, as indicated on the Site Location Plan);
  - The proposed UKPN substation will be accessed (for both construction traffic and operational maintenance visits) from the existing West Lodge Farm access off Thrapston Road. This existing access is used as the main access for West Lodge Farm including agricultural vehicles and HGV's; and is also used by UKPN to access the existing overhead pylons/lines.
- 7.48 The Highway Authority have no safety concerns regarding the proposed access arrangements, subject to a condition securing the necessary visibility splays.
- 7.49 The majority of vehicle movements will be generated during the construction period:
- In total the construction of the solar farm and BESS (anticipated to last 9 months) will result in approximately 1,350 deliveries to the site, spread over the construction period. It is unlikely that, even at the most intense periods of construction there will be more than 10 deliveries (20 HGV movements) per day.

- The construction of the UKPN substation will take up to 4 months and will generate around 65 HGV deliveries, including a single Abnormal Indivisible Load (AIL) required to deliver a component for the sub-station. It is unlikely that, even at the most intense period of construction there will be more than 2 deliveries (4 HGV movements) per day.
- 7.50 Vehicle movements during the operational period of the solar farm are very low, being mainly associated with the monitoring, upkeep and cleaning of the site. These trips will typically be made by small vans around 10-20 times per year.
- 7.51 The Highway Authority have noted the number of expected trips during the different phases of construction and operations and has confirmed that these are acceptable. The contents of the Framework Construction Traffic Management Plan are noted, however a more detailed document (responding to the details recommended in CCC's HDM – Traffic Management Plan: notes for Guidance document) can be secured by condition. This would allow detailed consideration of construction hours and suitable HGV routes (noting concerns raised by residents and the parish councils in this regard).
- 7.52 It is noted that neighbour and parish comments have raised concern about the impact of construction traffic on residential amenity. This is assessed below under 'Residential Amenity'. It is also noted that concern has been raised about the impact of construction traffic upon the condition of the roads – this is a matter which could be addressed within the Construction Environmental Management Plan (e.g. via a dilapidation survey of the road network being used by HGVs) if the Highway Authority consider it necessary.
- 7.53 Subject to conditions it is considered that the proposal will be served by appropriate and safe access from the public highway and will not result in any adverse impacts to highway safety or the capacity of the transport network. In this regard the proposal accords with Local Plan Policies LP16 and LP17 and the NPPF.

### **Ecology and Biodiversity**

- 7.54 Local Planning Authorities have a Statutory Duty to ensure that the impact of development on wildlife is fully considered during the determination of a planning application under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Habitats Regulations 2010). Local Plan Policies LP30 and LP31 also require all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity to be investigated and where possible avoided, or where unavoidable, mitigated.
- 7.55 The application is supported by an Ecological Appraisal, Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, Biodiversity Gain Assessment (and associated BNG metric) and a Skylark Mitigation Plan, all of which have been reviewed by the Council's Ecologist.
- 7.56 There are no internationally or nationally designated sites of ecological importance on the site itself. The site is within 2km of Little Catworth Meadow SSSI and Grafham Water SSSI, however, Natural England has

confirmed that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature sites or landscapes.

- 7.57 There are 7 non-statutory designated sites (County Wildlife Site [CWS] or Protected Road Verges [PRV]) within 2 km of the Site boundary. No adverse impacts upon these sites are expected as a result of the proposals.
- 7.58 There are no rare or protected habitats on site. The site is in arable use, with the field margins marked by hedgerow and trees. With the exception of minor hedgerow removal to facilitate construction, there will be no impacts on existing trees and hedgerow and the two existing small ponds on site will be unimpacted by the proposal (they are to be retained and enhanced by the proposals).
- 7.59 As a result of the proposals, there will be significant habitat creation. The proposal includes significant tree and hedge planting as well as a Biodiversity Enhancement Area (BEA) located on the eastern side of the site, adjacent to the BESS. The BEA will be planted and managed to provide habitat for badgers (foraging), bats (foraging), small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, a diverse community of farmland birds and invertebrates. In addition, the grassland around the array panels will be managed to mimic a flower-rich hay meadow which could be managed by grazing sheep. The grassland below the array panels provides habitat for small mammals and invertebrates (albeit the partial shading and drier conditions result in a lesser value for wildlife than other areas of the site). The delivery and long term management of this habitat (including during and after decommissioning) can be secured by conditioning a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan.
- 7.60 As detailed within the Ecological Appraisal, surveys at the site have been undertaken for protected species. Where required, the proposals have been designed to avoid any adverse impacts upon protected species, such as badger, and best practice construction methods are proposed to avoid adverse impacts during construction (which can be secured by condition). The Council's Ecologist raised no concerns regarding protected species save for Skylarks which are ground nesting birds which are generally in decline and classified as a red-listed species.
- 7.61 Surveys undertaken at the site identified 7 breeding pairs of Skylarks. As Skylarks are unlikely to nest in and around the proposed PV panels, compensation was requested for these breeding pairs. In response, the applicant proposes to provide an area of land within the blue line (i.e. land within the same ownership) which will be capable of supporting 14 Skylark plots (equivalent to a ratio of 2 plots provided for every 1 displaced). The Council's Ecologist is satisfied that this is sufficient mitigation and the Council's Legal Team are satisfied that the delivery of this skylark mitigation can be secured by a pre-commencement condition requiring the submission to and approval by the LPA of a Skylark Mitigation Strategy.
- 7.62 Turning to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the submitted Biodiversity Gain Assessment and associated metric states that a biodiversity net gain of 75.76% can be achieved for area-based habitats, 153.37% for hedgerows and 11.11% for watercourses. The Council's Ecologist is satisfied that significant BNG can be provided on the site and accurate

pre- and post-development biodiversity values can be secured by condition. Given the significant onsite biodiversity gains, the Council will need to monitor the delivery and management of the BNG to ensure it accords with the approved details. Costs associated with the monitoring of the BNG can be secured by an acceptable unilateral undertaking.

- 7.63 The council's Ecologist and Natural England have no objection to the proposal subject to conditions.
- 7.64 On this basis the proposal is therefore considered to comply with the aims of the Development Plan and the NPPF with regards to adequately avoiding and mitigating any impacts on ecology and biodiversity.

### **Drainage and Flood Risk**

- 7.65 The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy which has been reviewed by the LLFA.

#### Flood risk

- 7.66 The proposals are for development which is classified as 'Essential Infrastructure' which is appropriate in all flood zones.
- 7.67 Nevertheless, the application site is located within Flood Zone 1, with the exception of a small area of the site, immediately south of West Lodge Farm, which is located within Flood Zone 2/3. No built development is proposed within the area of Flood Zone 2/3, however the existing farm track, which will be used to provide access to the substation passes through this area. No physical changes are proposed to the existing farm track.
- 7.68 Risk of flooding from all sources (including surface water, ground water and reservoir flooding) is assessed in the submitted Flood risk Assessment which confirms that (with the exception of the small area of Flood Zone 2/3) the site is not at high risk of flooding from any source.
- 7.69 The proposal is for essential infrastructure and no development is proposed in an area of high flood risk. In accordance with the NPPF and NPPG, the sequential test or exceptions test is not applicable in this case.

#### Drainage

- 7.70 In response to an initial objection from the LLFA, during the course of the planning application, the proposal was amended by the applicant to include a swale strategy to manage surface water runoff.
- 7.71 The LLFA is now satisfied that surface water from the proposed development can be managed through the use of a series of swales fitted with check dams, located on the downside perimeters of the solar farm. In addition, the current field drainage system (which promotes infiltration and allows excess water in the soil to drain and reduces the risk of waterlogging) will be retained and the grassland which will be maintained around and underneath the solar arrays will provide natural attenuation (compared to bare or compacted soil).

- 7.72 Furthermore, to the satisfaction of the LLFA, the applicant has provided information on water quality and the proposed adoption and maintenance of the surface water drainage features.
- 7.73 Subject to conditions securing a detailed surface water drainage scheme and measures to control surface water drainage during construction, the LLFA has confirmed that it has no objection to the proposed development.
- 7.74 In accordance with Local Plan policies LP5 and LP15, the proposal would not give rise to any adverse impacts to drainage through surface water or river sources. In accordance with NPPF paragraphs 181 and 182, the proposal includes sustainable drainage systems and will not increase flood risk elsewhere.

### **Heritage Impacts**

- 7.75 The decision on this application has to be made in accordance with section 66(1) and section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (General duties as respects listed buildings and Conservation Areas in exercise of planning functions). Section 66(1) states, *"In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority ... shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses"*. Section 72(1) imposes a duty on local planning authorities *"with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area... special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area"*.
- 7.76 The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 protects the archaeological heritage of Great Britain by making provision for the investigation, preservation and recording of matters of archaeological or historical interest.
- 7.77 The application was accompanied by a Heritage Statement which, during the course of the application, has been reviewed by Historic England, the Council's Conservation Officer and the County Council Archaeologist.

### **Built heritage**

- 7.78 There are no designated built heritage assets within the application boundary. The nearest designated assets to the application site are:
- Grade II\* listed Church of St Botolph, Stow Longa (located circa 250m east of the proposed solar farm);
  - Stow Longa Conservation Area (the edge of which is located circa 360m east of the proposed solar farm, at the closest point) which includes seven Grade II Listed buildings;
  - Grade I listed Parish Church of St James, Spaldwick (located circa 1.7 miles north east of the proposed solar farm and 0.95 miles north east of the proposed substation);
  - A Grade II listed milestone, Thrapston Rad (adjacent to the existing northern access serving West Lodge Farm and circa 0.7 miles north east from the proposed substation);

- A Grade II listed Milestone About 1/4 of Mile North of Bustard Hill (approximately 650m south west of the site).

- 7.79 The impact of the proposal upon these heritage assets was assessed in the Heritage Statement submitted with the application, which finds that the proposal would cause harm to the significance of the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Botolph and Stow Longa Conservation Area, at a low level of 'less than substantial' as a result of the change to their setting. It concludes that no harm would be caused to the significance of any other designated assets, including the setting of listed buildings within Stow Longa Conservation Area or the Grade I Listed Parish Church of St James, Spaldwick.
- 7.80 Historic England have confirmed that they are in agreement with the findings of the submitted Heritage Statement. Conversely, the Council's Conservation Officer considers that 'less than substantial harm' would also result to the setting of listed buildings within Stow Longa Conservation Area, and the setting of Spaldwick Conservation Area.
- 7.81 It is not uncommon for the level of harm assessed to vary between parties (reflecting differing professional opinions), however, in this case, Historic England have confirmed that they agree with the applicant's position. Whilst the Council's Conservation Officer considers that the application site contributes positively to the setting of listed buildings within Stow Longa Conservation Area and the setting of Spaldwick Conservation Area, no specific points of intervisibility between the site and these heritage assets have been identified. The applicant's Heritage Statement (which Historic England agree with) excluded these assets from further assessment, on the basis of distance, and / or a lack of intervisibility, and / or an absence of historical functional associations. On this basis, it is not considered that the council could reasonably pursue an argument that the proposal results in harm to the setting of listed buildings within Stow Longa or the setting of Spaldwick Conservation Area.
- 7.82 It is noted that neighbour and parish comments have suggested that the proposal would harm the setting of Leighton Bromswold Conservation Area. Harm to Leighton Bromswold Conservation Area has been considered and it is noted that Leighton Bromswold is located on higher ground above the A14. The Council's Conservation Officer notes that whilst distant views of the communications tower and UKPN substation are likely, these would be seen within a wide view of the landscape and in the context of other existing pylons (which are higher in height than those proposed). The proposal is not considered to result in harm to the setting of Leighton Bromswold Conservation Area on this basis.
- 7.83 For the avoidance of doubt, it is therefore agreed that the proposal will result in a low level of harm to both the setting of the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Botolph and the setting of Stow Longa Conservation Area.
- 7.84 In accordance with NPPF paragraph 205, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its

alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

- 7.85 The Official List Entry for the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Botolph describes it as a parish church mainly of C13, C14 and C16, but having late C12 doorway and other fragments surviving from an earlier church. The church lies within an associated churchyard, located to the north of the historic settlement of Stow Longa (outside of Stow Longa Conservation Area). There is no known historical functional association between the land within the application site and the Church of St Botolph. There are glimpsed views between the churchyard in the direction of the application site and due to its height and its location at the edge of the settlement on high ground, there are views towards the church tower from within the application site (including from the PRowS which cross the site). The Applicant's Heritage Statement concludes that some of the land within the application site, particularly the northern extent, is considered to make a very minor contribution to the heritage significance of the church, through setting.
- 7.86 Stow Longa Conservation Area was designated in 1980 and focuses on the eastern extent of the historic settlement of Stow Longa. Its significance is principally derived from the special architectural, historic and archaeological interest of the built form and open spaces within it. Due to the presence of built form and intervening vegetation, the applicant's Heritage Statement found no clear intervisibility between the conservation area and the application site. Nevertheless, the remaining rural context of the Conservation Area, as provided by agricultural land immediately north, east and west does make a contribution to its setting. On this basis, the land within the site is considered to make a very minor contribution to the heritage significance of the Stow Longa Conservation Area. Therefore the change in character as a result of the proposed development would result in less than substantial harm, at the lower end of the spectrum, to the heritage significance of the Stow Longa Conservation Area, through an alteration to setting.
- 7.87 Having applied the special duties at Sections 66 and 72 of the P(LBCA) Act, and in line with and in line with the NPPF and Policy LP34, the identified harm to the setting of the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Botolph and Stow Longa Conservation Area requires clear and convincing justification and must also be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal. This should include a consideration as to whether the public benefit could be delivered through a less impactful scale and design scheme. This is a matter which will be addressed at the end of this report to allow the weighing and balancing of all potential benefits.

#### Archaeology

- 7.88 There are no designated assets of archaeological interest on the application site.
- 7.89 The submitted Heritage Statement included a desk-based assessment of archaeological potential, including a review of the results of a geophysical survey undertaken at the site.
- 7.90 Having reviewed the Heritage Statement, the County Archaeologist noted that the geophysical survey revealed very significant ditched/enclosed remains indicative of complex Iron Age and Roman



settlement, the significance of which could not be established without intrusive evaluation.

- 7.91 In response to the comments received by the County Archaeologist, the applicant subsequently agreed the scope of and undertook trial trenching at the site. The results of the trial trenching were discussed with the County Archaeologist and were subsequently submitted to HDC within an 'Archaeological Evaluation' report dated April 2025.
- 7.92 The trial trenching identified Iron Age and Roman remains of local and regional significance across a proportion of the site that will require mitigation. The most intense area of Iron Age/Roman settlement has been removed from the proposed development scheme, meaning that no development is now proposed in this area (labelled as 'Archaeological Exclusion Area' on proposed site plans). The remaining area of archaeological sensitivity (labelled as 'Archaeologically Sensitive Area' on the proposed site plans) will be preserved in situ via a 'no dig' solution - meaning that solar arrays will be attached to concrete ballasts as opposed to being pile driven into the ground, with above ground cabling. In addition, along the western boundary of the site, where it intersects with the Archaeologically Sensitive Area, no new trees are proposed (to prevent any potential damage to archaeological remains by tree roots).
- 7.93 Subject to conditions the County Archaeologist is satisfied that the proposal is acceptable. The archaeology conditions required will secure the long-term management of archaeological remains preserved in situ and secure the requirement for a Written Scheme of Investigation to safeguard archaeological assets during construction / operation / decommissioning.
- 7.94 Having regard to the requirement of the NPPF and Local Plan Policy 34, it is considered that, subject to the recommended conditions, the proposal will not directly harm any non-designated heritage assets of archaeological significance.

### **Agricultural land**

- 7.95 The Natural England Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) defines the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land as Grades 1, 2 and 3a with lower grade land included in Grades 3b, and 4, defined by wetness and gradient of the land.
- 7.96 Local Plan Policy LP10 states that all development in the countryside must seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value, avoiding the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1 to 3a) where possible and avoiding Grade 1 land unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- 7.97 NPPF paragraph 187 says that decisions should contribute to enhancement of the local environment by, amongst other things, recognising the economic and other benefits of BMV land.
- 7.98 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) encourages large scale solar farms to be located on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value. Where a proposal involves greenfield land, it is necessary to consider whether (i) the

proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

- 7.99 NPS EN-3 indicates that land type should not be a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location. Developers should, where possible, use suitable previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land. Where the use of agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to higher quality land avoiding the use of BMV land where possible. The use of BMV land is not prohibited although the impact on it is expected to be considered.
- 7.100 A Written Ministerial Statement dated May 2024 (Solar and protecting our Food Security and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land) says that food and energy security are an essential part of national security. On food security, there is a commitment to maintain the current level of domestic food production recognising that it is important that the best agricultural land is protected and food production prioritised. Solar power is acknowledged as a key part of the strategy for energy security, net zero and clean growth with the expectation of a 5-fold increase in solar deployment by 2035. Referring to NPSs and the Framework, due weight needs to be given to the use of BMV land with the starting position being that applicants should seek to minimise the impacts on BMV land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) and preferably use land in areas of poorer quality.
- 7.101 An Agricultural Land Survey report (based on desk study and fieldwork) was submitted with the application. This confirms that none of the site is Grade 1 or 2 agricultural land. The majority of the site is Grade 3b agricultural land with a small element of Grade 3a agricultural land.
- 7.102 Consistent with Local Plan Policy LP10, and as noted by Natural England, the proposal avoids the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land – after a period of 40 years the solar panels and BESS would be removed and the land returned to agricultural use.
- 7.103 The applicant has confirmed that the land around the solar panels would be used for sheep grazing. Therefore, on the basis that the site would continue to be used for agricultural purposes/food production as well as solar farming, the proposal would not lead to either the temporary or permanent loss of agricultural land. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that soil quality can improve after being left to ‘rest’ for a period of time. A planning condition can be imposed to safeguard soil resources and control soil management, including the provision of an appropriately experienced soil specialist to advise on and supervise soil handling.
- 7.104 Whilst the site would be taken out of possible use for crop production for a period of 40 years, this is not considered to be significant, having regard to the overall proportion of BMV land within the district, and would not materially impact UK food production/security.
- 7.105 Having regard to all of the above, it is considered that the proposal accords with the aims of Local Plan Policy LP10 and national policies which do not prohibit the use of BMV but seek to direct proposals land

of a poorer quality over that of a higher quality where possible, to ensure no significant impacts upon food production and security.

### **Glint and glare**

- 7.106 Solar panels are specifically designed to absorb, as opposed to reflect, irradiation. However, at certain angles solar panels may reflect the sun's rays, causing glint and glare. NPS-3 defines glint as a momentary flash of light that may be produced as a direct reflection of the sun in the solar panel, whilst glare is a continuous source of excessive brightness experienced by a stationary observer.
- 7.107 The application is accompanied by a Glint and Glare Study which has assessed the potential impact upon road safety, residential amenity, and aviation activity associated with the proposed development. The assessment considers both the impacts of the proposal, and the cumulative impacts associated with the existing Rookery Solar Farm.
- 7.108 In terms of road receptors, the Glint and Glare Study has considered the impact of the proposal upon users of a 1.4km section of the B660 and a 2.8km section of Stow Road/Spaldwick Road, from which potential views of the panel areas may be possible. In the case of both potential road receptors the study finds that screening in the form of existing vegetation and buildings is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels or solar reflections occur outside a road user's field-of view (50 degrees either side relative to the direction of travel). A low impact is therefore predicted, and no requirement for mitigation has been identified.
- 7.109 A total of 27 no. residential receptors were assessed (identified as properties located within 1km which have a potential view of the panels). Screening in the form of existing vegetation and buildings is predicted to significantly obstruct views of reflecting panels for 14 dwellings, such that solar reflections will not be experienced in practice. No impact is predicted, and mitigation is not required for these 14 dwellings.
- 7.110 For the remaining 13 dwellings, solar reflections are geometrically possible for more than three months per year but less than 60 minutes on any given day. This level of impact is not considered to be unduly harmful to living conditions. In addition, there are sufficient mitigating factors such as existing vegetation restricting views in most cases to above ground floor levels, separation distances and views coinciding with the Sun, that reduce the duration of effects and/or level of impact (i.e. solar panels are located to the west of the nearest properties in Stow Longa and therefore any reflections would occur as the sun is setting in the west, when it is at its weakest strength). As a low impact is predicted, mitigation is not required for these 13 dwellings.
- 7.111 It is noted that local residents and Leighton Bromswold Parish Council have raised concerns about the impact of views of the proposal from Leighton Bromswold (which sits on higher ground). No dwellings in Leighton Bromswold have been identified as possible receptors by the submitted Glint and Glare Assessment.
- 7.112 The application site is not located within or adjacent to an Airfield Safeguarding Area nevertheless, the Glint and Glare Study has considered possible impacts for the following unlicensed airfields:

Keyston Airfield, Sackville Farm Airfield, Little Staughton Airfield, Brooklands Farm Airfield, Valley Farm Airfield, and Dalkeith Farm Airfield – the closest being Keyston Airfield at 7.2km northwest of the proposed development. No significant impacts are predicted upon aviation activity at any of these airfields. Solar reflections towards approach paths and final sections of visual circuits are of an acceptable intensity in accordance with the associated guidance and industry practice or occur outside a pilot's main field-of-view (50 degrees either side relative to the runway threshold bearing) and therefore not considered significant in accordance with the associated guidance.

- 7.113 Overall, the proposal is therefore considered to accord with policies LP15 and LP16 and will not result in harm to residential amenity, road or aviation safety from glint and glare

### **Residential amenity**

- 7.114 The nearest settlements to the proposal are:
- Stow Longa (the solar farm is approximately 240m west, the BESS is approximately 330m west and the UKPN substation is approximately 0.7 miles north of Stow Longa);
  - Spaldwick (Spaldwick is located approximately 1.5 miles north east of the solar farm and BESS. The UKPN substation is located approximately 0.8 miles west of Spaldwick);
  - Catworth (the closest element of the proposal is the UKPN substation, located approximately 1.4 miles east of Catworth);
  - Tilbrook (located approximately 1.3 miles to the south west of the solar farm);
  - Kimbolton (located approximately 0.9 miles south of the solar farm);
  - Leighton Bromswold (the closest element of the proposal is the UKPN substation, located approximately 1.7 miles south of Leighton Bromswold).
- 7.115 The nearest properties to the proposal are located on:
- Church Walk, Stow Longa (circa 240m east of proposed solar panels);
  - The Lane, Stow Longa (circa 350m east of the proposed solar panels and circa 560 east of the BESS);
  - Rookery Farm and Station House, Kimbolton Road, Stow Longa (circa 200m east of the proposed solar panels);
  - Station Road, Tilbrook (circa 500m west of proposed solar panels);
  - Chestnut Farm Church End Little Catworth (circa 580m west of the UKPN substation);
  - Catworth Farm Catworth Farm Lane Catworth (circa 600m north of the UKPN substation).
- 7.116 Being able to see the proposal does not automatically equate to harm. NPS EN-3 states that "*Utility-scale solar farms are large sites that may have a significant zone of visual influence. The two main impact issues that determine distances to sensitive receptors are therefore likely to be visual amenity and glint and glare*". Both of these matters are considered in detail within the above sections of this report.
- 7.117 No part of the proposals would be so close or too high as to have any serious adverse impact upon the amenity of those living nearby.

- 7.118 Whilst longer distance views of the substation and communications mast may be possible for some residents, these would be seen within a wide view of the landscape and in the context of other existing pylons and towers. Furthermore, new landscape planting proposed as part of the development (and to be secured by condition) would also help to screen views of the development over time, as the planting matures.
- 7.119 It is noted that residents and Leighton Bromswold Parish Council have raised concerns about the impact of the proposal upon the amenity of residents in Leighton Bromswold. On the basis of the intervening distance, only long distance views of the proposal would be possible from Leighton Bromswold. Having regard to topography and screening by existing vegetation, it is considered that whilst some views of the taller elements proposed at the UKPN substation may be possible within long-distance panoramic views from Leighton Bromswold, this would not equate to a direct impact upon residents. None of the information submitted with the application indicates that the proposal would have a direct impact upon the residential amenity of residents within Leighton Bromswold and the council has no evidence to contradict this.
- 7.120 The Councils' Environmental Health Officer has confirmed that they do not consider light nuisance or land contamination to be an issue. With the exception of the floodlights at the UKPN substation, which are only to be used in the event of an emergency, no external lighting is proposed and a condition preventing the erection of any external lighting without the permission of the local planning authority can be imposed.
- 7.121 The application is accompanied by a Noise Assessment which considers the impact of operational noise upon nearest residents. This has been reviewed by the Council's Environmental Health Officer.
- 7.122 The closest noise sensitive receptors are located at Stow Longa to the east.
- 7.123 Solar farms are by their nature inherently quiet installations and only operate during daylight hours. They have no moving parts and the items of equipment with the most potential to generate noise (e.g. transformers, inverters and ventilation systems) can be selected, located, orientated or (if necessary) attenuated to limit audible sound levels from sensitive receptors. In this case, noise generating equipment associated with the solar panels have been located so as to maximise separation distances to a minimum of 500m from receptors. In addition, housing equipment in containers will help to minimise noise externally.
- 7.124 The BESS will house the battery storage equipment and will potentially operate 24 hours a day (dependent on demand). The containers within which the equipment is stored would ensure that noise from the operation of the equipment would be minimised, with negligible noise externally. The containers would have an HVAC system housed internally to maintain the correct operating temperatures, which would generate noise. There would also be a Power Conversion System (PCS) and a small transformer within each battery station. To further reduce noise from the operation of the BESS, it is proposed to construct an acoustic fence, 3 metres in height, around the perimeter of the BESS.
- 7.125 The Noise Assessment concludes that audible noise levels at the nearest properties would be very low even during the most sensitive

night-time and early morning periods. It is unlikely that the noise levels associated with the operation at these properties, would generally exceed the prevailing background noise levels and would be equivalent to a No Observed Effects Level, when assessed against WHO night-noise guidance.

- 7.126 Subject to securing the mitigation measures assumed in the Noise Assessment, the Environmental Health Officer has no objections.
- 7.127 Concerns raised by the parish councils about the Noise Assessment were discussed with the Councils Environmental Health Officer who advised that the maximum increase as a result of being located downwind from a noise source is about 3dB. Likewise, a relative humidity change of 80% to 20% (i.e. as a result of sunny weather) would result in an increase of 3dB, although a change like this would be very slow. A 3dB difference would be negligible.
- 7.128 In accordance with Local Plan Policy LP29 the planning application is accompanied by a rapid Health Impact Assessment. This notes that disturbance to health and wellbeing is most likely to be experienced during the construction and decommissioning phases owing to increased traffic.
- 7.129 The Transport Statement submitted with the application states that the total construction period is expected to last 9 months (the UKPN substation is expected to be constructed within 4 months of this period) with around 1,415 deliveries to the site, spread over the construction period (1,350 deliveries to the solar farm and 65 deliveries to the UKPN substation). Whilst there may be noise and highway disturbance for some residents during the construction and decommissioning phases, this would be for a limited period and a detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan, including appropriate working / delivery times can be secured by condition and would help to mitigate this impact. As such, any impact associated with construction phase would not be so great as justify withholding permission. In addition, the applicant has confirmed that local residents and businesses will be provided with a Site Manager contact if any concerns arise and need reporting so that action can be taken and issues rectified. The submission of site management details can be secured as part of the Construction Environmental Management Plan.
- 7.130 Subject to the imposition of conditions, the proposal is therefore acceptable with regards to residential amenity and accords with Local Plan Policy LP14.

#### **Other matters for consideration**

##### ***Fire safety***

- 7.131 The application is accompanied by a Fire Safety Management Plan and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue have commented on the planning application. In line with Planning Practice Guidance, the applicant engaged in pre-application discussions with the fire service prior to the submission of the application.
- 7.132 Guidance has been produced by the National Fire Chiefs Council for Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage System planning. The applicant has

provided a table demonstrating how the submitted Fire Safety Management Plan responds to the requirements of the fire service, including the National Fire Chiefs Council guidance.

- 7.133 The Fire Safety Management Plan confirms that:
- LFP Lithium-ion batteries will be used (this type of battery is more stable at high temperatures and far less prone or susceptible to thermal runaway and have a longer cycle life than older technology batteries). No stacked containers are proposed and the site design responds to the required separation distances between containers;
  - The system will be constantly monitored and controlled through an energy management system that will monitor the energy dispatch of the system but also the temperature of the cells and the cabins. The Energy Management System will raise any alarms regarding temperature, smoke detection, fire detection and fire suppression.
  - A Battery Management System will shut down the system in the event that a fault is identified in the smallest system part possible (i.e. a fault in an individual battery cell will shut the system down);
  - An automatic fire detection and alarm system will be fitted and linked to the operator of the site;
  - Aerosol fire suppression systems will also be fitted in each container, as well as carbon monoxide, hydrogen and heat and smoke detectors. Upon detection of a specific amount of either carbon monoxide, hydrogen or heat and smoke an alarm shall be sent to the EMS/SCADA and the BESS shall be shut down automatically using an emergency stop mechanism;
  - Should an emergency incident occur an engineer will attend site to support the emergency services;
  - Water supplies are to be provided at both entrances to site, in addition to stored water being located at the BESS (within the fire water tank and pump house).
- 7.134 Health and Safety Guidance for Grid Scale Electrical Energy Storage Systems March 2024 has been prepared by the Department for Energy and Net Zero and will apply outside of the planning system. In addition, relevant Building Regulations will apply (outside of the planning system) which require applicants to provide suitable access for the fire service.
- 7.135 Discussions between Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue and the Case Officer have taken place and it has been confirmed that once the exact battery specification is fixed, a detailed Fire safety Management Plan will need to be reviewed and agreed with the Fire and Rescue Service. This can be secured by condition.
- 7.136 It is noted that neighbour and Parish Council comments have noted that Kimbolton Fire Station (the closest to the site) is under threat of possible closure. It is understood from Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service that a decision has yet to be made on the future of Kimbolton Fire Station but this would not impact their comments on the proposal.
- 7.137 General guidance provided by the Environment Agency advises that applicants should consider the impact to groundwater from the escape of firewater/foam and any metal leachate that it may contain. Where possible the applicant should ensure that there are multiple 'layers of protection' to prevent the source-pathway-receptor pollution route occurring. In particular, proposals should avoid being situated near to rivers and sensitive drinking water sources.

- 7.138 In this case, the proposals are not located near to a river, and it is not located within a Special Protection Zone for drinking water. The drainage proposals include below ground fire water attenuation for the BESS where water runoff would be directed in the event of a fire event.
- 7.139 Subject to securing a detailed Fire Safety Management Plan, the LPA has no evidence to suggest that the development and operation of the BESS would be unsafe.

***Decommissioning and waste generated during the lifespan of the project***

- 7.140 With the exception of the UKPN substation, at the end of its operational period of 40 years (or in the event that the export of electricity from the site ceases sooner), the solar farm and BESS will be decommissioned and the land returned to its former condition. Accordingly, conditions relating to decommissioning and restoration works are necessary, including waste management.
- 7.141 Solar panels are recyclable. They are constructed almost entirely from aluminium, glass and silicon which are materials which can be broken down and used again.
- 7.142 Battery storage falls within the scope of the UK's producer responsibility regime for batteries and other waste legislation. This creates additional lifecycle liabilities which must be addressed outside of the planning system, including opportunities for battery recycling.
- 7.143 Likewise, the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations 2013, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment government guidance (updated February 2025) and the Waste Batteries and Accumulators Regulations 2009 will apply. The WEEE regulations aim to reduce the amount of electrical and electronic waste going to landfill and improve the recovery and recycling rates of these products.
- 7.144 Whilst neighbour comments have raised concern about the production of toxic waste during the lifespan of the development, Officer's are satisfied that a Construction Environmental Management Plan and Decommissioning Scheme (to be secured by conditioned) can minimise waste streams and ensure the safe handling and disposal of waste during construction and decommissioning. During the operational phase of the project, Officer's are satisfied that applicable regulations outside of the planning system will ensure the safe handling, recovery, recycling or disposal of materials.
- 7.145 CPRE's request for a life-cycle carbon assessment is noted, however there is no requirement for the provision of such within Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 or the NPPF. NPS EN-1 requires the provision of a whole life greenhouse gas assessment for NSIP scale projects, however, it also recognises that given the characteristics of energy infrastructure "*and the range of non-planning policies that can be used to decarbonise electricity generation, such as the UK ETS....government has determined that operational GHG emissions are not reasons to prohibit the consenting of energy projects or to impose more restrictions on them in the planning policy framework than are set out in the energy NPSs*". On this basis, having regard to the scale of the



proposal (which is not an NSIP), it is not considered it would be reasonable or justified to require the submission of a life-cycle carbon assessment in this instance.

## **8. Planning Balance and Conclusions**

### **Planning Balance and Conclusions**

- 8.1 In determining the planning application, section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In addition, Section 143 of the Localism Act amends Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act relating to the determination of planning applications and states that in dealing with planning applications, the authority shall have regard to:
- Provision of the development plan insofar as they are material,
  - Any local finance considerations, so far as they are material to the application (such as CIL if applicable), and,
  - Any other material considerations.
- 8.2 The principle of development complies with Local Plan Policy LP10. Subject to conditions, the proposal also broadly complies with Local Plan Policies LP3, LP5, LP14, LP15, LP16, LP17, LP30 and LP31.
- 8.3 Local Plan Policy LP35 requires that any adverse impacts associated with the proposal are addressed and are acceptable.
- 8.4 It has been identified that the proposal would result in a low level of harm to the setting of both the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Botolph and the setting of Stow Longa Conservation Area. For the purposes of NPPF paragraphs 212 - 215, the level of harm would be less than substantial (and at the lower end of this category of harm). In accordance with Local Plan Policy LP34 and the NPPF (which is a material consideration), very great weight is attached to the harm to these designated assets and the statutory presumption of the avoidance of harm can only be outweighed if there are public benefits that are powerful enough to do so.
- 8.5 The proposal would provide renewable energy for a period of 40 years and it is anticipated that the solar farm would be connected to the grid by Autumn 2028/29. The proposal will therefore make a significant contribution towards the delivery of additional solar generated electricity and battery capacity nationally before 2030, for which there is an urgent identified need in various national strategies and NPS. This is a public benefit afforded substantial positive weight in favour of the proposal.
- 8.6 The proposal can provide a significant biodiversity net gain (a 75.76% uplift for area-based habitats, 153.37% uplift for hedgerows and 11.11% uplift for watercourses). This can be secured by condition and is afforded significant positive weight as a public benefit in favour of the proposal.
- 8.7 In addition, the proposal would deliver some economic benefits arising from employment associated with the construction of the proposal. This public benefit is afforded limited positive weight in favour of the proposal.
- 8.8 Having applied the special duties at Sections 66 and 72 of the P(LBCA) Act, very great weight is afforded to the conservation of the setting of

both the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Botolph and the setting of Stow Longa Conservation Area. However, it is considered that the contribution the scheme would make to the generation of clean and secure energy is a substantial public benefit, which taken together with the other public benefits outlined, provides clear and convincing justification for and outweighs the 'less than substantial' harm (at the lowest end of this scale) which would arise to the significance of the designated heritage assets.

8.9 As identified within this report, the proposal will also result in adverse impacts to:

- Landscape character. In accordance with Policy LP35 it is considered that the proposal has mitigated, as far as possible, its impact upon the landscape character, to make this impact acceptable. Nevertheless, the proposal will significantly change the character of the application site itself, linked to the change in land use from arable agriculture to an area of renewable energy generation and storage. NPS EN-1 (January 2024) acknowledges that virtually all large scale energy infrastructure projects will have adverse effects on the landscape, but there may also be beneficial landscape character impacts arising from mitigation. In this case the proposal does deliver beneficial landscape character impacts through significant new planting and a Biodiversity Enhancement Area which increase the sites biodiversity value and improves the nature conservation value of the application site in accordance with the aims of the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2022). On this basis, the harm arising to landscape character is considered to be limited and hence can be afforded limited negative weight in the overall planning balance.
- Visual amenity. Whilst the proposal will result in a degree of harm to the outlook currently experienced by residents of the closest dwellings and users of PRow crossing the site (at least in the short term, before the mitigation planting matures) this is not considered to result in any unacceptable adverse impacts. With regard to the nearest residential properties, views of the proposed built form from within the ground floor of these dwellings are expected to be limited to glimpses over existing field boundary vegetation or broader views from first floor windows. Being able to see the proposal does not automatically equate to harm and no part of the proposals would be so close or too high as to have any unacceptable adverse impact upon the amenity of those living nearby. Whilst the outlook of users of some stretches of PRow will change, the proposal has been designed to minimise the dominance of the proposals within views from the PRow (by ensuring the PRow are retained in green corridors which provide set back from the panels and intervening vegetation). Furthermore, the proposal (with the exception of the UKPN substation) is temporary and therefore reversible after 40 years, solar farms are becoming a more common sight within open countryside and the existing landscape around the application site is already characterised by energy infrastructure (solar farms and high voltage energy lines and pylons). On this basis, the harm arising to visual amenity is considered to be limited and hence can be afforded limited negative weight in the overall planning balance.

- 8.10 In accordance with Local Plan Policy LP35, it has been demonstrated that, subject to conditions, all potential adverse impacts including cumulative impacts are or can be made acceptable.
- 8.11 The benefits of the proposal have already been outlined above. Having regard to the degree of harm arising in relation to landscape character and visual amenity, this harm is afforded limited weight in the overall planning balance and is considered to be outweighed by the benefits of the proposal.
- 8.12 The proposal is considered to accord with the development plan when read as a whole and no material considerations have been identified which would justify a decision contrary to the development plan. In accordance with the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development, the proposals accord with the development plan and the benefits of the proposal (as outlined above) outweigh the arising harm.
- 8.13 It is therefore considered that planning permission should be granted subject to the imposition of relevant conditions and a unilateral undertaking.

**9. RECOMMENDATION - APPROVAL subject to conditions and an acceptable unilateral undertaking to secure BNG monitoring fees;**

- 5 year time limit to implement
- Accordance with approved plans
- 40 year temporary period (excluding UKPN substation)
- Decommissioning scheme to be submitted
- Final location (within the approved perimeter fencing) and details of equipment (including colour and materials) to be submitted
- PV panels to be no higher than 3m (as shown on plans)
- No CCTV or external lighting except that shown to be installed
- Full details of the emergency lighting at the UKPN substation to be submitted
- Control of unexpected ground contamination
- Provision and maintenance of visibility splays at the site access
- Construction Environmental Management Plan to be submitted including requirements for construction traffic management
- Submission of an Archaeological Management Plan and Written Scheme of Investigation to safeguard archaeological assets
- Submission of a soft and hard landscaping scheme including maintenance regimes and replacement planting in the event of failure
- Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) to be submitted including full details of the BNG
- Submission of a Skylark Mitigation Strategy
- Submission of final BNG details and monitoring of the onsite BNG for a period of 30 years
- Long-term management and maintenance details of drainage scheme to be submitted.
- Submission of a Public Rights of Way dilapidations survey and Public Rights of Way Scheme
- Installation and retention of the proposed noise mitigation measures

- Submission of an updated Fire Safety Management Plan and Emergency Response Plan
- Tree Protection Plan to be submitted
- Detailed surface water drainage scheme to be submitted
- Details of how surface water run off will be managed during construction to be submitted
- Soil management plan to be submitted.

If you would like a translation of this document, a large text version or an audio version, please contact us on 01480 388388 and we will try to accommodate your needs.

**CONTACT OFFICER:**

Enquiries about this report to **Hollie Renney, Senior  
Development Management Officer**  
[hollie.renney@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:hollie.renney@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

[REDACTED]

---

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 22 August 2024 16:34  
**To:** Control, Development (Planning); DMAAdmin; DMAAdmin  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Planning Permission Consultation - Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road (ref 24/00883/FUL)

Good afternoon,

Following Stow Longa Parish Councils meeting yesterday please find below our formal response to the proposals contained within the planning application 24/00883/FUL | Construction of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure. | Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road Stow Longa. Please note from the below email chain that we were kindly granted a deadline extension for submission of our response to 22/08/24.

The Parish Council's response has been informed by a broad range of feedback and responses from residents on the subject and as a result raise a formal **Objection** to this application.

### Summary of Response

There is an overall opinion that the Solar Power plant development is both excessive in and disproportionately large, comparative to the existing village of Stow Longa. The proximity to St Botolph's Church, a 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Grade II\* listed building and; residential homes within the village are cause for concern to residents, whose lives will be impacted by noise and light pollution. It is our opinion that the planners have not put into place adequate provision of buffering zones and distance in proximity from the existing village buildings. In addition, the plans will degrade the scenic views and vital local amenities such as the network of footpaths and bridleways creating narrow, tunnel like paths that will be impacted by further noise and pollution.

Often described as a Hamlet, Stow Longa is a small village of just 70 households with a church and surrounding farmland. The village is popular with horse riders, ramblers, local dog walkers and Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. It is a small, rural community with a long history of arable farming in the surrounding fields.

The proposal to repurpose 237 acres of farmland adjacent to the village will detrimentally alter the rural landscape and transform our local countryside into an industrial area through the introduction of a new solar power plant.

The Parish Council is generally very supportive of renewable energy projects, as it has demonstrated on the existing project on the Land West of Rookery Farm which, the Stow Longa Parish Council supported and recommended for approval in December 2012.

The existing site has an annual output estimated to power around 1,300 homes. This equates to almost 20 times the number of homes within Stow Longa and, is therefore significantly greater than its fair share in terms of provided energy resources to the broader local population.

The proposed new site is 10 times larger than the current site and dwarfs the size of the existing village which we deem to be both intrusive and excessive in design.

### Key points of Objection

The Parish Council would make the following key points in relation to its objections.

### *1. Light pollution*

Cambridgeshire Constabulary advises that provision for significant lighting be included on the site for safety reasons. As a village Stow Longa has no street lighting and is located approximately 2 miles from both Spaldwick and Kimbolton, it is therefore extremely likely that the introduction of additional lighting will cause a significant detrimental impact to the village. Whilst the use of PIR technology is recommended by the Police it, is highly likely to be triggered by local wildlife on a frequent basis as the fields are home to a large population of Hares and Muntjac amongst other wildlife.

### *2. Noise pollution*

The introduction of the BESS plant equipment to the local area will generate significant noise pollution to the quiet village location. We see no reference to, or analysis of; the impact of wind direction, especially during peak seasons such as the summer when residents are also likely to have windows open and spend more time outside. The proximity of the BESS to nearby houses which is approximately 0.5 miles, is simply unacceptable. The noise assessment report fails to benchmark the current levels of ambient noise in the area and how this may be disproportionately impacted. It also excludes any analysis on how the far noise might carry based on varying weather conditions.

### *3. Land utilisation*

The application states that it is necessary to use Grade 3A land to offset land that would unacceptably affect the visual outlook. The remaining land is Graded as 3B. The loss of both types of land for food production is inappropriate as it will have a detrimental effect upon the UK's food security.

We recognise the conflict here between food and energy security, but we have a responsibility to be considered and strategic when choosing the most suitable locations for energy production. Grade 3A land is deemed as BMV (Best and Most versatile) by Natural England. The NPPF guidance states that local authorities try to use areas of poorer quality land over high quality, including that which has the least "environmental or amenity value", whilst seeking to conserve and enhance the natural environment. In 2012 Natural England estimated that 59% of Farmland falls outside of the BMV classification which equates to an estimated 25,000,000 acres across the UK (around 41% of the total land area). This data highlights that there is an abundance of land available to develop these sites without impacting our small rural community.

### *4. Health & Safety*

With on-site Lithium battery storage proposed we are aware of many reports of fires with this type of equipment in the public domain which renders the site as High Risk. We note that the fire safety management plan identifies Kimbolton Fire Station located as just 3 minutes away from the site. It should be noted by the Officer reviewing this proposal that Cambridgeshire Fire service's Operational Response and Risk report identifies Kimbolton Fire Station as a potential site for closure and is currently undergoing a strategic review with a recommendation to close. We therefore feel it is pertinent to highlight the critical health and safety danger this proposed high risk site will pose to the local community as we have a duty of care to our residents.

### *5. Loss of Amenity & Visual Impact*

The proposed location of the BESS, adjacent to the footpath will be extremely detrimental. The rural views will be spoiled and whilst eventually the proposed planting will shroud the area, it will cause the views to be completely lost, creating a tunnel effect to the footpath and with the addition of the noise pollution, render these routes completely unusable.

The volume of operational office buildings, inverter storage units, CCTV and 2.5-3m high fencing surrounding the perimeter will irreversibly destroy the local countryside and scenic views including the visual impact from St Botolph's Church, contravening the guidelines of GLVIA3 due to the impact on the views to and from a heritage asset.

## *6. Impact of transport during construction phases*

Despite recommendations made to Bluefield during public consultation they have ignored our recommendation to consider the timings of deliveries to site throughout the construction phase. During school term time a large volume of school coaches pass through the village between the hours of 7:30am-9:00am & 3:30pm-5pm, predominately too and from Kimbolton School. As a local access road, Spaldwick Road has seen significant damage to the verges and highways in recent years due to the width and weight of traffic and was cited as the number one issue for residents in 2023 village survey. The problem is exacerbated during rush hour periods when Coaches, Heavy Goods & Farming vehicles attempt to pass each other on the narrow roads often causing damage to resident's gardens, damage to overhanging trees within the conservation area and presenting a serious health and safety risk to residents using the narrow footpath through the village, especially young children who are waiting at the bus stop.

We vehemently object to the proposed size, frequency and timings of delivery traffic that will cause irrefutable risk to residents and damage to the village. The suggestion that deliveries will take place on Saturdays, also leads us to believe that further noise pollution will be prominent at weekends.

Whilst the above list is not exhaustive of the issues related to the planning application, we would also like to highlight further points that we feel missing or inaccurate within the submission.

Location of the proposed communications tower is unclear from documentation.

Height of the proposed communications tower is unclear. The technical drawing appears poorly labelled on the scale. One could interpret it as either 75m or 25m high, both are unacceptable as Stow Longa is a largely flat area with no tall buildings therefore the communication tower would be visible for miles around.

It should also be noted that the Biodiversity Net Gain documentation is illegible in its current format on the planning portal.

We note submission from Cambridgeshire's Historic Environment Team who raise concerns about failure to conduct intrusive evaluation of the site and support this concern, as there is significant evidence to support that the proposed site historically would have supported buildings and enclosures.

Very little consideration has been given to the ecological impact of the site whilst there is an ecological survey submitted it pays very little attention to the loss of feeding grounds for the local raptor community. Being host to Barn Owls, Tawny Owls, Kestrels, Red Kites, Buzzards, Peregrine Falcons and Sparrow Hawks the loss of hundreds of acres of open hunting space will have a detrimental impact this population.

## **Conclusion**

The Parish Council acknowledges the need for the UK to enhance its energy and food production security; but, if addressed appropriately, these objectives can be mutually compatible. By selecting locations remote from communities and not on productive arable land, solar farms could generate the sustainable energy needs of the UK whilst maximising the extent that we grow to meet the Country's and residents' needs - bearing in mind that the UK presently imports approximately 40% of its food requirements.

In summary, whilst proposed as a measure aligned with the UK's need to enhance its energy security, in reality this is - first and foremost - a business opportunity for the developer. If approved, this planning application would generate Company profits at the expense of quality-of-life for affected residents - for a minimum of 40 years. If approved by HDC, the Parish Council would engage proactively and vigorously to overturn this decision.

---

Chair  
Stow Longa Parish Council

<https://stowlonga-pc.gov.uk/>

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On 2024-08-22 09:23, clerk@stowlonga-pc.gov.uk wrote:

----- Original Message -----

**Subject:**RE: Planning Permission Consultation - Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road (ref 24/00883/FUL)

**Date:**2024-07-25 08:43

**From:**"Control, Development \\\(Planning\)" <Development.Control@huntingdonshire.gov.uk>

**To:**<

**Copy:**<

Dear

Further to your email below, the Case Officer has confirmed that she is happy to agree an extension to allow you comment.

With kind regards





Development Services

Corporate Delivery

Huntingdonshire District Council

Pathfinder House, St Marys Street

Huntingdon

PE29 3TN

**From:** [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 24, 2024 5:53 PM

**To:** DMAAdmin <[Development.ManagementAdmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:Development.ManagementAdmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)>

**Cc:** DevelopmentControl <[DevelopmentControl@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:DevelopmentControl@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Subject:** Re: Planning Permission Consultation - Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road (ref 24/00883/FUL)

Hi,

Re below, please note that the next Stow Longa Parish Council meeting is on 21st August 2024. Given the importance of this application to the local community, it is requested that your deadline for the submission of comments be extended to cease work on 22nd August 2024.

Confirmation that this date is acceptable is requested.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

Clerk

Stow Longa Parish Council

On 2024-07-24 17:01, [Dmadmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:Dmadmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk) wrote:

Dear Parish Clerk,

Please find correspondence from Development Management at Huntingdonshire District Council

attached to this email in relation to the following application for planning permission.

Proposal: Construction of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure.

Site Address: Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road

Reference: 24/00883/FUL

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If you have any doubts or concerns relating to this email please contact us directly, our contact details are provided below.

Development Management  
Huntingdonshire District Council

T: 01480 388388

E: [dmadmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:dmadmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

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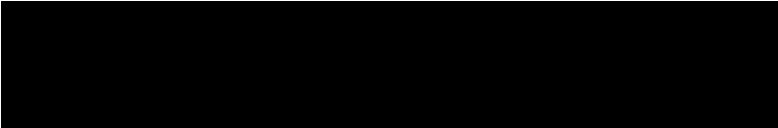
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**Subject:** Parish Council Response to Planning Application Reference 24/00883/FUL Subject: Request for Mitigation Development Conditions Should Permission Be Grante  
**Date:** 26 January 2025 19:34:24  
**Attachments:** [We sent you safe versions of your files.msg](#)  
[Request for Mitigation Conditions.pdf](#)  
**Importance:** High

---

Mimecast Attachment Protection has deemed this file to be safe, but always exercise caution when opening files.

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Dear All,

Please find attached a letter in response from Stow Longa Parish Council to Pegasus Group's letter submitted 19th December 2024 related to Planning Application Reference 24/00883/FUL which outlines Development conditions that we feel should be imposed, should HDC be minded to grant planning approval.

Kind regards,


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[REDACTED]  
Senior Development Management Officer (Strategic Team)  
Huntingdonshire District Council  
St Mary's Street  
Huntingdon  
PE29 3TN

**Parish Council Response to Planning Application Reference 24/00883/FUL Subject:  
Request for Mitigation Development Conditions Should Permission Be Granted**

[REDACTED]  
On behalf of Stow Longa Parish Council, we acknowledge the recent response to our objection letter submitted by Pegasus Group on 19/12/2024 in relation to Planning Application 24/00883/FUL for the construction of a solar farm and associated infrastructure at Rookery Farm. While we maintain our objection and reservations regarding the potential impacts of this development, we wish to propose the following planning conditions be imposed should the Planning Officers be minded to grant permission, in order to address key concerns and mitigate the potential adverse effects on our community and environment:

**1. Light Pollution**

- Ensure that emergency lighting at the substation is used strictly for emergencies and not for routine operation.
- Require downward-facing and shielded light fixtures to minimise light spill.
- Impose a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with light pollution mitigation measures.

**2. Noise Pollution**

- Mandate the requirement for acoustic fencing and other noise mitigation measures as detailed in the submitted Noise Assessment.
- Establish regular noise monitoring during both construction and operational phases, with clear thresholds for acceptable levels.
- Mandate the cessation of operation in the event of noise levels exceeding acceptable limits, pending resolution.
- Recognising the concerns of residents closest to the site who currently enjoy a quiet, peaceful environment conducive to relaxation and uninterrupted sleep, we urge that the developer arranges a trial of the inverter system. This would allow those most affected to experience and assess the actual noise levels under simulated operational conditions. Such a trial would provide an opportunity for residents to have their concerns addressed and, if necessary, for further mitigation measures to be implemented.

**3. Protection of Agricultural Land**

- Impose a condition requiring the land to be returned to its original state after the decommissioning of the solar farm, including soil remediation and removal of all infrastructure.
- Ensure that grazing activities are actively maintained throughout the operational period, as indicated by the applicant, to preserve agricultural use.

#### **4. Fire Safety**

- Require the developer to maintain and update the Fire Safety Management Plan, reviewed and approved by Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service on an annual basis.
- Mandate the installation of on-site fire suppression systems and regular inspections.

#### **5. Visual and Heritage Impact**

- Enforce an updated and robust Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, including additional screening measures to minimise visual impact, especially from sensitive locations such as the church.
- Require detailed landscaping plans with native hedgerows and tree planting to screen the site and enhance biodiversity.
- Impose a long-term maintenance obligation for screening vegetation.
- Extend the distance between St Botolphs Church & Residential homes and the site perimeter to preserve a more appropriate barrier between the village and the site, reducing the overall footprint of the development to ensure it does not overwhelm the existing footprint of the village.

#### **6. Transport Impact**

- Restrict delivery and construction traffic to off-peak hours, with particular attention to school times and periods of high local traffic.
- Mandate a Construction Traffic Management Plan that includes:
  - ♣ Limits on vehicle size and frequency.
  - ♣ Measures to ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.
  - ♣ Procedures for repairing any damage caused to local highways and verges.

#### **7. Ecology and Archaeology**

- Ensure the submission and approval of final reports on archaeology and ecology before any construction begins.
- Impose conditions to protect and enhance local biodiversity, including the creation of wildlife corridors and habitat enhancements.

#### **8. Community Liaison and Monitoring**

- Require the appointment of a Community Liaison Officer (Site Manager) to provide regular updates to the Parish Council and local residents on construction progress, traffic management, and any issues that arise.
- Establish a system for ongoing community engagement and feedback throughout the construction and operational phases.

#### **9. Flood Risk and Drainage**

- Upon reviewing the flood risk and drainage document, we note that most areas are categorised as Flood Zone 1, indicating a low probability of flooding (less than 0.1% chance). However, there is an assumption that the existing drainage ditches will adequately manage any additional discharge. We request evidence to confirm this assumption, particularly as natural springs in the area, which flow even during warmer months, are not addressed in the documentation. This could lead to unanticipated pressure on drainage systems. Furthermore, we seek clarity on who would be responsible for remedial drainage work should issues arise post-construction.

#### **10. Fire Station Closure**

- While the closure of the Kimbolton Fire Station is beyond the control of the applicant, it is not beyond the jurisdiction of the Planning Authority. Closure of this station would likely increase response times to emergencies, potentially exacerbating risks to adjacent residents and the environment, particularly in terms of fire emissions. Considering that other fire stations in the area are also under threat of closure, we require assurances that these risks have been fully understood by the Planners and that appropriate mitigation measures are in place.

We trust that these conditions will provide a balanced approach to addressing our community's concerns should the decision to approve the planning application be granted. We particularly urge the trial of the inverter system as a proactive step in addressing noise which is one of the principal concerns for villagers.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted Signature]

Chairman  
Stow Longa Parish Council

[Redacted Address]

<https://stowlonga-pc.gov.uk/>

Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street  
Huntingdon. PE29 3TN  
Developmentcontrol@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

01480 388424  
www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Head of Planning Services  
Pathfinder House  
St. Mary's Street  
Huntingdon  
Cambridgeshire PE 29 3TN

Application Number: 24/00883/FUL Case Officer Hollie Renney

**Proposal: Construction of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure.**

**Location: Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road**

**Observations of Spaldwick Town/Parish Council.**

Please ✓ box as appropriate

☐

Recommend **approval** because .....(please give relevant planning reasons in space below)

☒

Recommend **refusal** because...(please give relevant planning reasons in space below)

of Highway Safety concerns in particular regarding school hours (multiple routes to multiple schools buses and cars.) The Council believes existing Industrial Estate traffic would increase exponentially. Listed buildings on the High St, Spaldwick already suffer HGV damage and the Village Green where the (listed) War Memorial is sited already has existing damage to the verges and curbs where large vehicles have cut the corner (High St, ☐ Stow Rd junction). The buildings and memorial are within a conservation area. No observations either in favour or against the proposal. Additionally the Spaldwick Road into Stow Langa is narrow and vehicles passing at busy periods, especially buses, HGVs and farming vehicles could cause damage to overhanging trees in the conservation area gardens and, in particular, people, including children using the footpath.

Date: 19/9/24.

Failure to return this form within the time indicated will be taken as an indication that the Town or Parish Council do not express any opinion either for or against the application.

Please send response to email address below:-

Development.control@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

**(Development Management)**

[REDACTED]

---

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 30 August 2024 12:07  
**To:** DevelopmentControl  
**Subject:** Planning Responses

**Categories:** [REDACTED]

Hi,

My Council has considered the following applications and their views are as stated –

24/00883 Rookery Farm, Stow Road, Kimbolton – construct solar farm plus battery energy storage system and association works.

Recommend refusal. It is considered that this application is premature, as further information should first be provided relating to work done to examine the archaeology of the site, including archaeological investigations by trenching.

24/01445 2 Tollfield, Kimbolton – demolish single storey rear extension and replace with 2 storey rear extension.

Recommend approval as appropriate development.

Regards

[REDACTED]  
Clerk to the Council



# CATWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Hunts DC Planning Department

Sent by email to

[Dmadmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:Dmadmin@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

Catworth Parish Council  
8 Bernard Road  
Brampton  
Huntingdon  
PE28 4RW  
Tel: 07500 100700

Email:

13 September 2024

## **Planning Application 24/00883/FUL Construction of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure –**

### **Catworth Parish Council Submission**

Following Catworth Parish Council's meeting yesterday evening, please find below our formal response to the proposals contained within the planning application 24/00883/FUL | Construction of a Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure. | Solar Farm Rookery Farm Kimbolton Road Stow Longa.

The Parish Council's response follows debate amongst councillors and includes feedback and responses from residents directly impacted. As a result, we **wish to neither propose approval nor recommend rejection** of this application.

### **Summary of Response**

Recognising it has direct impact on the core residential areas of Catworth, the proposed site does closely border our parish boundaries and is likely to be of a direct impact to residents in the Little Catworth community. We are disappointed with the limited engagement with those living in this area with them having little, if any, information shared by either the developers or from HDC.

We would also highlight that from the presentations and proposals shared to date, the plans are ambiguous and lack enough detail in order for us to make a fully informed decision. That said, we would seek to raise several concerns and would request that these are considered by the planning process.

# CATWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

## Key points of Concern

The Parish Council would make the following key points in relation to its concerns.

### 1. Noise pollution

The introduction of the solar farm and associated equipment will generate significant noise pollution for those living or trading in proximity to the transmission unit. The plans shared do not clearly detail how this noise pollution will be negated or minimised and we would encourage the planning officers to seek further assurances or implement noise mitigation measures to minimise impact.

We see no reference to, or analysis of; the impact of wind direction, especially during the spring/summer when residents of Little Catworth are likely to be outside or have their windows open. The proximity of the transmission unit to nearby houses, less than 0.25 miles, is likely to cause noise issues.

The noise assessment report fails to benchmark the current levels of ambient noise in the area and how this may be disproportionately impacted. It also excludes any analysis on how the far noise might carry based on varying weather conditions.

### 2. Safety and Fire Hazards

With on-site Lithium battery storage proposed, we are aware of many instances of combustion this type of material and given the scale of the batteries, we would deem this site as High Risk. On noting that the fire safety management plan identifies Kimbolton Fire Station located as just 3 minutes away from the site and likely first responder. We would remind the Officer reviewing this proposal that Cambridgeshire Fire service's Operational Response and Risk report identifies Kimbolton Fire Station as a potential site for closure and is currently undergoing a strategic review with a recommendation to close. We therefore feel it is pertinent to highlight the critical health and safety danger this proposed high risk site will pose to the local community as we have a duty of care to our residents.

Best regards



Clerk to the Council

## Leighton Bromswold Parish Council

### Planning Application – 24/00883/FUL Solar Farm & Battery Energy Storage Centre and Stow Longa

Following the Leighton Bromswold Parish Council meeting held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September, the parish council objects to the construction of the proposed solar farm and battery energy storage centre at Stow Longa (24/00883/FUL) on the following grounds:-

1. The proposed development is located within clear view of the village of Leighton Bromswold and the bridleways and footpaths within its parish boundary. This view is currently unspoilt views of the Northen Wolds Landscape Character Area of Huntingdonshire with its natural landscape and the rural environment. This development will change this landscape into one of an industrial area with security lighting, fencing and a 25M high communication tower. It directly affects the use and enjoyment of many within the village of Leighton Bromswold, who live in a Conservation Area, were unaware and not consulted directly on this application, and contrary to HDC
2. The local area benefits from little light pollution and dark skies. With this development's perimeter and security lighting along with its 25M communication tower with associated lighting, light pollution will result along with the loss of the dark skies. Again, this is contrary to HDC Planning Policy LP10.
3. The proposed development will be built on a number of footpaths, bridleways and byways, one of which is the Three Shires Way. There are no plans to protect or divert these resulting in their loss. These rights of way are regularly used by the residents of Leighton Bromswold for leisure and exercise.
4. The UK is not currently self-sufficient in its food production and imports 40% from overseas. Considering the escalation of current problems around the world, food security is becoming more of an issue. Losing a further 96 hectares of prime agricultural land will not help this situation. There does not appear to be any justification to further go against a policy of losing valuable agricultural land when smaller scale solar panel developments could be utilised along (as there is on the existing site) with agricultural buildings and housing via 'rent a roof schemes'
5. The size of this development is out of scale with other developments and settlements in the area. It fails to recognise not only the natural landscape but the impact on nearby conservation area and historic listed buildings.

Leighton Bromswold Parish Council also fully support the comments made on this application by the CPRE and Stow Longer Parish Council.

Furthermore the details on the application are possibly incomplete and misleading:-

- We have referred to the omission of alternative PRow in the application in 3 above which is in contravention of Cambridgeshire County Council policy.
- There appears to be a discrepancy between the grading of the loss of agricultural land (notes as Grade 3a/3b whereas the CPRE has used the data from Defra indicating Class 2 classification.
- More disturbing is the fact that the developer has used views from Leighton Bromswold taken from part way up the hill near Staunch Hill, whereas the properties and view, experienced by residents of The Avenue are much higher with a direct site line to the development site at almost ground level.
- No indication as to the location or siting of the large communications tower.

With the above issues in mind, Leighton Bromswold Parish Council cannot support this proposal and request that it is **REFUSED**.

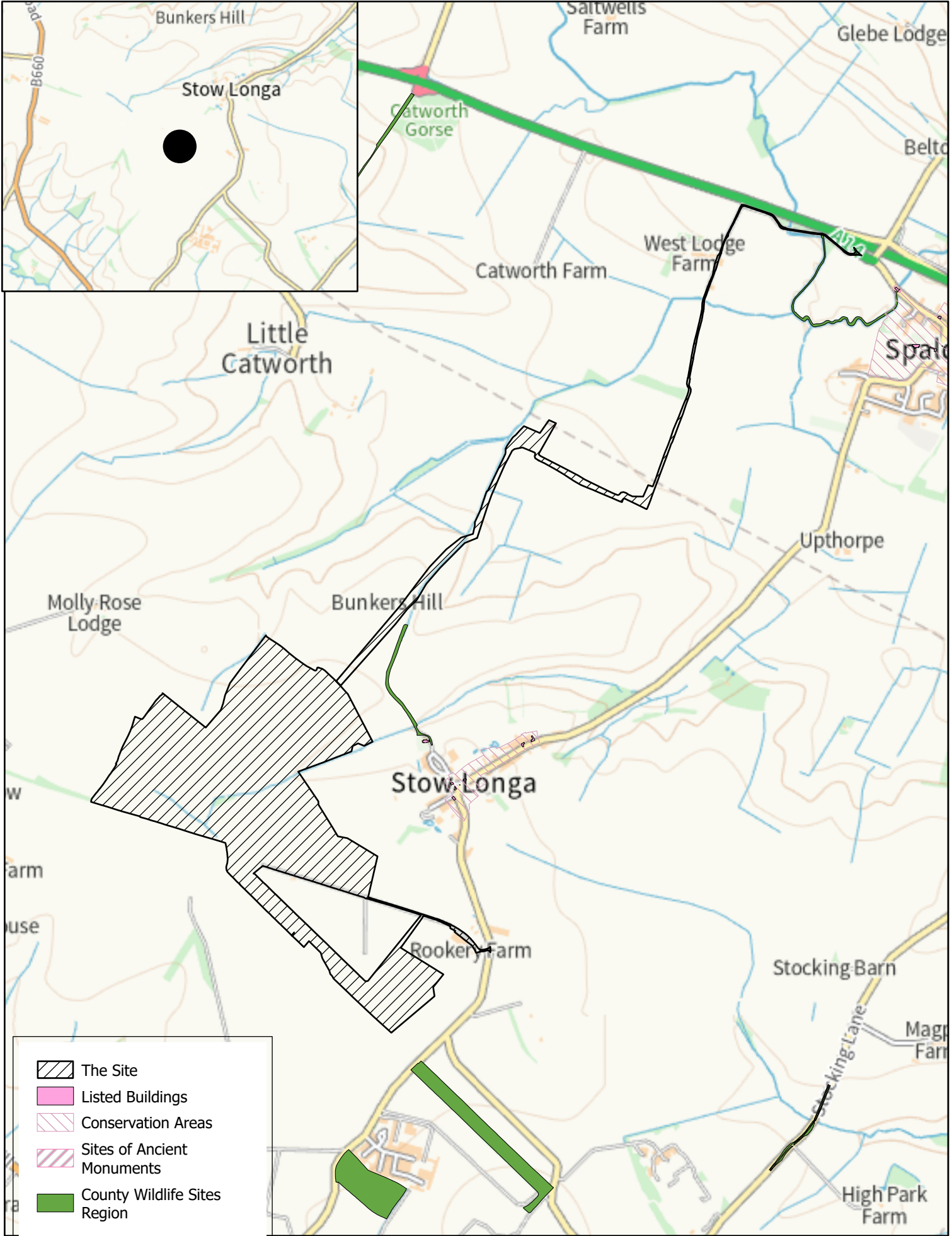
Development Management Committee

Application Ref: 24/00883/FUL

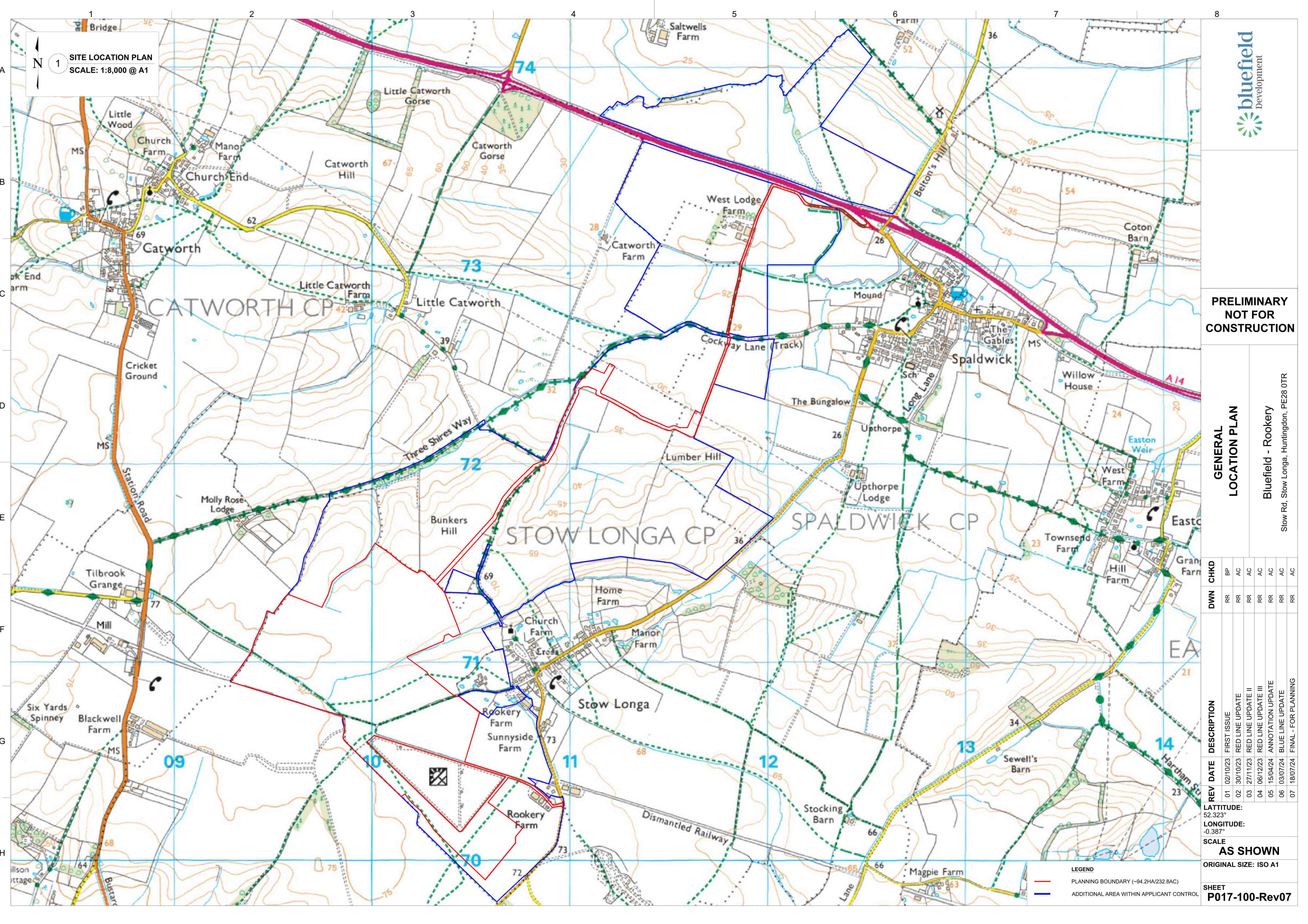


Scale = 1:20,000

Date Created: 09/07/2025







1

N

1

SITE LOCATION PLAN  
SCALE: 1:8,000 @ A1



PRELIMINARY  
NOT FOR  
CONSTRUCTION

GENERAL  
LOCATION PLAN

Bluefield - Rookery

Stow Rd, Stow Longa, Huntingdon, PE28 0TR

REV	DATE	DESCRIPTION	DWN	CHKD						
				RR	BP	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC
01	02/10/23	FIRST ISSUE		RR		RR		RR		RR
02	30/10/23	RED LINE UPDATE		RR		RR		RR		RR
03	27/11/23	RED LINE UPDATE II		RR		RR		RR		RR
04	06/12/23	RED LINE UPDATE III		RR		RR		RR		RR
05	15/04/24	ANNOTATION UPDATE		RR		RR		RR		RR
06	03/07/24	BLUE LINE UPDATE		RR		RR		RR		RR
07	18/07/24	FINAL - FOR PLANNING		RR		RR		RR		RR

LATITUDE:  
52.323°  
LONGITUDE:  
-0.387°  
SCALE  
AS SHOWN  
ORIGINAL SIZE: ISO A1  
SHEET  
P017-100-Rev07

- LEGEND
- PLANNING BOUNDARY (-94.2HA/232.8AC)
  - ADDITIONAL AREA WITHIN APPLICANT CONTROL



KEY:

- Site Boundary

Existing Vegetation to be Retained

- Mapping based on tree survey and aerial photography

- Hedgerows (except where within visibility splay) to be managed to grow out and be maintained at 4m heights, to provide screening value without overshadowing PV solar panels

- Where outside of land ownership, management is out of applicants control

- Any gaps in existing hedgerow to be infilled with native hedge plants to suit existing species

Indicative Existing Vegetation to be Removed

- refer to associated Ecology documents prepared by BSG Ecology for detail of ecological value

- where removed to accommodate construction access only (i.e. not required during operation) gaps in hedgerow to be infilled post construction

Existing Rookery Farm Solar Farm

Existing Public Right of Way – Footpath

- 2m clear width allowed to all footpaths with min 0.5 (generally 1.5m+) clear space beyond (to allow for vegetation growth)

Existing Public Right of Way – Bridleway

Existing Public Right of Way – Byway open to all traffic

Existing Overhead Lines

Archaeological Exclusion Area

Archaeologically Sensitive Area

- panel to be ballasted

Proposed Infrared CCTV Cameras

Proposed Inverter Stations

Proposed Security Fencing

- to BESS compound and UKPN Substation, fencing site wide to feature gaps every 100m to allow movement of reptiles and other fauna. Badger gaps as specified by project ecologists

Proposed Acoustic Fencing

- to BESS compound and UKPN Substation

Proposed Connection Cable to Substation

Proposed Native Hedgerow with Native Hedgerow Trees

- Hedgerow widths are indicative for eligibility purposes due to drawing scale

- to be managed to allow to grow up to and be maintained at maximum 3m height

Proposed Native Woodland Planting

Proposed Native Scrub Planting

Existing Riparian Corridor to be Retained and Enhanced

Proposed climbing plant (BESS acoustic fence)

- to be planted at 2m intervals along fence. Refer to planting schedule for further details

Proposed Wetland Meadow Mix to Proposed Swales and Attenuation Pond

- to be seeded with Emorgate EM8 Meadow Mixture for Wetlands (or similar approved) sown at 4g/m<sup>2</sup>

Biodiversity Enhancement Areas (BEA)

- to be overseeded with Emorgate EM10 Tussock Meadow Mixture (or similar approved) sown at 4g/m<sup>2</sup> as required

Proposed Meadow Grass Mix to Site Peripheries

- to be seeded with Emorgate EM4 Meadow Mixture for Clay Soils (or similar approved) sown at 4g/m<sup>2</sup> as required

Existing Grassland to be Retained and Enhanced

- to be overseeded with Emorgate EG4 Meadow Grass Mixture for Clay Soils (or similar approved) at 4g/m<sup>2</sup> as required

Permeable Grasscrete/BodPave Grass Surfacing (or similar approved)

Proposed Access Tracks

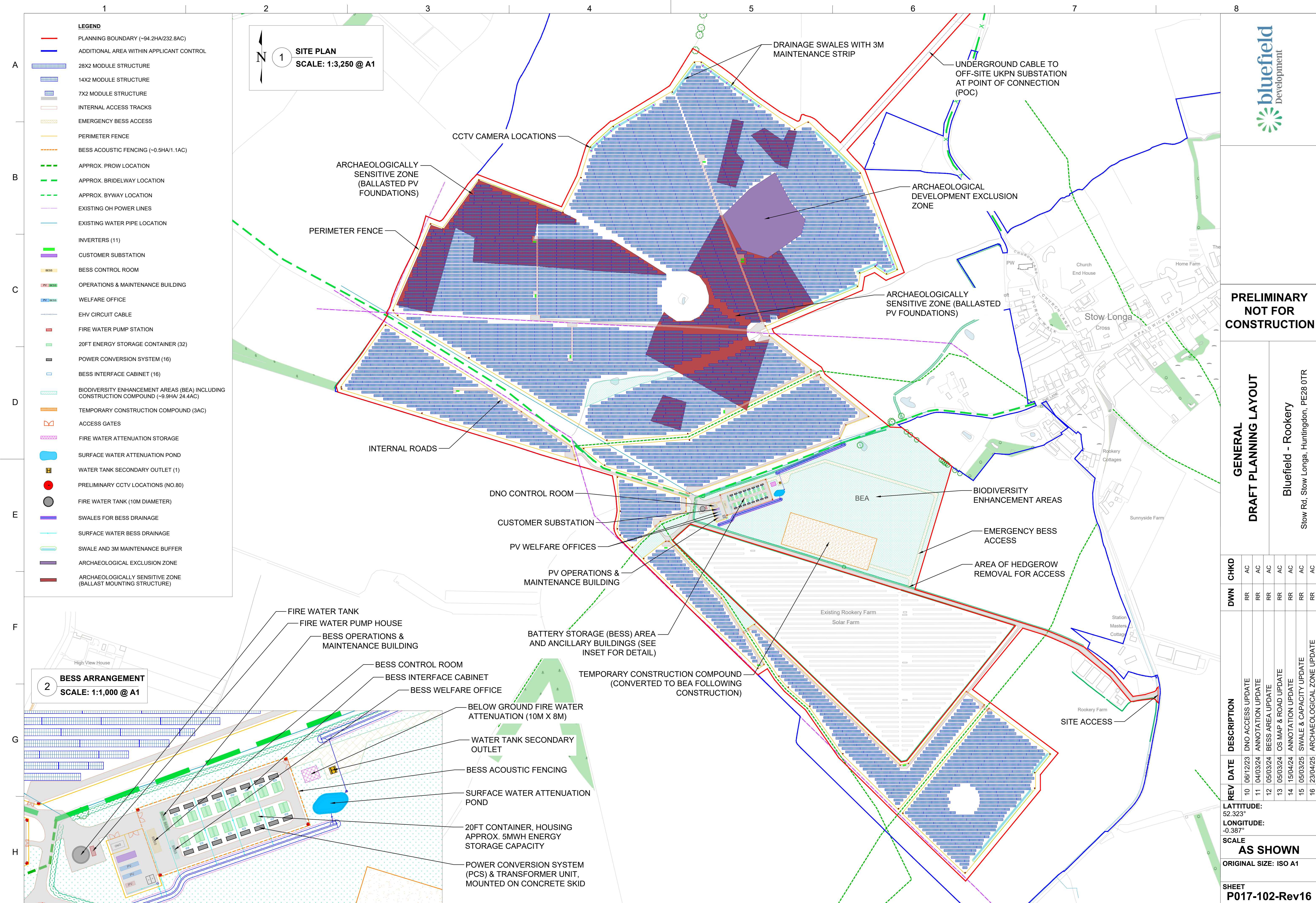
- for operation and maintenance use only

Proposed UKPN Substation

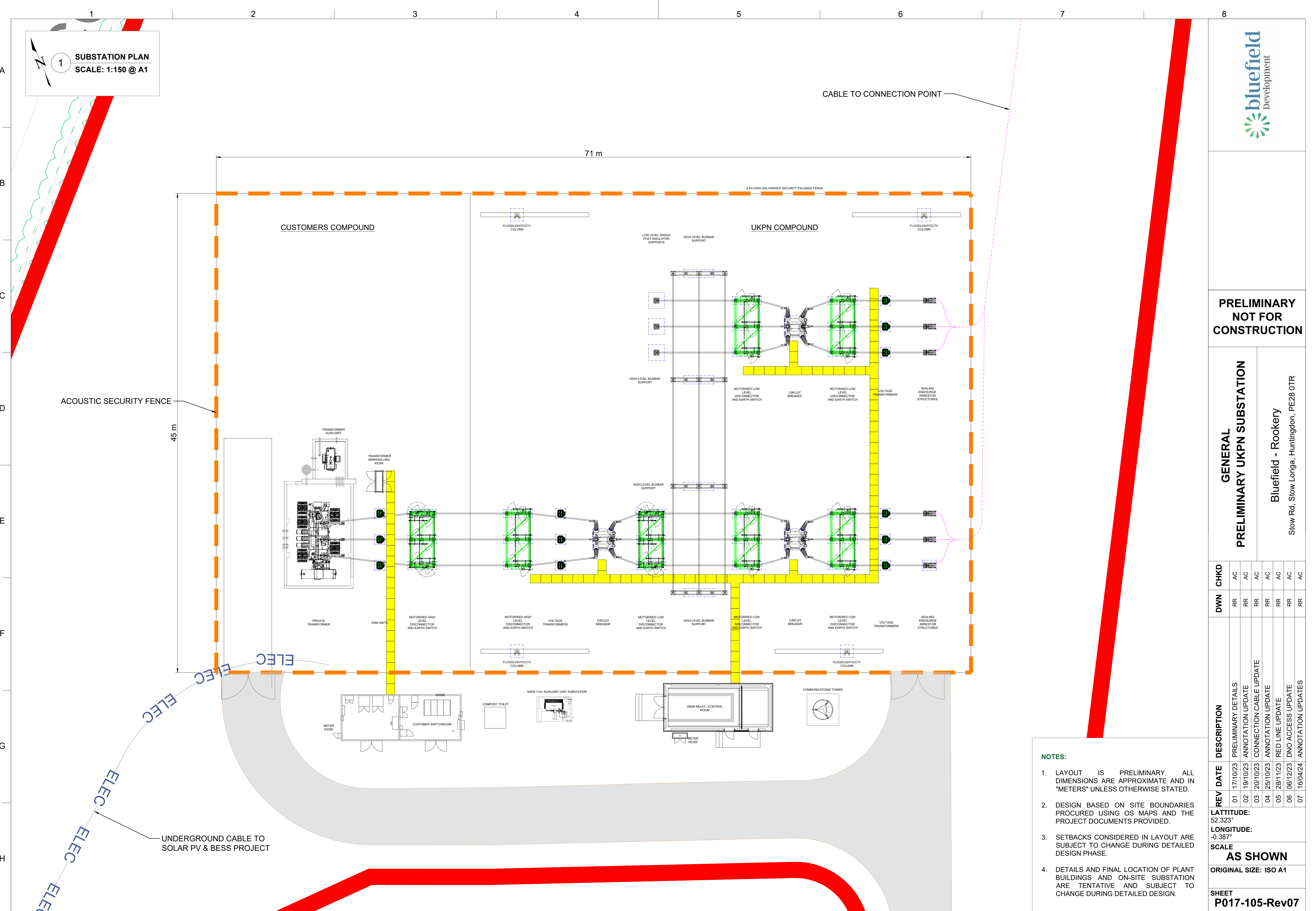
Proposed BESS Compound

Proposed PV Solar Panels
- © Pegasus Planning Group Limited. © Crown copyright and database rights OS 100042083. Promap. Licence number 100020449. EnmapSite Licence number 0100031673. Terms & Conditions @ pegasusgroup.co.uk
- NOTE: For full details and specification refer to Site-wide Planting Plan P23-0781\_EN\_001, and BESS Planting Plan P23-0781\_EN\_003  
Refer to Non-Intrusive Unexploded Ordnance Survey Report prepared by MACC International prior to commencement of works; UXO watching brief to be undertaken in support of any excavations.
- REVISIONS:  
28/05/25 – Rev J: Archae areas added to key  
21/05/25 – Rev H: Trees removed from OH powerline easement  
24/01/25 G: Spelling amended  
22/01/25 F: Minor amends to annotation  
10/01/25 – E: Graphic amends as per clients comments to match with Rev C  
26/11/24 – D: Updated proposals according to landscape officer comments  
01/05/24 – C: Updated planting proposals surrounding substation  
05/04/24 – B: Updates following client comments  
25/03/24 – A: Updated Layout; graphics revised following client comments  
24/01/24 – First Issue
- PLANNING
- Rookery Farm, Stow Road, Stow Longa, Huntingdon, PE28 OTR – Site-wide Masterplan
- PEGASUS GROUP
- bluefield development
- | PEGASUSGROUP.CO.UK | TEAM/DRAWN BY: VK | APPROVED BY: SL | DATE: 28/05/2025 | SCALE: 1:2500@AO | DRWG: P23-0781\_EN\_002J | CLIENT: Bluefield Renewable Developments Ltd |









PRELIMINARY  
NOT FOR  
CONSTRUCTION

GENERAL  
PRELIMINARY UKPN SUBSTATION  
Bluefield - Rookery  
Stow Rd, Stow Longa, Huntingdon, PE28 0TR

REV	DATE	DESCRIPTION	DWN	CHKD
01	17/10/23	PRELIMINARY DETAILS	RR	AC
02	19/10/23	ANNOTATION UPDATE	RR	AC
03	20/10/23	CONNECTION CABLE UPDATE	RR	AC
04	25/10/23	ANNOTATION UPDATE	RR	AC
05	28/11/23	RED LINE UPDATE	RR	AC
06	06/12/23	DNO ACCESS UPDATE	RR	AC
07	16/04/24	ANNOTATION UPDATES	RR	AC

LATTITUDE:  
52.323°  
LONGITUDE:  
-0.387°  
SCALE  
AS SHOWN  
ORIGINAL SIZE: ISO A1  
SHEET  
P017-105-Rev07

- NOTES:
- LAYOUT IS PRELIMINARY. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE AND IN "METERS" UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED.
  - DESIGN BASED ON SITE BOUNDARIES PROCURED USING OS MAPS AND THE PROJECT DOCUMENTS PROVIDED.
  - SETBACKS CONSIDERED IN LAYOUT ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE DURING DETAILED DESIGN PHASE.
  - DETAILS AND FINAL LOCATION OF PLANT BUILDINGS AND ON-SITE SUBSTATION ARE TENTATIVE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE DURING DETAILED DESIGN.