

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 20 January 2025

Case No: 23/01507/FUL

Proposal: Erection of a Solar Photovoltaic Farm with associated substations and other supporting infrastructure including battery storage, inverters and transformers, fencing, CCTV, landscaping and installation of underground high-voltage cable within public highway

Location: Land South of Abbotsley Country Homes
Drewels Lane Abbotsley

Applicant: Mr S Dix – Low Carbon

Grid Ref: 520359 (E) 256354 (N)

Date of Registration: 5th Dec 2023

Parish: St Neots

RECOMMENDATION –

Delegated powers to APPROVE subject to conditions.

This application is referred to the Development Management Committee (DMC) because Abbotsley Parish Council have objected contrary to the Officer recommendation of approval.

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

- 1.1 The application site refers to the Land at Eaton Ford, St Neots, Cambridgeshire. The Site is approx. 75.7ha in size, with the main area where the solar farm would be sited accounting for 61 ha. The site occupies approximately 3 field parcels. The Site is situated directly south of Abbotsley Golf and Country Club and wraps around the southernmost part of the former Abbotsley Golf Hotel and Course together with the Abbotsley Country Homes community to the north, whilst to the east, south and west are open agricultural fields.
- 1.2 The Site is bordered to the west by Potton Road, which leads towards the B1046 and A428. The southern boundary is defined by Drewels Lane which leads directly from Potton Road from the west. The nearest settlements are Abbotsley Village 1.4km west and St Neots approx. 2km to the southeast of the site. Located

approximately 650m to the north of the site is Caldecott Manor Farm, an existing small scale solar farm.

- 1.3 There is one listed building located near the site, this being Hardwicke Farmhouse which is Grade II listed and is located 150m to the north of the site adjacent to a number of other buildings within its curtilage. The site is not within a Conservation Area, the closest is the Abbotsley Conservation Area some 1.2km to the east of the site and separated by a copse and agricultural fields.
- 1.4 There is also the St Neots Conservation Area approximately 2.5km to the west separated by fields and industrial development.
- 1.5 The intention would be to utilise the existing private access off Potton Road and create a new access point into the field. Which would serve both during the construction period and operational period of the scheme. The proposed new access into the application site, and the use of the existing private road, has been agreed with the owner of the road.
- 1.6 The Site itself has a flat topography throughout. The west boundary with Potton Road is comprised of sporadic tree and tall hedgerows. The southern boundary with Drewels Lane is comprised of low hedge planting and bordering drainage ditch. The fields themselves are used for arable agriculture and are classified as being within Flood Zone 1, which demonstrates the land is at the lowest risk of flooding.
- 1.7 Public footpath 1/10 crosses the site in a north-south direction from the golf course, connecting to Drewels Lane in the south, whilst public footpath 1/5 runs alongside the northern boundary and bridleway 1/1 runs along the western boundary of the site.
- 1.8 The application seeks planning permission for the construction of a solar farm and cable route with a capacity of approximately 49.9MW, for a temporary period of 40 years from the date of the first exportation of electricity from the site.
- 1.9 The proposed development consists of solar PV panels placed on metal arrays arranged in rows across the site in an east/west orientation to ensure the panels themselves face south at an angle of 29.5 degrees to maximise efficiency. The maximum height of the panels will be 3m. The arrays are spaced to avoid any shadowing effect from one panel to another with topography dictating exact row spacing that can range between 3.5-9m.
- 1.10 Plant and other equipment to support the generation of electricity would be located around the site, adjacent to internal tracks to ensure access can be achieved for maintenance purposes. The tracks would have a width of 3.5m and be constructed with crushed aggregate. The supporting equipment includes 21

inverters, 6MW of battery storage, 1 customer switchgear, a DNO substation and the cable route (although this will be underground).

- 1.11 The connection to the grid goes via a cable. The cable route extends north along Potton Road towards Eaton Ford and the connection point is proposed at the Little Barford power station, which is within the administrative boundary of Bedford Borough.

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 Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy EN-1 (2023 – in force Jan 2024)
- 2.4 National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN3) (2023 – in force Jan 2024)
- 2.5 Officer note – National Policy Statements: those relevant to this application are set out in paras 2.3 and 2.4 and are primarily produced to support the National Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) regime. However, both publications identify that they may be material planning considerations 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 that they are specifically produced to support; officers consider, that in this instance, the adopted local plan policies should take primacy.
- 2.6 For full details visit the government website [National Guidance](#).
- 2.7 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

3. LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES

- 3.1 Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)
- LP1 Amount of Development

- LP2 Strategy for Development
- LP3 Green Infrastructure
- LP4 Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
- LP5 Flood risk
- LP10 The Countryside
- LP11 Design Context
- LP12 Design Implementation
- LP14 Amenity
- LP15 Surface Water
- LP16 Sustainable Travel
- LP17 Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
- LP19 Rural Economy
- LP29 Health Impact Assessment
- LP30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- LP31 Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
- LP34 Heritage Assets and their Settings
- LP35 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
- LP36 Air Quality
- LP37 Ground Contamination and Groundwater Pollution

3.2 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)

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

4. PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 CF/23/70026/SCRE - Screening opinion in respect of a Solar Photovoltaic Farm with associated substations and other supporting infrastructure including inverters and transformers, fencing, CCTV and landscaping screening. Opinion Adopted 30th June 2023 and conclusion – EIA not required.

5. CONSULTATIONS – until Dec 2024

- 5.1 Abbotsley Parish Council (copy attached) – Refuse the application on the following grounds:
- The proposal would result in the loss of valuable agricultural land
 - The proposal's impact on the countryside
 - The proposal would have negative effects on wildlife
 - The PC is concerned about the cumulative impact of solar farms in this area, this application being one of them
 - The proposal would result in loss of countryside
 - Other lower grade land could be used for this purpose.

- 5.2 St Neots Town Council (copy attached) – Approve subject to consultee comments being addressed by the applicant – St Neots Town Council supports the generation of low carbon electricity locally.
- 5.3 CCC Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) – No objection in principle and conditions are recommended requiring the submission of the full detailed design of the drainage scheme, requiring details for its long term maintenance and requiring details of how surface water runoff will be managed during construction.
- 5.4 CCC Definitive Maps Team – No objection. Conditions have been recommended on the following, details of a PRow scheme to include construction details, maintenance, confirmation of surfacing, temporary fencing and a dilapidation survey of the PRow No.5 and No.10 that will form part of the final details of the access.
- 5.5 CCC Historic Environment Team – No objections to development progressing in the location but recommend that the following be secured by planning conditions – submission of a further WSI to implement a programme of archaeological works and the submission of an Archaeological Management Plan.
- 5.6 CCC Local Highway Authority (LHA) - No objections. Recommend conditions restricting the provision of fences and gates, requiring provision and retention of visibility splays, that the width, depth, material, and form of accesses and their construction accords with specific requirements and County specification, that internal parking and manoeuvring areas are retained, that details of any temporary construction facilities to be submitted and that a Construction Traffic Management Plan is submitted.
- 5.7 HDC Landscape Officer – Following the discussion and submission of revised plan Ref: LV-6 Rev C – recommends determination as all previous concerns have been addressed.
- 5.8 HDC Conservation Officer – Given the likely minor impact of the solar farm to the significance of Hardwick Farmhouse, no objections to the scheme on heritage grounds.
- 5.9 HDC Environmental Health Officer (EHO) – No objection in principle subject to the imposition of a number of planning conditions relating to Construction Noise and the submission of a CEMP.
- 5.10 HDC Tree Officer – No objection in principle subject to a conditions relating to the submission of a Tree Protection Plan and a schedule of monitoring and reporting of the related protection areas.
- 5.11 Bedford Borough Council – Make a number of observations and comments. Recommend planning conditions relating to CEMP and East West Rail.
- 5.12 Natural England – Raise no objection as it is considered that the proposed development will not have a significant impact on any statutorily protected nature conservation sites or landscapes.
- 5.13 British Horse Society (BHS) – Raise concerns and objection to the impact of the solar farm on the Public Bridleway 1/1. Suggestions are

made to improve and enhance the public access to the countryside in a number of locations in the area.

- 5.14 Active Travel England – No comment to make
- 5.15 Cadent Gas – No objection in principle to the development subject to adherence to guidance on operating and working within safeguarded Cadent Gas areas.
- 5.16 Wildlife Trust – No objection in principle subject to a number of planning conditions relating to BNG, Ecological Management and Maintenance Plans and skylark mitigation.
- 5.17 CPRE The countryside charity – Objection. The proposed development will involve the loss of best and most versatile land. At least 81% of the site is Grade 3a and above. The NPPF guides development away from the best and most versatile area and LPA's are advised to use poorer, over high quality agricultural land.
- 5.18 Cambridgeshire Constabulary - No objection in principle and the area is considered to be an area of medium risk of crime. There are a number of recommendations provided including details on fencing, CCTV and other protection measures.
- 5.19 National Highways - No objection to the proposed development.
- 5.20 UK Power Networks – No comments to make. Note that power cables run overhead in close proximity.
- 5.21 East West Rail Ltd – Recommend no objection subject to an agreed condition in relation to crossing points of the safeguarded land.

6. REPRESENTATIONS

- 6.1 No public representations have been received at the time of writing this report.

7. ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:
- Principle of Development
 - Landscape and Countryside Character
 - Highway and Transport Impacts, including Public Rights of Way and East West Rail safeguarding.
 - Ecology and Biodiversity
 - Drainage and Flood Risk
 - Heritage Impacts
 - Impacts to Neighbouring Amenity
 - Land Contamination and Air Quality
 - Contamination Risks and Pollution
 - 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 the built-up area and is therefore considered to be within the countryside for planning purposes. 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.
- 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 As stated above, 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. In terms of the countryside location, and notwithstanding further assessment in respect of the use of agricultural land, it is therefore considered there is an in-principle policy support for the proposal in this 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 NPPF 2024 at para. 161 sets out that “The planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050...” which updates previous wording to “support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate”. Para 163 of the NPPF 2024 is a new paragraph and states that “the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change should also be considered in preparing and assessing planning applications, taking into account the full range of potential climate change impacts”. The guidance continues (para. 168) that LPAs should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, that they should give significant weight to the benefits associated and the contribution to a net zero future, and recognise that small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.
- 7.9 The British Energy Security Strategy states that the government expects a five-fold increase in combined ground and rooftop solar deployment by 2035. The government expects solar, together with wind, to be the predominant source of energy generation by 2050.

- 7.10 The delivery of this proposed scheme would generate up to 49.5MW and would contribute towards government targets for renewable energy and Huntingdonshire's Climate Strategy.
- 7.11 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 constructed and connected to the grid by Autumn 2026. The proposal will therefore make a significant and early contribution towards the delivery of additional solar generated electricity nationally.
- 7.12 With respect to use, the application site currently comprises approximately 75.5ha of agricultural land. Policy LP10, (reflecting para 187b of the NPPF), seeks to protect best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land, classified as Grades 1, 2 and 3a from irreversible development.
- 7.13 Natural England have raised no objections to the proposal, and consider that, subject to conditions requiring details of decommissioning and safeguarding of the land quality, there would be no loss of BMV land.
- 7.14 2 objections have been received from Abbotsley Parish Council and CPRE on the grounds that the land is fertile, good quality agricultural land that should be retained for food production.
- 7.15 This is relevant as the National Planning Policy Framework defines BMV land as ALC Grade 1-3a [inclusive] only. In the case of this Site, the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Grade was not known, and it was necessary to determine this through examination.
- 7.16 The submitted ALC Report confirms that "Much of the Site is classified as subgrade 3a (80%) and a mixture of Subgrade 3b (19%) and Grade 2 (1%), so would fall within the category of BMV Land.
- 7.17 While the quality of land at the Site appears important in a national context, it is not at local level as subgrade 3a is common in Cambridgeshire. In addition, sub-grade 3a constitutes some of the least fertile land in the county, where Grade 1 and Grade 2 land are predominant. It is likely that some development will necessarily need to occur on BMV land in the region.
- 7.18 The proposed location of the development is therefore consistent with the key policy objective, in that it represents an efficient use of some of the poorer, less versatile, and less resilient land in the region.
- 7.19 The proposed development will only result in the temporary cessation of arable production on 9% of the farm's land but agricultural production can continue in the form of grazing. The proposed development also has the potential to deliver significant wider environmental benefits, such as improvements to soil structure and health, carbon sequestration and habitat and biodiversity enhancements.
- 7.20 The leasing of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes is recognised as an important form of income diversification for the farm business which will support the agricultural activities on the rest of the farm thereby helping to mitigate the risks associated with volatile

commodity prices, weather patterns and the pressures associated with the changes to the EU and UK agricultural support regime.”

- 7.21 The use of Grade 3b land for development is supported under policy LP10, as it is not BMV land. Policy LP10 is clear that development should seek to avoid irreversible loss of BMV land. The development that covers this land includes swales, an access track, fencing, solar panels and two inverter/transformer cabins. Of these elements and having regard to a potential ‘worst-case’ scenario, the access track and the inverter/transformer cabins would require some hardstanding and are likely to be more permanent fixtures, though the access track is of limited depth and officers do consider it highly likely this could be removed without any notable impact. The swales, fencing and solar panels are either relatively straightforward earthworks or temporary ground mounted structures that could be readily removed from the site once their use has ceased.
- 7.22 The remaining elements identified, the access track and inverter/transformer cabin hardstanding, would be minor in their scale at approximately 0.1ha, limited to the periphery of the field. A condition is recommended in accordance with LP35 that, prior to decommissioning, a plan is submitted to the LPA that sets out the approach for removal of the equipment, and that seeks to revert the land to its former status in accordance with that agreed plan as well as a condition will also be required that imposes a temporary time limit on the development. Subject to those conditions and the wholly minimal area of land where development is unlikely to be reversed, it is considered there would not be any permanent material loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. The development is therefore considered not to represent the irreversible permanent loss of BMV land.
- 7.23 On the whole, therefore, and subject to the conditions identified above, it is considered the principle of the development is acceptable, in terms of use and location, and in accordance with policies LP10 and LP35.

Landscape and Countryside Character

- 7.24 The Council’s Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document 2022 (LTSPD) notes that this site sits within the South East Claylands Landscape Character Area.
- 7.25 Much of the topography has been shaped by water with the River Great Ouse creating a wide shallow valley to the north and west of the area. Tributary streams flow from higher land to the south west to the Great Ouse forming a gently undulating landscape in the central part of the character area.
- 7.26 The South East Claylands include large areas of high quality landscape with a varied and typically gently undulating landform, established hedgerows and woodland and the historic settlement patterns which are reflected through the route of the Roman Ermine Street, medieval green lanes and abandoned settlements and field patterns arising from 18th and 19th century enclosures.
- 7.27 In respect to this application, the LTSPD particularly notes that all new development proposals should promote increased planting and soft landscaping around the edges of the towns to screen visually intrusive

development (particularly through planting of tree and woodland belts), avoid ribbon development to conserve the form of historic villages, ensure preservation and interpretation of historic features remaining within the landscape and protect tall hedgerows and hedgerow trees as these are a distinctive feature of the central area.

- 7.28 Towards the south of the area, where the application site is located, woodland cover increases. Heavy clay soils predominate in the area supporting cereal crops and arable farming. Villages are sparse and the connecting network of lanes are often narrow. Higher hedges with numerous trees are wider found, particularly in the southern part of the area. The relative lack of settlement in the area combined with the mature vegetation creates an intimate and tranquil feel to the landscape. In those parts more affected by agricultural change and amalgamated fields, the scale of the landscape becomes larger and this sense is lost.
- 7.29 The application site sits within a plateau, the land rising slightly to the eastern edge of the solar array and reaching a peak on the edge of the site, and then continuing as a plateau to the east.
- 7.30 The development proposes the solar panels away from the edge of the site, with vegetated landscaping proposed along the edges in the form of high hedgerows, with interspersed clusters of trees along the boundaries, including stopping up existing gaps within existing hedgerows.
- 7.31 The application has been accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which has concluded that any effects on landscape character and visual amenity would be extremely contained.
- 7.32 The LVIA has also been accompanied by viewpoints and assessment of the scale of change that would arise in the context of this development at various points. In general, it has concluded large scale effects would arise within the site and immediately adjacent, but that any effects beyond the site perimeter, would be limited by surrounding mature vegetation to a localised area surrounding the site. As a result, any effects on landscape character and visual amenity would be extremely contained.
- 7.33 The Landscape Officer has reviewed the application, the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and its addendum, and the proposed planting strategy plan.
- 7.34 While the Landscape Officer considers the sensitivity of the landscape within this area to be low, with localised impact on the area in terms of the sensitive receptors of the local dwellings and footpaths, they have agreed in principle with the conclusions that the landscape has the capacity to accommodate the solar array at this scale without material harm. They raise no objections to the proposed development, and recommend a condition is imposed that requires a full planting scheme to be provided.
- 7.35 Officers have considered the details submitted from all parties in the context of the adopted LTSPD. It is considered that the landscape does have the ability to accept the development, and that in terms of principle landscape matters its impact can be mitigated. The position within a flat

plateau is considered to substantially limit views of the site from beyond ridgelines at substantial distance.

- 7.36 Officers note the viewpoints submitted as part of the LVIA and which were subject to discussion with the Landscape Officer in terms of location. Viewpoints that have been included in the applicant's LVIA are taken from positions that are considered sufficient to provide an understanding of the visual impact at these viewpoints and the locality.
- 7.37 Officers welcome the comments in respect of the planting scheme, in that it will offer screening to the development. It is not considered that total screening of the development would be reasonable, nor that it is a realistic or appropriate goal of a planting scheme for a development of this nature and scale. Such a planting scheme should aim to mitigate for the impacts of the solar farm by offering selective screening where the impacts are harmful such that it is warranted, but in general officers consider the aim of this planting proposal should be to introduce planting in a manner that otherwise breaks up continuous views of the development.
- 7.38 The use of high hedgerows would provide significant screening from views close to the site, where the highest magnitude of change is considered likely to be experienced. In longer views, the use of clustered tree planting, using the trees indicated within the submitted mixes, are considered likely to have a substantial impact in breaking up views of the solar panels and reflect the landscape character identified with the LTSPD. This will give the western boundary planting a greater opportunity to extend beyond the overall height of the solar panels, having regard to topographical changes, and while it is not considered likely to be able to achieve that across the entirety of all views, officers consider the most impacted views from the west will be afforded a sufficient level of mitigation, albeit that this level of mitigation will not provide immediate screening.
- 7.39 Overall, in terms of impacts on public views, officers consider those at the immediate edges of the site, and in close proximity are likely to experience a high level of change. Most of these would be from roads, lanes or Public Rights of Way and therefore views of the proposed development would be either at speed or would only form a small part of the overall experience of the landscape. The boundary planting is considered sufficient to mitigate for views from non-motorised users. At longer distances, particularly along the southern fields where it is considered views are more readily available from Drewels Lane and Potton Road, and the right of way network adjacent, officers consider that the distance of the view, coupled with the proposed planting scheme, will break up the views of solar panels sufficiently to limit their visual dominance in the landscape.
- 7.40 On the whole, and subject to conditions requiring a fully detailed planting scheme to be submitted, officers consider the proposal has demonstrated the proposed development would not result in a materially harmful impact to the landscape as a resource and could suitably integrate itself into the topography and character. The proposal would therefore accord with policies LP10, LP11, LP12 and LP35 in this regard.

Highway and Transport Impacts, including PRow and East West Rail Safeguarding

- 7.41 The application Site is located south of the B1046, a busy, national speed limit road that eventually adjoins the A428 to the east and provides connection to St Neots. The application proposes access from Potton Road, making use of existing access point found on Potton Road, which currently serves the golf club and residential uses on the Lane, it will be used for both construction and maintenance.
- 7.42 The application has been accompanied by a draft construction traffic management plan (CTMP), contained within the Transport Assessment. It estimates approximately 1,164 construction deliveries across the build stage, with approximately 20 additional movements from contractors parking at the site on a daily basis. Once operational, the development is expected to require approximately 50 maintenance visits over the course of a year, one every week. As the site would be monitored offsite, it is unlikely there would be any significant additional vehicle movements once the development is operational.
- 7.43 The Local Highway Authority have reviewed the submitted information and raised no objections in principle, subject to conditions relating to the construction and maintenance of the access, and appropriate control of construction traffic.
- 7.44 On the whole, and subject to conditions, the development is therefore considered not to represent an adverse impact to highway safety or the capacity of the transport network and would therefore accord with policies LP16 and LP17.
- 7.45 The County Rights of Way Team have raised no objection to the proposal as amended, subject to a condition requiring precise details of the alignment and material, and conditions requiring offsets from PROWs for fencing and planting.
- 7.46 They comment that “Public Footpath No. 5, Abbotsley forms the access to the site. The applicant has confirmed that no change of surface is proposed to Public Footpath No.5, Abbotsley.
- 7.47 A proposed maintenance track crosses Public Footpath No. 10, Abbotsley. Officers have reviewed the further details provided regarding the proposed changes to the surface of the public footpath. Due to the limited extent of the proposed change of surface to the public footpath, and the fact that it remains unmetalled, we do not require completion of the authorisation form. The Definitive Map team’s previous objection regarding the change of surface proposal is withdrawn, subject to the inclusion of a planning condition.”
- 7.48 “The Applicant is happy to accept a condition requiring such temporary fencing and asked where this should be located. We require such fencing to be located either side of Public Footpath No. 10, Abbotsley and to the north of the proposed native hedgerows that lie to the south of Public Footpath No. 5, Abbotsley.
- 7.49 We also note the Applicant is agreeable to our previously requested conditions regarding fencing and planting offsets.”

- 7.50 The permissive path is proposed on a temporary basis, to run concurrent with the operation of the solar farm itself. While it would have been preferential for the enhancement to become permanent officers consider this to be an acceptable arrangement as the improvement will remain in place for a proportionate time to the impact created by the development.
- 7.51 The BHS has commented that should this application be successful, there is an excellent opportunity to enhance the local public rights of way network by creating a peripheral public right of way of at least bridleway standard but preferably a restricted byway standard. This would meet the Cambs ROWIP requirements and should be at least a minimum requirement for any approval. The trigger date for providing the access should be before commissioning of the site is complete.
- 7.52 Officers have taken this suggestion into consideration and conclude that given the sufficient public access in this area already and the improvements that the applicant has already agreed with CCC PRoW Officers – the request for an additional new periphery Byway, is excessive and has not been substantiated by CCC PRoW team.
- 7.53 As no formal PROWs would be lost through the proposal, and the development would result in a temporary, albeit long-term, improvement to the PROW network, officers consider that, subject to conditions identified, the proposal would accord with policy LP16.
- 7.54 As of November 2024 – the Government issued a directive that all proposals which may have a significant impact on any safeguarded land to accommodate the proposed East West Rail, will be formally consulted on. The application Site falls within the safeguarded land. East West Rail have responded that the solar array area is of no impact but would like further clarification on the proposed line of the cable and connection to the BESS. The applicant has consulted directly with East West Rail. Following discussions, they have now satisfied EWR that safeguarded land will not be compromised, a planning condition has been agreed that will be attached to any planning approval, to agree a Construction Method statement.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- 7.55 The application has been accompanied by Ecological Reports, a Landscape and Biodiversity Management Plan and detailed calculations of Biodiversity Net Gain. These set out the potential areas of ecological value within the site and its surroundings that may be of ecological significance and considers the potential mitigation and enhancement proposals to ensure the development does not result in adverse impacts to ecology and biodiversity.
- 7.56 The Wildlife Trust has reviewed these details and following amendments and clarification, raise no objection. They have noted the reports follow best practice and consider these have established an accurate representation of baseline of the site. They note that the submitted Net Gain Calculations appear to be optimistic in respect of the proposed wildflower grassland, but that even if elements were considered to provide a low overall increase in biodiversity units the development would still deliver a significant increase in habitat units and therefore a high level of net gain.

- 7.57 Wildlife Trust Officers have reviewed the additional information submitted by the application including revised Landscape Strategy Plan (LV6 Rev. B) & Biodiversity Metric Spreadsheet (sent separately to the WT), and the updated Ecological appraisal report and BNG report. WLT Officers responded that “The additions and changes made to all these documents fully address the issues we raised in our original response and provide a suitable basis for the determination of the application.” They suggest planning condition mitigation/recommendations for species such as newts and skylarks as contained in the Ecological Report by Cherryfield Ecology, submitted on 25th May 2024
- 7.58 On the whole, therefore, and subject to conditions identified above, as well as a condition requiring a finalised landscape management plan, Officers consider the proposal would protect existing ecological features and achieve measurable enhancement in biodiversity terms. It is therefore considered to accord with policies LP30 and LP31.

Drainage and Flood Risk

- 7.59 The application site is located within Flood Zone 1, at the lowest risk of flooding.
- 7.60 No objections have been received from the LLFA as the statutory consultee for surface water. They have recommended standard conditions seeking the fully detailed design should be submitted if the application is approved, details of its long term management and details of how surface water will be managed during the construction process. Similarly, no objections have been received from the Environment Agency in respect of flood risk from river sources, subject to securing the mitigation in the submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA).
- 7.61 The application proposes to manage surface flows predominantly through a mix permeable paving, swales and filter strips. This would both control the rate of discharge and provide water quality treatment. The LLFA have confirmed this would restrict rates of discharge to below greenfield levels. They state that the submitted documentation shows that the development can be managed through the use of swales, filter drains, a detention basin and restricting the waters flows to 15.8l/s with a 75mm orifice so as not to increase the risk of a blockage.
- 7.62 While the solar panels themselves are not permeable, the development does not create substantial levels of hardstanding compared to, for example, a residential development. Water would reach the ground, and there would be some level of infiltration drainage naturally occurring, though as this is likely to be more focused into runs, the profile of how water runs along the ground is likely to change.
- 7.63 The proposed swales and filter strips would serve to slow water flow and create attenuation features that would hold the water while it discharges, and officers consider there is plenty of available land that can accommodate these features. While the final length and position of swales will fall to detailed design stage, this significant increase above baseline is considered sufficient to be satisfied there is adequate space to accommodate the required drainage measures.
- 7.64 Officers note the relevant test in this instance would be that the situation is not materially worse than present. While the fully detailed design

would be submitted at a later stage, the level of restriction indicated and the proposed mitigation measures that have been suitably demonstrated to be achievable are sufficient for officers to consider an acceptable drainage arrangement would be readily achievable.

- 7.65 In terms of flooding from river sources, the whole site is located in Flood Zone 1, at the lowest risk of flooding. As a solar farm, the development is classified as “Essential Infrastructure” in accordance with Annex 3 of the NPPF. As the development is located outside the flood zones there is no impact to the existing functional flood plain through a reduction in that area, and the development has demonstrated it can adequately accommodate the storage and release of surface water into the brook to less than greenfield rates such that there would be no material impact beyond current runoff rates, in real terms this offers a betterment to the current situation.
- 7.66 Subject to conditions, therefore, officers consider the proposal would not give rise to any adverse impacts to drainage through surface water or river sources. The proposal would therefore accord with policies LP5 and LP15.

Heritage Impacts

- 7.67 Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require that special regard is had to the desirability of preserving particular features of Listed Buildings and Conservations Areas and great weight should be afforded to the assets conservation. 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.
- 7.68 HDC’s Conservation Officer has not made any comment on the grounds of harm to heritage assets, due to the lack of any designated heritage assets in close proximity, such that the proposal is not considered to be within the setting that contributes to their significance or harm.
- 7.69 The County Historic Environment Team (CHET) have also raised no objections and consider that the development would not impact any archaeological deposits so recommend approval subject to the imposition of a number of planning conditions.
- 7.70 In accordance with policy LP34 and the relevant NPPF legislation, great weight should be afforded the protection of heritage assets. Any harm should be considered in accordance with para 215 of the NPPF, and a development that gives rise to harm will need to be balanced against any public benefits of the proposal.
- 7.71 CHET have raised no objections, and do not consider the proposal would result in any material harm. Officers consider that weight should be afforded to these consultees given their expertise.
- 7.72 The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with policy LP34 and the relevant provisions of the NPPF in respect to impact to heritage assets.

Impacts to Neighbouring Amenity

- 7.73 While the site is distant from the majority of residential dwellings in the area, officers note a small number are in close proximity. The closest being the log cabin lodges, approximately 100m to the north of the solar array. The Golf club is approx. 200m from the nearest panels and the farm to the south is about 500m. The distances are considered sufficient to protect the amenity of surrounding occupants from overshadowing or overbearing impacts, notwithstanding that the solar panels and associated structures are not of such a height that they would be considered likely to give rise to harmful levels of overbearing or overshadowing. The landscaping strategy has been carefully considered and assessed, to take these amenities into account.
- 7.74 On the whole, and subject to the conditions identified, officers consider the proposal would accord with policy LP14.

Land Contamination and Air Quality

- 7.75 The Council's Environmental Health Officer has raised no objection on the basis of contamination risks or air pollution. Natural England have raised no concerns subject to conditions to ensure that there would be no ground contamination, and the LLFA have noted the proposed drainage mitigation measures are acceptable.
- 7.76 In terms of existing contamination, officers consider it likely that the active agricultural use of the site would have required some form of chemical use that could result in contamination, though it is not considered highly likely there would be any contaminants within the site. There are no notable brownfield uses within or surrounding the site that would give rise to concerns in terms of contamination, or any significant evidence of past uses that would indicate previous contaminative uses on or adjoining the site.
- 7.77 As a solar farm, the development's operational aspect would not give rise to emissions that would result in materially adverse impacts to air quality. While there would be some level of emissions during construction, the short length of the construction time (approx. 20 weeks) as such that it is considered these would be marginal, and not at a level that would be considered harmful.
- 7.78 While officers consider there is likely to be some chemical use as part of regular maintenance of the site, both in cleaning solar panels as needed and as part of biodiversity management to limit the possible impact of inappropriate plant species, the level of use is considered likely to be low, having regard to the amount of maintenance visits likely to be carried out throughout the lifetime of the development. It is noted that any consideration should be made against a likely starting point that some chemical use would form part of standard agricultural practice use of the site, albeit in a materially different context.
- 7.79 Overall, and particularly having regard to the mitigation that will form part of the drainage scheme, officers consider the proposed development is unlikely to lead to any materially harmful impact to water sources within and surrounding the site.

- 7.80 In respect to ground contamination, it is noted that no concerns have been raised by the Environmental Health Officer. The application has set out the aspects of the development that could 'potentially' give rise to ground contamination and the Construction Method statement will be agreed to control the appropriate form of storage, as well as actions in the event of a spill.
- 7.81 There are no other sources likely to result in ground contamination particularly arising as a result of the development, the development is considered sufficiently remediated through the drainage proposals, it is considered this is sufficient to limit the impact of any possible chemical use.
- 7.82 On the whole, the proposal is considered to accord with policies LP36 and LP37 in respect to ground and water pollution and air quality.

Health Impact Assessment

- 7.83 As confirmed in LP 29 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan – for large scale new developments the importance of creating an environment that facilitates safe, healthy and inclusive communities is paramount.
- 7.84 The submitted HIA confirms that the proposed development will enhance those parts of the bullet point criteria contained in LP 29 – including access to open countryside, crime reduction, air quality, noise and neighbourhood amenity, these are shown as already established and not will not be negatively diminished by the development.
- 7.85 There will be benefits in terms of accessibility to the countryside and improved connection of PRoW. The HIA also notes that disturbance to neighbour amenity is most likely to be experienced during the construction and decommissioning phases owing to increased traffic, but this will be short term. Crime and antisocial behaviour will be discouraged by the perimeter fencing and CCTV surveillance at entrances gates.
- 7.86 It is also noted that access to work and training opportunities will be enhanced during the construction phase for local employers and employees.
- 7.87 On the whole, the proposal is considered to accord with policy LP 29, in respect that it identifies the relevant positive and negative health impacts, demonstrates consideration of how such impacts may be enhanced or mitigated, and identifies what impact this consideration has had on the development proposal.

Other Matters

- 7.88 Although no comments have raised concerns that the proposal would lead to an increase in risk of crime, the Cambridgeshire Police have noted that solar farm installations themselves can be vulnerable to crime but have not made any comment that there is likely to be an increase in crime beyond the site itself. As set out previously, lighting and CCTV would be required as part of the development, and details of that will be secured by condition. The site would also require fencing, and the final details of that would be required by condition to ensure it meets

appropriate safety standards without adversely impacting character, PRow use, or undermining ecological corridors. This accords with the comments of the Police and officers consider this is sufficient to limit the threat of any crime that might arise, sufficient to ensure there would be no materially increased risk either to the site or its surroundings. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with policy LP14 in terms of risk of crime.

- 7.89 Abbotsley Parish Council comments received have objected on the basis that there is no assessment of alternative sites provided that demonstrates the development must be in this location and the impact of cumulative developments of solar provision. This is not a requirement of adopted policy, and regardless of any identification of alternative sites the application as submitted must still be assessed on its own merits. Assessments of alternative sites would normally be sought only where there were harms identified in order to demonstrate there were no other alternatives such that the location should outweigh those harms. In this instance no significant harm has been identified, there is no adopted policy requirement, and no other reason has been put forward as to why an assessment of alternative sites should be carried out. It is therefore not considered a necessary or reasonable requirement to seek further assessment of alternative sites in this instance.

8. Planning Balance and Conclusions

- 8.1 The application must be considered in accordance with the statutory tests in s.38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, namely, in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 8.2 Officers have reviewed the detail submitted, along with representations from Parish/Town Councils, and technical and non-technical consultee responses. It has been identified that the proposed development would accord with national and local policy, having regard to the controls that are available to the Local Planning Authority, particularly conditions as set out in the recommendation below. While it is noted that there will be some immediate impacts, particularly in relation to landscape and highways, these are not considered to be materially harmful in the context of the development as a whole, having regard to the timescales of such impacts throughout the lifetime of the development. In any event these limited impacts are considered to be significantly outweighed by the significant material benefits of renewable energy generation and biodiversity net gain that would arise from the development.
- 8.3 On balance and subject to appropriate conditions, it is considered the proposal accords with adopted national and local policy, and no material considerations have been identified that would indicate the application should otherwise be refused contrary to that policy.

9. RECOMMENDATION - APPROVAL subject to conditions relating to the following;

- 3-year time limit to implement
- Accordance with approved plans
- 40-year temporary permission

- Decommissioning plan to be submitted.
- PV Panels to be no higher than 3m (as shown on plans)
- Agricultural land and soil management plan to be submitted.
- Detail drainage scheme to be submitted.
- Securing the mitigation in the submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA)
- Long-term management and maintenance details of drainage scheme to be submitted.
- Management scheme for surface water discharge during construction to be submitted.
- Full details of hard and soft landscaping to be submitted, including offset details to PRow.
- Tree Protection Plan to be submitted.
- Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) to be submitted.
- Ecological Species mitigation to be submitted. (newts and skylarks)
- Archaeological Management Plan for the construction phase and a WSI.
- Details of CCTV locations and fields of view to be submitted.
- Details of lighting to be submitted.
- Public Rights of Way / Permissive Path details to be submitted.
- Construction Environment and Traffic Management Plan to be submitted. To include traffic routing plan and good practice construction environmental methods. (CEMP)
- Details of fencing/gates to be submitted.
- Access to be a minimum of 7.3m in for 17m in length.
- Access to be constructed to CCC Specification where they adjoin the adopted highway.
- Parking and manoeuvring space to be provided within the site for the duration of construction.
- Visibility splays to be provided and maintained.
- Access kerbs to be 15m radius
- No surface water to discharge onto the highway from the accesses.
- Access to be a metalled surface.
- Construction method statement for elements which cross East West Rail safeguarded land.

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 **Hannah Guy, Principal Development Management Officer**
 Hannah.guy@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Schedule of Planning Applications – 9th January 2024

No.	Reference	Development	SNTC Decision	Notes
[REDACTED]				
		Rear garden		
[REDACTED]				
S5	23/01507/FUL	Mr S Dix Low Carbon Solar Park 30 Ltd Land South Of Abbotsley Country Homes, Drewels Lane, Abbotsley Erection of a Solar Photovoltaic Farm with associated substations and other supporting infrastructure including battery storage, inverters and transformers, fencing, CCTV, landscaping and installation of underground high-voltage cable within public highway	Approved	Subject to consultee comments being addressed by the applicant. St Neots Town Council supports the generation of low carbon electricity locally.

Schedule of Planning Applications – 9th January 2024

No.	Reference	Development	SNTC Decision	Notes
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Chairperson

ABBOTSLEY PARISH COUNCIL



Development Control
Huntingdonshire District Council

19th November 2024



**23/01507/FUL – Erection of solar photovoltaic farm with associated substations and other supporting infrastructure including battery storage, inverters and transformers, fencing, CCTV, landscaping and installation of underground high-voltage cable within public highway - Further information submitted
Land south of Abbotsley Country Homes, Drewels Lane, Abbotsley.**

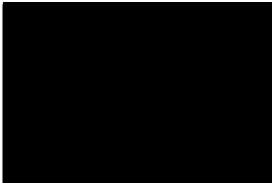
Abbotsley Parish Council considered this application at its meeting held 14th November 2024. All members of the Parish Council voted unanimously to recommend **refusal**.

The Parish Council stated that the views expressed on 15th December 2023 have not changed. For ease, the reasons for refusal are expressed again here:

- The proposal would result in the loss of valuable agricultural land.
- The proposal's impact on the countryside.
- The proposal would have negative effects on wildlife.
- The proposal would result in the loss of countryside.
- The Parish Council is concerned about the cumulative impact of the proposed solar farms in this area, this application being one of them.
- Other locations with lower grade land could be used for this purpose.

Councillors continue to be extremely concerned about the number of solar farms with planning approval and currently going through the planning system within this area. Abbotsley has the possibility of being surrounded by three solar farms rather than countryside. This proposal will be quite visible and Councillors are unhappy with the proposed negative visual impact that this would have.

Yours sincerely



Clerk to Abbotsley Parish Council

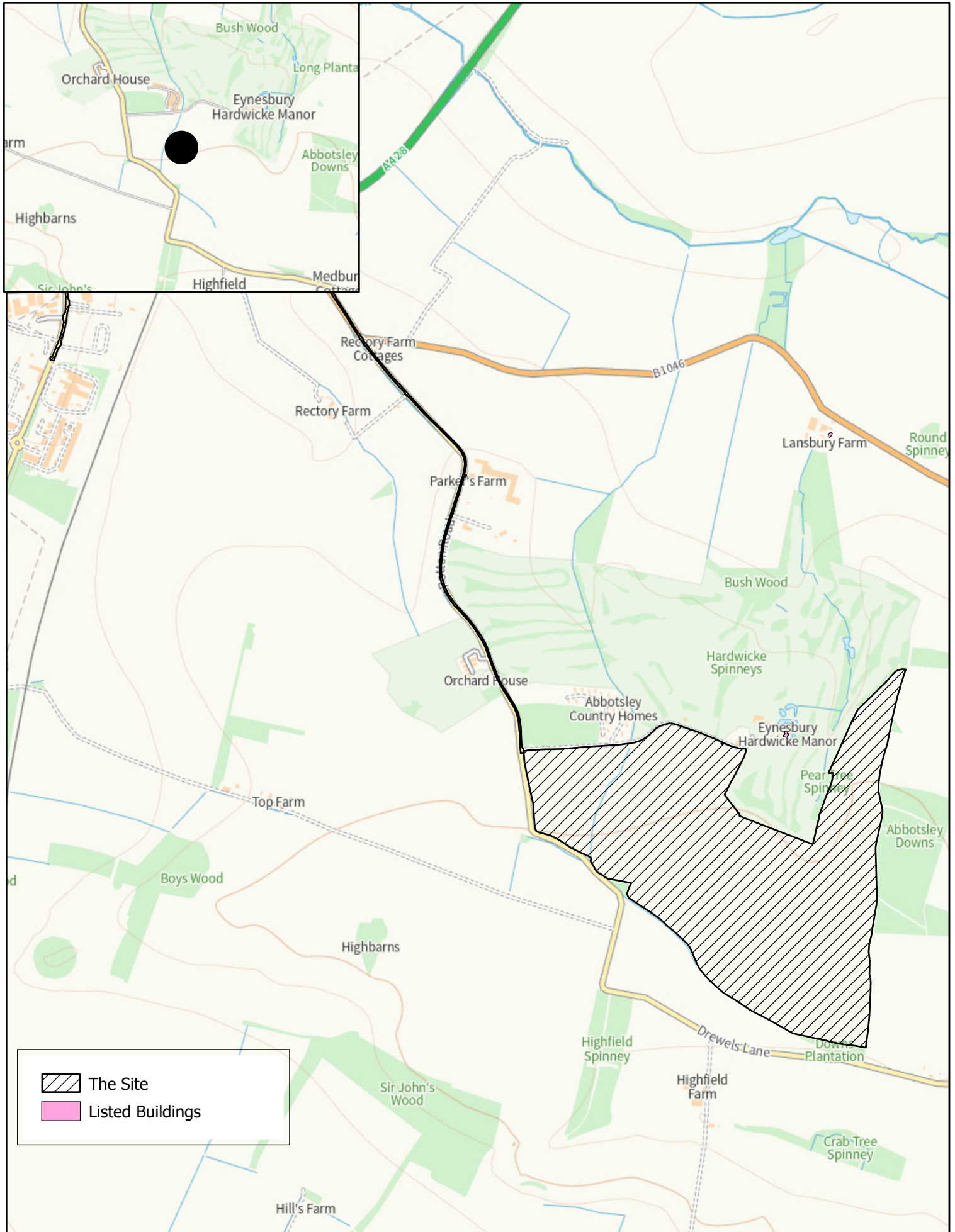
Development Management Committee

Application Ref: 23/01507/FUL



Scale = 1:15,655

Date Created: 08/01/2025





To Abbotseley Golf Hotel and
Abbotseley Country Homes

Potton Road
5.4m

2.4 x 31m visibility splay to junction

2.4 x 43m visibility splay

Private Road

Overhead power lines

Electricity pylon stays to be relocated



Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationary Office @ Crown Copyright Contract No. 100048330

A	Update site layout plan received	BL	DB	DB	29.06.23
REV		DR	CH	AP	DATE

PROJECT
PEAR TREE SOLAR FARM, ST NEOTS

CLIENT
LOW CARBON UK

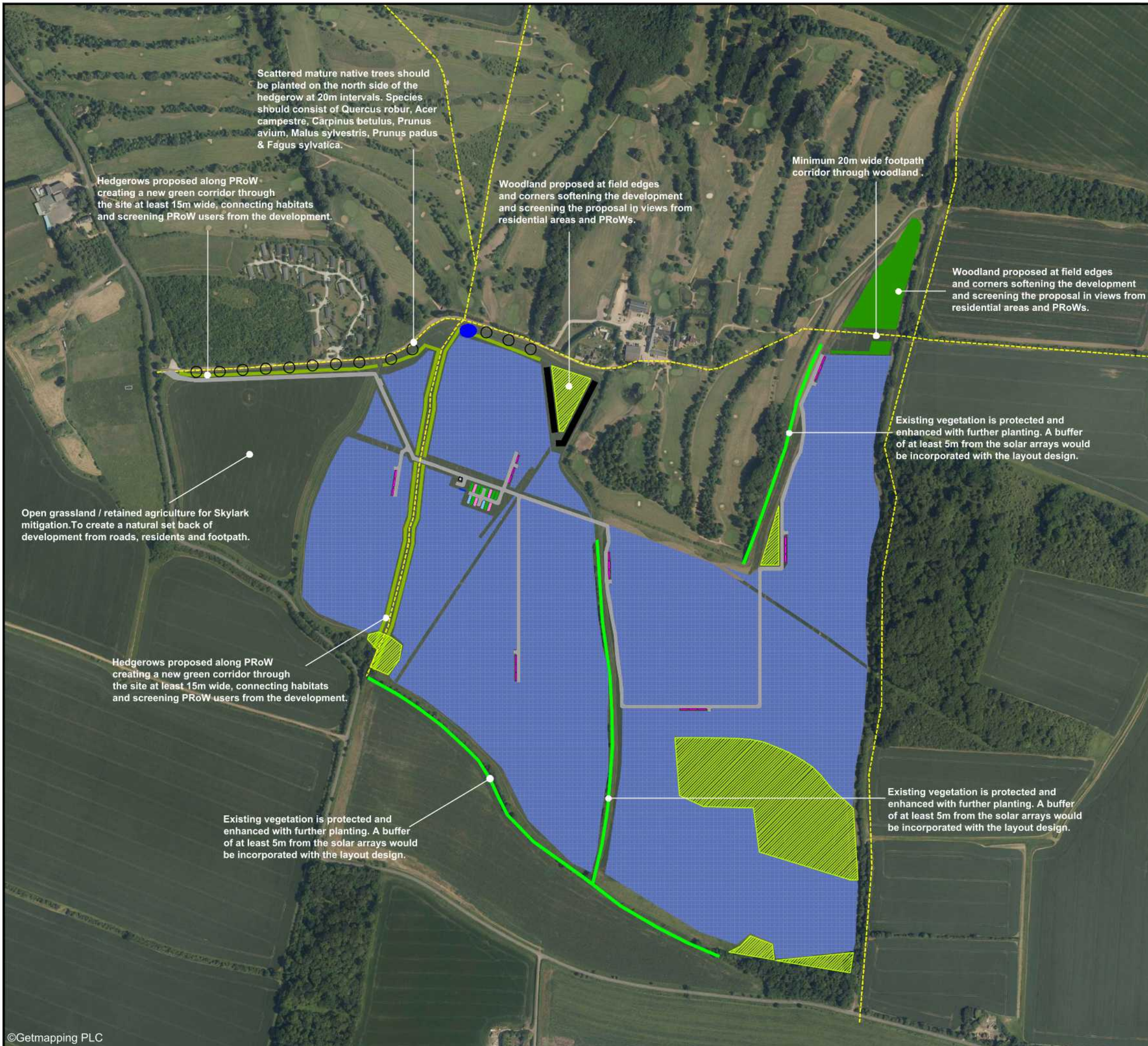
DRAWING TITLE
PROPOSED ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS



DRAWN BY	CHECKED BY	APPROVED BY	DATE	SCALES @ A3 SIZE	ISSUE STATUS
BL	DB	DB	13.06.23	1:250	PLANNING

DRAWING NUMBER	REV.
C5141-1PD-002	A

CAD FILE NAME : C5141-1PD-002



Project: **Pear Tree Solar Farm**



- Key:**
- Existing vegetation to be retained and enhanced
 - Proposed native hedgerows
 - Proposed native woodland
 - Proposed native tree belt
 - Open grassland (sown with Emorsgate EM2 or similar)
 - Development infrastructure
 - Solar arrays
 - Public Right of Way (PRoW)
 - Indicative location of attenuation basin



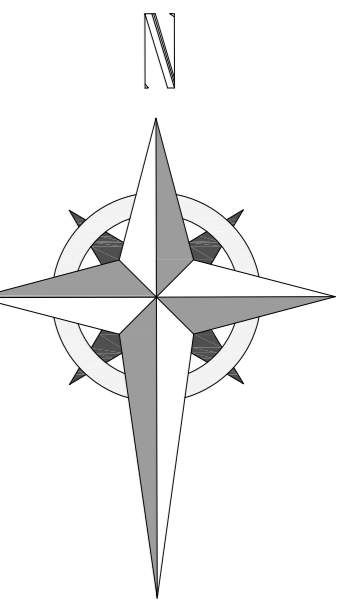
Figure: LV6 Revision C
Landscape Strategy Plan

Drawn by: BJD
 Checked by:
 Date: 23-09-24

Revision	Date	Revision Notes	Drawn	Inspected
01	22.09.22	Final Issue	JF	SD
02	03.03.23	Amendments to Development Zone	CS	SD
03	16.03.23	Amendments to Red Line Boundary	GM	SD
04	12.05.23	Amendments to Site Layout	JF	SD
05	26.05.23	Amendments to Site Layout	JF	SD
06	21.07.23	Amendments to Development Zone	JF	SD
07	22.03.24	Amendments to Development Zone	JF	SD
08	26.03.24	Amendments to Development Zone	MR	SD

LEGEND:

	SITE BOUNDARY
	DEVELOPMENT ZONE
	EXISTING VEGETATION



Status: **PLANNING**

Project: **Eaton Ford Solar Farm**



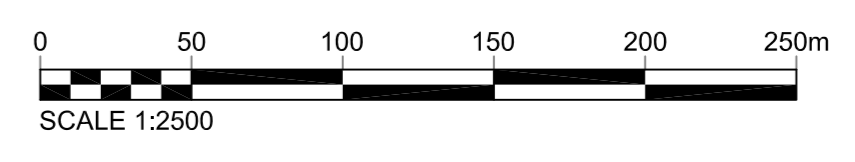
2nd Floor Billing Road, 5-7 Carter Gardens,
London, SW1V 2AD,
Tel: 044207 450700
enquiries@lowcarbon.com www.lowcarbon.com

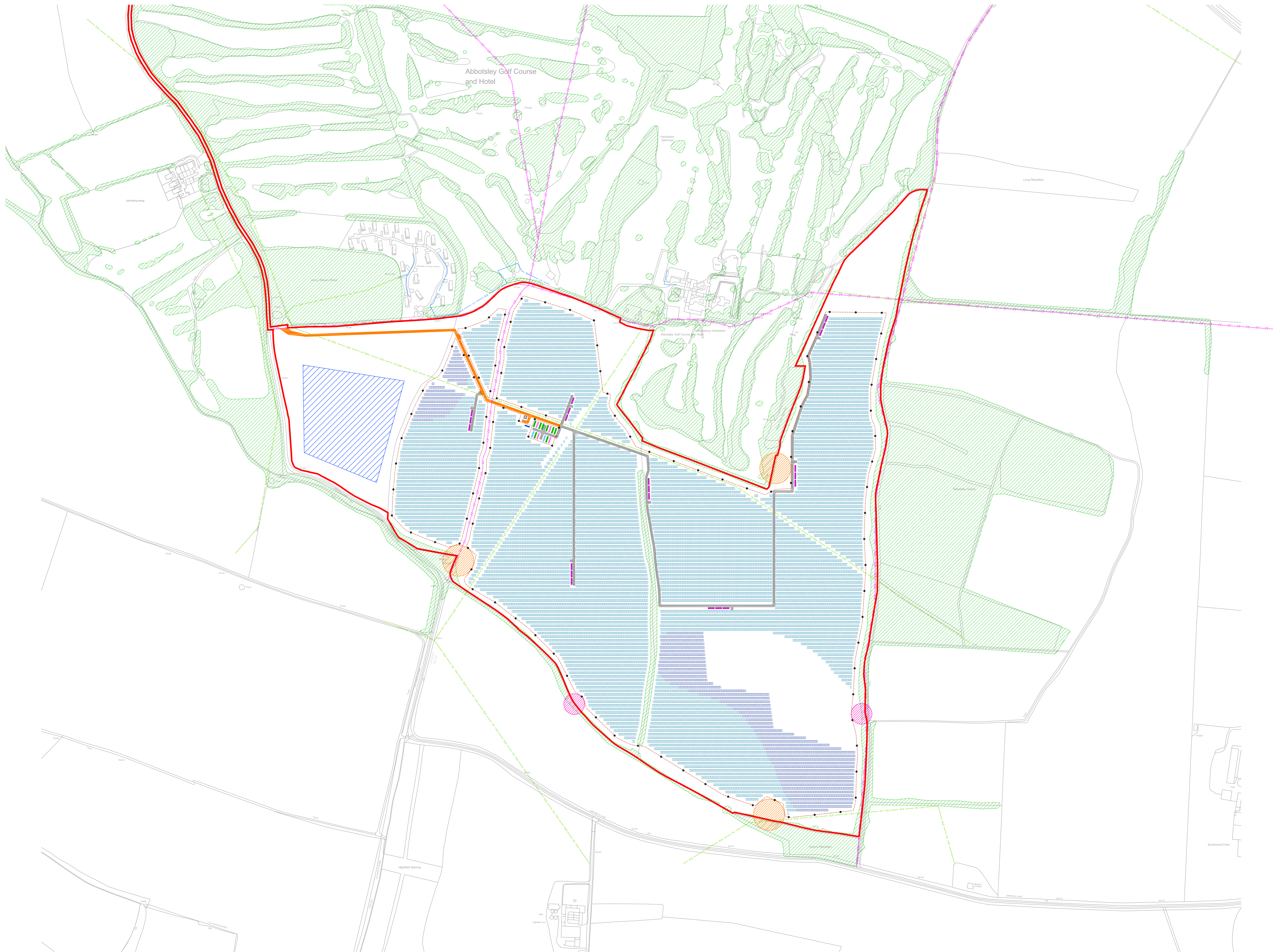
Drawing Title: **Eaton Ford Development Zone Plan**

Drawn: JF	Checked: SD	First Issued: 22.09.2022
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Project Code: LCS098	Drawing Number: DZ-01
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Sheet Size: A0	Scale: 1:2500	Revision: 08
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Revision	Date	Revision Notes	Drawn	Inspected
01	22.09.22	Final Issue	JF	SD
02	16.10.22	Revised Layout	AE	SD
03	13.02.23	RLS Amended, Battery Container and Pile of	GM	SD
04	03.03.23	Commission Method	CS	SD
05	15.03.23	Revised Layout	GM	SD
06	12.05.23	Part Line Boundary Amended	GM	SD
07	26.08.23	Part Line Boundary Amended	GM	SD
08	26.08.23	Amendments to Site Layout	JF	SD
09	21.03.24	Revised Layout	JF	SD
10	25.03.24	Revised Layout	JF	SD
11	07.06.24	Layout Revised	JF	SD

- LEGEND:**
- SITE BOUNDARY
 - EXISTING OH 33kV CABLE
 - EXISTING OH 11kV CABLE
 - EXISTING OH LV CABLE
 - FOOTPATH
 - BRIDLEWAY
 - DNO ACCESS
 - MAINTENANCE ACCESS
 - SITE ACCESS
 - PERIMETER FENCELINE
 - EXISTING VEGETATION
 - AREA AVAILABLE FOR POTENTIAL SKYLARK MITIGATION
 - BADGER SET 30m EXCLUSION
 - 20m BUFFER TO POTENTIAL ROOST FEATURE (BATS)

- SITE INFRASTRUCTURE:**
- DNO SUBSTATION
 - SOLAR PANELS MODULES (PITCH #7.2m) R.S = 3.2m
 - INFRASTRUCTURE INSTALLED WITH NO DIG TECHNOLOGY
 - BATTERY
 - SECURITY GATE
 - CCTV CAMERA
 - INVERTER
 - CUSTOMER SWITCHGEAR
 - SPARE PARTS CONTAINER
 - BATTERY
 - TRANSFORMER/ INVERTER (BATT.)

Status: **PLANNING**

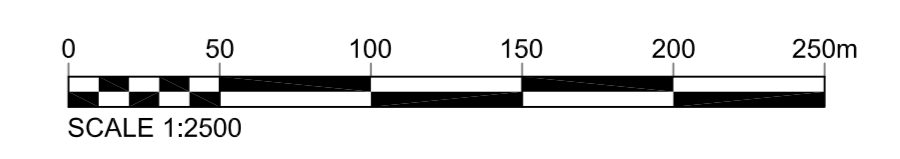
Project: **Eaton Ford Solar Farm**

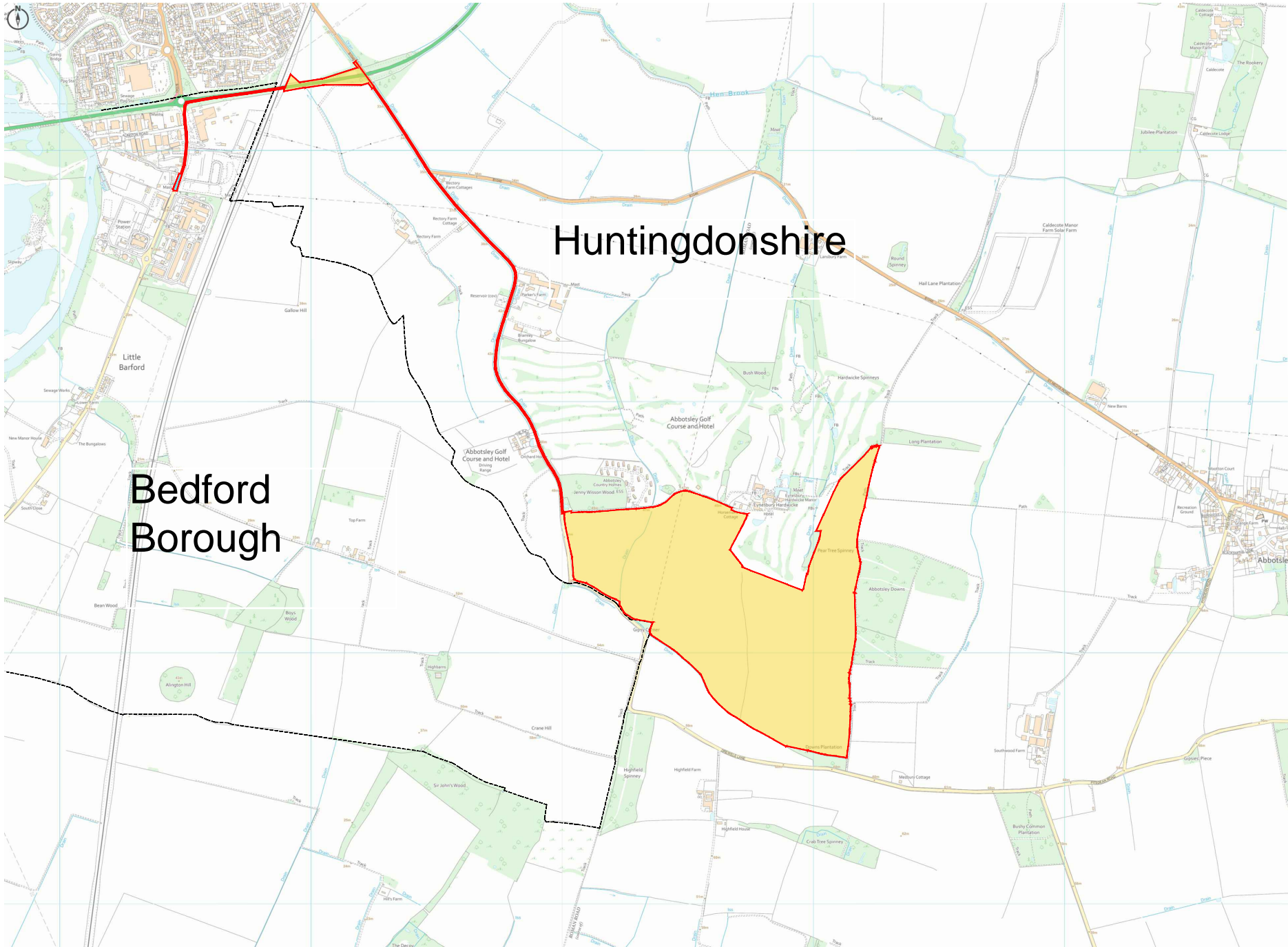


Drawing Title: **Eaton Ford Layout Plan External**

Drawn: JF	Checked: SD	First Issued: 22.09.2022
Project Code: LCS098	Drawing Number: PLE-01	
Sheet Size: A0	Scale: 1:2500	Revision: 11

1 EATON FORD LAYOUT PLAN EXTERNAL
Scale: 1:2500@A0





Revisions:

Revision	Date	Revision Description	Drawn	Checked
01	20.11.23	Final Issue	CS	SD
02	20.11.23	County Boundary Amend	CS	SD

- LEGEND:
- SITE BOUNDARY
 - FOR PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT WITHIN BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL AND HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL ADMINISTRATIVE AREAS
 - ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL BOUNDARY
 - LAND IN BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL
 - LAND IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



PROPOSED WORK	POWER
LAND IN BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL	100.0%
LAND IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	1.0%

Eaton Ford Solar Farm (Pear Tree Solar Farm)



CADmando Design & Drafting Services Ltd
The Long Walk, Bedford, Bedfordshire, Bedfordshire, MK42 0JH
Tel: 01235 533333
www.cadmando.com

LEGAL

Drawn:	CS	Checked:	SD	First Issue:	20.11.2023
Project Code:	LCS098	Revision Number:	SP-02		
Sheet Size:	A4	Scale:	1:5000	Revision:	02

1 EATON FORD SITE LOCATION PLAN
Scale: 1:5000@A4

