

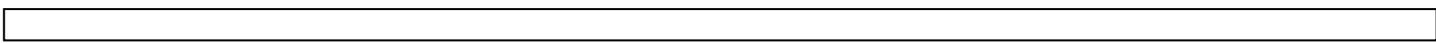


Report to Buckinghamshire Council – Central Area Planning Committee

Application Number:	22/00986/APP
Proposal:	Construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure
Site location:	Callie's Solar Farm, Owlswick Road, Ford, Buckinghamshire, HP17 8XW
Applicant:	Low Carbon UK Solar Investment Company Limited
Case Officer:	Zenab Hearn
Ward affected:	STONE AND WADDES DON AND BERNWOOD
Parish-Town Council:	DINTON FORD AND UPTON AND ASTON SANDFORD
Valid date:	15 March 2022
Determination date:	23 November 2022
Recommendation:	The recommendation is that the application be deferred and delegated to the Director of Planning and Environment for APPROVAL, subject to the receipt of no new material representations, and the conditions as proposed and any other considered appropriate by Officers, or if these are not achieved for the application to be refused

1.0 Update

- 1.1 This is an update report to Buckinghamshire Council Central Area Planning Committee relating to the proposal at Callies Farm that was due to be considered at the meeting of the 26 October 2022. The application was deferred following a representation received from an interested party relating to the absence of the Breeding Bird report. The original report is attached to this report.
- 1.2 The report was formally submitted by the Applicant, it was made available for comments on the web site and the Ecology Officer was consulted on the further technical information received.
- 1.3 Since the publication of the initial report for the October Central Planning Committee (subsequently postponed) a committee site visit was conducted. Members visited the site on 25th October and walked along the public right of way to the edge of the site to consider views from within and outside of the site including from Whiteleaf Hill.
- 1.4 Further to the publication of the report, 8 comments were received in objection to the



application, including an objection from Dinton Upon Ford Parish Council and Berks, Bucks, Oxon Wildlife Trust and 4 comments were received in support of the application from interested parties. These are considered later in the report.

Ecology

- 1.5 Following a review of the “Briefing Note Breeding Birds” the ecologist has provided additional comments which are produced below:

This application is supported by an Ecological Assessment from Ecology Solutions dated March 2022. The measures detailed are considered to be acceptable and the report judged to be an accurate account of the ecological features present on site at the time of the assessments. A series of mitigation and protection measures are set out within this report.

The mitigation and enhancement measures detailed in the Ecology Solutions Ecological Assessment will need to be secured through a condition specific to this document.

A separate breeding bird assessment from Ecology Solutions dated August 2022 has been provided upon request. Measures to secure features for the identified species within this report have been identified and will be secured through the conditions established securing the landscape and ecological enhancement proposals and through construction protection measures. Construction impacts for the proposed development will need to be detailed within a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to be secured via a condition.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is covered within the Ecology Solutions BNG document, dated August 2022. This report and its accompanying appendices details how the scheme will generate the BNG now required under local and national planning policy. The report identifies an overall BNG in both habitat and Hedge (linear) units to be positive. These gains will need to be secured through the conditioning of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP).

- 1.6 New material concerns were raised by interested parties regarding ecology which are summarised below:

- The proposal would harm local biodiversity
- The ability to provide neutral grassland under the arrays is not proven
- The proposal is in direct conflict with criteria d. and g. of Policy NE1. in failing to provide adequate conservation of the 12-13 breeding pairs of skylark through inadequate mitigation and in failing to deliver no net loss of biodiversity.
- The comments submitted by Bioscan on behalf of a neighbouring objector requires a full consultation with BBOWT and the EA (amongst others).

- 1.7 The Environment Agency has responded to consultations on this application noting that the planning application is for development which they do not wish to be consulted on.

- 1.8 Whilst Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) were consulted on

the application twice, latterly comments have been received objecting to the application noting that “while the applicant has made improvements to this application around removing existing priority habitat from the application site and providing a breeding bird survey and a skylark mitigation area, there are still large concerns with the application. These fundamentally amount to whether the development will be able to achieve biodiversity net gain stated and deliver suitable mitigation for the displaced breeding birds, notably skylarks.”

- 1.9 The additional representations received have been carefully considered by the Ecology Officer who is of the view that the representations take a very narrow view on ecological matters. Overall, the proposal includes measures to secure features for the identified species within the submitted reports that will be secured through conditions. The report identifies an overall BNG in both habitat and hedge (linear) units to be positive. These gains will also be secured through the conditions requiring details of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP). Officers maintains that proposal is a policy compliant scheme and neutral weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

2.0 Representations

- 2.1 Comments received following the publication of the original report are summarised in this updated report. The Parish Council’s objections are reported in full below.

Dinton Ford and Upton Parish Council

The Parish has previously laid out their objection to the application which is the subject of this appeal, an application for a further solar farm at Whirlbush Farm has been approved. Whirlbush Farm is adjacent to the existing Bumper’s Solar Farm and the addition of the adjoining proposed Callie’s Farm would create a massive, sprawling industrial presence, despoiling the rural and tranquil aspect and character of this landscape.

If this application is allowed, the impact and cumulative impact, within the setting of the Chilterns would have a seriously adverse effect on the open rural landscape, detrimental to the visual and recreational value of the area.

The Dinton with Form and Upton Parish Council continues to object to this application based on the original objection in April 2022, identifying four areas of objection (1) siting, (2) visual impact on AONB, landscape area and PROWs, (3) construction and decommissioning and (4) impact on the setting of Heritage sites.

The Parish feels this large scale industrial intrusion into this tranquil, historic, rural landscape conflicts with National and VALP policies. We confirm we will call in this application and are prepared to voice our objections when this application is called to committee.

The parish council objects to this application on several grounds. Some of these are akin to those expressed in regard to a rejected application for a wind turbine on the same site (12/01806).

This was also refused, again, by the Planning Department on application 21/02310/APP Owlswick Road, Ford – Construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure.

1) Siting

The development of a solar farm in an area of the Vale of Aylesbury would be detrimental to the Area of Attractive Landscape.

The land is agricultural in usage and grade 3a, 3b and some grade 2. This is at odds to the government policy recommending usage of brownfield sites for solar farms. The proposed site seems to have been largely chosen on the availability of an electricity substation adjacent to the A4129. It is already alongside a solar farm at Bumpers Farm.

A further proposal at Whirlbush Farm has been agreed, and if Callies Solar Farm was approved, it would create a very large area of solar farms and occupy an area of true countryside and agricultural land thus turning it into an industrial site.

2) Visual Impact

The proposal in this application is within proximity to several Conservation Areas and to the Chilterns AONB and this clearly visible from the Chiltern Ridge and not hidden by trees and hedges as claimed.

The nature of the solar farm with Solar panels 3m high and fencing along footpaths (3) of upto two metres high with CCTV and alert systems would be intrusive. The changes to the PROWs are not in keeping with the countryside and will not enhance the biodiversity of the area.

3) Construction and decommissioning

The claim is that the disruption to the villages and small roads of the area would be carefully managed. Our experience of the impact of building HS2 suggests otherwise, as does the extra traffic diverting around Aylesbury. The bussing in of 100 construction workers would not improve this traffic problem.

Although the term is 40 years, there is published evidence to suggest that decommissioning, contamination and restoration of the land is extremely difficult to achieve without harm to the environment and the land.

4) Impact on Heritage sites

The National heritage sites at Waldridge Manor, Aston Mullins Aston Sandford and Ford are long recognised and the impact will be as great as expressed by the previous decisions about a wind turbine on the same site made by the Secretary of State in rejecting an appeal. Ridge and furrow fields of the immediate area have been long appreciated features and represent an ancient association to the past agricultural usage. Despite the comments made in the application an applicant environmental impact assessment (EIA) is needed.

This is a potentially large scheme if considered in the context of the existing Bumpers farm

and Whirlbush farm scheme. For this reason alone the application should be considered by the strategic planning committee.

We would strongly ask that this application is rejected and are prepared to speak to our objections when it is called into planning committee.

We will send a representative to a Development Control Meeting to oppose this application.

Letters of Objection

- 2.2 Following the publication of the original report, 8 objections were received. Many of these objections have been considered in the previous report. The additional matters raised relate to ecology and are considered in the ecology section of this update report above.

Letters of Support

- 2.3 4 letters of support were received following the publication of the original report and are new matters which are summarised below:

- The solar farm will generate clean, renewable electricity, helping Buckinghamshire to meet its climate change targets
- The application has been made considerably smaller without any reduction in the maximum amount of power that will be produced.
- The planting of natural grassland and bee friendly wildflowers, as well as installing bird boxes across the site, will bring significant ecological benefits.
- The solar farm will provide opportunities for local suppliers to supply goods and services for the construction of the site, as well as learning opportunities for local schools.
- The development is temporary and will continue to be used for grazing.
- The temporary removal of some of the land from intensive agriculture will also allow it to naturally regenerate.
- The site is already very well screened by the topography and existing hedgerows
- Solar panels still allow grazing, re-wilding and other planting can be incorporated which would improve invertebrate populations and other wildlife
- This kind of innovation is a good example of what is necessary to change our methods of energy production across our nation. Action, vital to our sustainability and independence as a nation.

3.0 Weighing and Balancing

- 3.1 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: a) Provision of the development plan insofar as they are material, b) Any local finance considerations, so far as they are material to the application (such as CIL if applicable), and c) Any other material considerations

3.2 The economic, social and environmental roles for the planning system, which derive from the three dimensions to sustainable development in the NPPF, require in this case that a balancing exercise be made to weigh the benefits of the proposed solar panels against the identified harm.

3.3 The section below has been revisited following the publication of the original report. The following matters have been taken into account in coming to a recommendation:

Positive weight is maintained on these issues:

- Economic and social benefits of energy security (very significant weight)
- Provision of renewable energy (very significant weight)

Neutral weight is maintained on these issues:

- Flooding/sustainable drainage
- Minerals safeguarding
- Highways
- Layout and design
- Residential Amenity
- Archaeology
- Heritage
- Loss of agricultural land
- Biodiversity net gain/Ecology
- Public Rights of Way

Whilst concerns have been raised on biodiversity and ecology, these matters been considered in this report and neutral weight is maintained on these matters.

Negative weight is maintained on the following matters:

- Landscape issues: Landscape character (major adverse harm)
- Landscape and visual amenity of rights of way (moderate adverse harm) o Landscape

– impact on the setting of the Chiltern Hills AONB (moderate adverse harm)

- Cumulative effect upon landscape character and sequential views (moderate adverse harm).

- 3.4 Taken as a whole, the impact on the landscape in terms of character, visual harm to users of the rights of way, setting of the Chiltern Hills AONB and the cumulative impact of similar type development is taken to be given negative weight.
- 3.5 This proposal follows a refusal under ref: 21/02310/APP, and as detailed in the report seeks to address the previous reasons for refusal. As a result, the site area has reduced with the northern portion of the site excluded, the height of the panels has been reduced and the proposal is largely confined to existing field boundaries and an area is proposed for skylark mitigation.
- 3.6 This proposal avoids the minerals safeguarding area and reduction in site area means that the development no longer falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3. However, while there remains adverse harm to the landscape the degree of harm has to be carefully balanced against the benefits of the proposal.
- 3.7 The proposed development would make a significant contribution to energy security, renewable energy targets and towards achieving net carbon zero. The scheme will contribute positively towards the provision of Renewable Energy to meet the National aims of reducing Greenhouse gasses and towards the strategic commitment of Buckinghamshire Council towards Net Zero carbon energy production by 2050. The proposal would contribute to the local economy and provide significant energy security benefits. The proposal has been improved in so far as it is policy compliant in respect of most of the relevant policies. These benefits are given significant weight in favour of the development.
- 3.8 The benefits of the proposal must be weighed against the harm identified in the report namely to the impact on the landscape character, the visual amenity of the footpaths crossing through the site and cumulative impacts, particularly when viewed from the Chiltern Hills AONB. The landscape harm, may in part, be mitigated by the proposed soft landscaping and the generous corridors being provided to the PRoW which cross the site. While this does amount to significant weight this is slightly moderated by the fact that nature of the site is 'temporary' albeit 40 years which is in itself a significant period of time. However, some consideration must be given to the fact that land will revert back to its former agricultural use once no longer required for the production of renewable energy.
- 3.9 Notwithstanding the objections raised by third parties on matters relating to ecology and biodiversity, it is considered by officers, that subject to the inclusion of suitable conditions, the proposal would have a neutral impact in terms of transport, design, residential amenity, agricultural land quality, ecology and biodiversity, flooding and drainage and the historic environment.
- 3.10 Whilst the landscaping harm is acknowledged, there are significant benefits which arise from the scheme in respect of renewable energy, the contribution the scheme would make towards net zero carbon targets and energy security.

3.11 The application has been assessed against the development plan as a whole and all relevant material considerations. It is recognised that the proposal would result in some harm, most notably in respect of landscape effects. However, the substantial benefits arising from this proposal would outweigh the harm and overall, the proposed solar farm would accord with the broader objectives of the development plan.

4.0 Recommendation:

4.1 The recommendation is that the application be deferred and delegated to the Director of Planning and Environment for APPROVAL, subject to the receipt of no new material representations, and the conditions as proposed (in the original report) and any other considered appropriate by Officers, or if these are not achieved for the application to be refused.



Report to Buckinghamshire Council Central Area Planning Committee

Application Number:	22/00986/APP
Proposal:	Construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure
Site location:	Callie's Solar Farm, Owlswick Road, Ford, Buckinghamshire, HP17 8XW
Applicant:	Low Carbon UK Solar Investment Company Limited
Case Officer:	Zenab Hearn
Ward affected:	STONE AND WADDESDON
Parish-Town Council:	DINTON FORD AND UPTON
Valid date:	15 March 2022
Determination date:	26 October 2022
Recommendation:	Approval

1.0 Summary & Recommendation

- 1.1 This application is being presented to the Central Area Planning Committee following a call in by Dinton Upon Ford Parish Council. This application seeks planning permission for the construction of a solar farm with all associated equipment with a generating capacity of up to 49.9MW for a period of 40 years from the date of the first exportation of electricity from the site. This application follows a previous application (ref: 21/02310/APP) for a solar farm at this site which was refused in December 2021. This application seeks to address the previous reasons for refusal by seeking to provide a more efficient subsidy free solar farm on a smaller area than the previous application.
- 1.2 The proposal would provide a source of renewable energy which would contribute towards energy security, meeting the targets set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 and the commitment towards Net Zero Carbon by Buckinghamshire Council to which significant weight is given in favour of the application. The proposal would cause harm of moderate significance to the visual amenity and landscape quality of the area.
- 1.3 Consistent with section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 proposals must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance, the proposal would deliver substantial public benefits on a scale such as to outweigh the harm identified. The delivery of renewable energy and contribution to energy security which this scheme would provide to meet both local and national commitments weigh strongly in favour of this proposal.

- 1.4 Recommendation – for the reasons explained within this report, this application is being recommended for approval subject to the condition proposed and any amendments and additional conditions considered necessary.**

2.0 Description of Proposed Development

- 2.1 The application site extends to approximately 62 hectares and comprises agricultural land located to the south west of Lower Waldrige Farm. The site is located to the south of the hamlet of Ford and approximately 2.2km south east of the village of Haddenham.
- 2.2 The site is irregularly shaped consisting of 11 separate fields predominantly in arable use with some grazing land lying between Olswick Road and the A4129 Thame Road to the south. The southern area of the site occupies the rising southern bank of the river valley and the plateau of higher ground further south and ultimately links to the A4129 Risborough Road, from which access is proposed. The surrounding area is predominantly open countryside, including arable and pastoral farmland with isolated farms and associated buildings located in the wider vicinity.
- 2.3 The site is located within National Character Area 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales and the Haddenham Vale Landscape Character Area. There are a number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) crossing or within close proximity to the application site including the Outer Aylesbury Ring (OAR) recreational trail between Aston Sandford, Green Lane Farm and Midshires Way (ASA/5/1/ and ASA/5/2) to the south, the public footpath between Aston Sandford and Waldrige Manor following the local ridgeline (ASA/9/2/, DMF/130/1/ and DFU27/2) towards the centre, between Waldrige Manor and Ford village (DFU/27/1) to the north of the site. A bridleway connects Aston Sandford, Mushroom Farm and Waldrige Manor.
- 2.4 Heritage assets are situated within Ford village which include a number of listed buildings. The General Baptist Chapel, Manor Farmhouse and Ford Farmhouse are Grade II listed buildings situated over 1km from the site. Waldrige Manor is Grade II* listed located 296m from the eastern boundary of the site and a Scheduled Monument known as ‘Nucleated medieval settlement east of Waldrige Manor’ is also located in the area. A Grade II listed building barn is located to the southern boundary of the site. The Aston Sandford Conservation Area is located 1km from the north western part of the site.
- 2.5 The site falls in Flood Zone 1. The applicant has provided an Agricultural Land Classification (ACL) Assessment which demonstrates that the majority of the site constitutes Grade 3b (moderate quality) agricultural land, with a small area of Grade 3a (good to moderate).

Proposed Development

- 2.6 This application seeks planning permission for the construction of a solar farm with a design capacity of up to 49.9 MW for a period of 40 years from the date of the first exportation of electricity from the site.
- 2.7 This application follows an application that was refused under planning ref: 21/02310/APP dated 21 December 2021 (under appeal see Planning History section). The application was refused due to the following reasons:

- Impact on the landscape setting,
- The absence of a minerals assessment
- The loss of priority habitat
- Failure to adequately assess flood risk

2.8 This application seeks to address the previous reasons for refusal. The key differences between the previous application and this application are:

- The site area of the solar farm is on a smaller, more consolidated parcel of land (62ha) compared with 97ha with the northern land parcels removed;
- Solar arrays maximum height of 2.5m compared with 3m previously;
- Use of more efficient solar arrays with an output of approx. 600kw compared to 350 previously;
- Wider corridors to protect the existing Public Rights of Way
- Ecological mitigation and compensation area to address issues regarding priority habitat
- The reduction in the site area avoids minerals safeguarding areas;
- Site is now exclusively within flood zone 1 and
- A connection under a riverbed which lies within flood zone 2 and 3 no longer forms part of the application.

2.9 As with the previous application, the solar panels are proposed to be placed on metal arrays arranged in rows, allowing for boundary landscaping, perimeter fencing and access. The panels will be laid out in rows across the site in an east/west orientation and will face south at approximately a 25-30 degree tilt. The panels are to be a maximum of 2.5m in height and the spacing between the rows would range between 3.5 and 9m.

2.10 The proposal seeks to utilise best available technology meaning panels with a maximum output of 600-watts will be installed subsidy free. The proposal includes internal tracks measuring 3.5m in width for maintenance purposes and will be constructed of crushed aggregate. Supporting equipment includes 1 DNO substation, 1 customer switchgear and 24 inverters.

2.11 The grid connection will be at the local UK Power Networks Ilmer substation accessed from the A4129/Thame to the south of the site.

Perimeter Fencing and CCTV

2.12 A 2m high security deer fencing will be installed around the perimeter of the site. Badger friendly access points are included to allow the passage of badgers across the site. Pole mounted 2.5m CCTV security cameras are to be installed across the site.

Access and Rights of Way

2.13 Vehicular access is proposed during the construction access, anticipated to be up to 24

weeks, via a new access from Owlswick Road which is subject to the National Speed Limit. Following the construction period, this access will return to its original state. Once the site is operational, the site will be accessed from Owlswick Road or via the new junction onto the A4219 from the south.

- 2.14 There are three PRoWs that would be affected by the development namely; DFU/27/1, DFU/30/1 and ASA/5/1. The PRoWs will be retained and protected as part of the development, this would be done through the planting of hedgerows.

Trees and Landscaping

- 2.15 As part of the proposal, no individual trees will require removal but it will be necessary for some sections of hedgerow to facilitate the development. In total 46 linear metres of hedgerow/groups will require removal. The application proposes to mitigate this loss through the provision of proposed new hedgerow and tree planting as part of the landscape planting proposals for the wider site as detailed in the proposed landscape strategy.

Decommissioning

- 2.16 At the end of the 40 year lifespan of the solar farm, the site would be restored to agricultural use with all equipment including below ground connections removed. However, landscape measures proposed as part of the development would remain. The decommissioning of the solar farm would take approximately 6 months.

Rochdale Envelope

- 2.17 The proposal uses the “Rochdale Envelope” principles. The Rochdale Envelope is widely accepted on infrastructure projects and there is guidance on the use of the Rochdale Envelope by the Planning Inspectorate and Policy EN-1 Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy. Essentially, the Rochdale Envelope requires an assessment to be based on a cautious ‘worst case’ approach. In this case, what is proposed on site is the maximum that would be built, but it could be less than this or with very minor changes to the layout. The Rochdale Envelope provides flexibility in design options where details of the whole project are not available, while ensuring the impacts of the final development are fully assessed. Any planning permission granted on the basis of the Rochdale Envelope is conditional on providing the final details for approval prior to construction.

3.0 Relevant Planning History

Reference: 10/02550/APP

Development: Temporary 50.2m anemometer mast for a period of 18 months

Decision: FPP1 Decision Date: 19 May 2011

Reference: 10/60001/SO

Development: Erection of two wind turbines

Decision: EIAC Decision Date: 5 January 2011

Reference: 12/60000/SO

Development: Scoping Opinion - proposed wind turbine

Decision: SO Decision Date: 23 February 2012

Reference: 12/01806/APP

Development: Construction, operation and decommissioning of single 3 bladed wind turbine with maximum height to tip of blade of 101.5 metres and associated infrastructure including new highways access, access tracks, temporary site compound, crane pad and substation

Decision: Refusal Decision Date: 17 January 2013

Reference: 21/00770/SO

Development: Screening Opinion to determine whether there is a requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to accompany a planning application for development at the above location for a solar farm.

Decision: EIAC Decision Date: 7 May 2021

Reference: 21/02310/APP

Development: Construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure

Decision: Refusal Decision Date: 21 December 2021

The application was refused for the following reasons:

- impact on the landscape setting,
- the absence of a minerals assessment
- the loss of priority habitat
- failure to adequately assess flood risk

This application is the subject of an appeal and is scheduled for a Hearing in January 2023. At the moment the PINS has agreed to a delay in the statement of case deadline as they are aware of the revised application being considered and due for determination by the Council. The appellant has indicated that they intent to withdraw the appeal if planning permission is forthcoming with the revised scheme.

Surrounding Area

Bumpers Farm

Reference: 14/06582/FUL

Development: Construction of a ground mounted solar farm including supporting infrastructure comprising 14 x inverter enclosures, Distributor Network Operator cabin, security fencing and CCTV system, underground cabling, landscaping and associated works to include creation of access

tracks

Decision: Appeal Allowed. The development has been implemented.

Whirlbush Farm

Reference: 21/02821/APP

Development: Installation of a solar farm comprising ground mounted solar PV panels with a generating capacity of up to 49.99 MW, including mounting system, battery storage units, inverters, underground cabling, stock proof fence, CCTV, internal tracks and associated infrastructure, DNO substation, landscaping and environmental enhancements for a temporary period of 40 years.

Decision: Approved Date: 03-03-2022. Not started.

4.0 Representations

4.1 Statutory site publicity has been given to the application. All representations received have been summarised in Appendix A.

5.0 Policy Considerations and Evaluation

5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is reiterated within paragraph 47 of the NPPF (2021). The development plan is defined in Section 38(3)(b) of the 2004 Act as “the development plan documents (taken as a whole) that have been adopted or approved in that area”.

5.2 The development plan for this area comprises:

- Buckinghamshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2019 (BMWLP)
- Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (15th September 2021)

5.3 The VALP is an up to date plan, and in accordance with paragraph 220 of the NPPF (2021) the plan has been examined in the context of the NPPF (2012) and apply to the policies in this plan.

5.4 In addition, the following documents are relevant material considerations to the determination of the application:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) - ‘Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy’
- The Climate Change Act 2008
- British Energy Security Strategy 2022
- EN-1: Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (July 2011);

- EN-3: National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (July 2011) - Written Ministerial Statement on Solar Energy: protecting the local and global environment made on 25 March 2015
- Commercial Renewable Energy Development and the Historic Environment Historic England Advice Note 15 (February 2021)
- Natural England's Technical Information Note: Solar Parks: Maximising Environmental benefits (TIN101)

5.5 The issues and policy considerations are the principle of development, design, historic environment in terms of impact on nearby listed buildings, archaeology and conservation areas, the amenity of existing residents, landscape character and visual and highways and access, minerals safeguarding, loss of agricultural land, ecology and flooding and drainage.

Principle and Location of Development

- Policy C3 – Renewable Energy

5.6 Policy C3 of the VALP (2021) encourages renewable energy developments provided that there is no unacceptable impact on the criteria set out within the Policy.

5.7 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out a proactive approach towards the provision of Renewable Energy development to meet aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet renewable energy targets. Chapter 14 of the NPPF sets out the national planning policy with regards to climate change, flooding and coastal change. This requires the planning system to support the transition to a low carbon future and to support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. Paragraph 151 of the NPPF (2021) requires plans to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat. Paragraph 158 of the NPPF (2021) states that applications for renewable energy development are not required to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy. It also requires applications to be approved where its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

5.8 The British Energy Security Strategy (2022) expects a five-fold increase in the deployment of solar energy by 2035. The strategy continues to support the effective use of land by encouraging large scale projects to locate on previously developed, or lower value land, where possible, and ensure projects are designed to avoid, mitigate, and where necessary, compensate for the impacts of using greenfield sites.

5.9 The Climate Change Act of 2008 and subsequent amendment in June 2019 sets a legal requirement of the Secretary of State to reduce Greenhouse emissions by 2050. The sixth carbon Budget places a legally binding target for the UK to Net Zero by 2050, requiring a doubling of electricity demand from power produced by low-carbon sources, including 4GW per year of solar energy production. Through the Electricity Market Reform (EMR) there is a move towards the increase of a supply of secure electricity to ensure sufficient

capacity to meet demand. Renewable energy plays a key factor in supporting the demand and tackling the climate crisis. In July 2020 the Council passed a motion to work alongside national Government with the objective to achieve net carbon zero for Buckinghamshire by 2050.

- 5.10 The National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (2011) published by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, sets the overarching national policy for energy. Whilst the proposed development is under the threshold for national significance, the principles of EN-1 are material because it describes the national approach to energy provision. Part 2.2 of EN-1 sets the Government's aim to move towards a secure low-carbon energy system which requires significant investment in new technologies to deliver a long-term strategy for low carbon energy provision, such as solar energy, and to reduce reliance of fossil fuel consumption. Energy provision is vital to economic prosperity, and social well-being, and is essential to ensure that the UK and Buckinghamshire has secure renewable energy.
- 5.11 The starting point for proposals delivering renewable energy is a positive policy framework for which significant weight must be given. This is defined in Policy C3 which encourages such development provided that, there is no unacceptable adverse impact, including cumulative impact on a number of identified issues within the policy. The key issues are the impact upon landscape and biodiversity, visual impacts on local landscapes, the historic environment, the Green Belt (although no relevant in this case), aviation, highways and access and residential amenity. The impact on the identified issues relevant to this site are considered within the report.
- 5.12 This application seeks planning permission for the installation of a solar farm and supporting infrastructure for a period of 40 years, at the end of the project, it is proposed to be removed from the site and the land returned to its former state. The delivery of this scheme would generate upto 49.9MW. The proposal would contribute towards the targets set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 and the commitment to Net Zero Carbon across Buckinghamshire Council. The development will increase the security for provision of renewable electricity supply within Buckinghamshire.
- 5.13 The LPA acknowledges that opportunities for renewable energy proposals are strongly influenced by the availability of the natural resources and the sensitivity of the environment to accommodate the different types and scales of installation including the cumulative impacts. The policy support for the renewable scheme must be balanced alongside the visual impact of the scheme, the cumulative effect with other existing and proposed development in the area, the effect on, and the temporary loss of agricultural land, the historic environment, the impact on rights of way and the impact on the amenities of local residents, the effect on the local highway network and the effect on wildlife and ecology.

Landscape Issues

- Policy C3 – Renewable Energy
- Policy NE4 – Landscape character and locally important landscape
- Policy NE3 – The Chilterns AONB and Setting
- Policy NE8 – Trees, hedgerows and Woodlands

- 5.14 Policy NE4 of the VALP (2021) requires development to contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and development should provide net gains in biodiversity.
- 5.15 Policy NE8 of the VALP (2021) requires the protection and retention of trees, hedgerows and woodland and the implementation of buffers around retained and planted hedgerows and woodlands.
- 5.16 Policy C3 of the VALP (2021) encourages planning applications involving renewable energy development if there is no unacceptable adverse impact, including cumulative impact on local landscapes.
- 5.17 The overarching aim set out in EN-1 (Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy) requires decision makers to balance large scale projects against the impact on the locality, ensuring that the proposal has been well designed taking account of the potential effect on the landscape having regard to siting, operational and other relevant constraints with the aim being to minimise the harm to the landscape where possible and introducing appropriate measures to do so.
- 5.18 Landscape and Visual Impact is one of the most important considerations in determining any application for such development. Large scale solar development can result in negative impacts on the rural landscape where the landscape is open or undulating. It is essential that the solar farm be planned to mitigate and reduce its impact where possible, and that proposed landscaping is both appropriate and effective.

Landscape Character

- 5.19 The site is located in the NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales which covers an extensive area of low-lying land and comprises two separate sub-character areas: the Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Vales to the north; and the Vales of White Horse and Aylesbury to the south. The site is located within the latter. It mainly consists of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays.
- 5.20 Within the Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment (2008) AVLCA the site is located within the Haddenham Vale Landscape Character Area. The area is characterised by a relatively large low-lying area spread out from the foothills of the Chiltern escarpment making a marked contrast with the chalk hills. The escarpment is a constant factor in many views which otherwise have an uncontained and remote feel due to the limited topography and the lack of settlement, woodland and infrastructure.
- 5.21 The historic landscape character of the site and the immediately surrounding area is characterised by a concentration of pre-18th century fields covering the area between the

villages of Dinton and Ford, and 18th-19th century fields to the south of Ford. There are no 20th century fields within the site and a number of fields, both within the site and surrounding it, contain relict ridge and furrow. To the west of the site are two deserted medieval villages – Moreton and Waldridge and there are abandoned building platforms to the east of Aston Sanford. There has been little change in terms of field boundaries since the 19th century and the current PRowS are all evident as paths.

- 5.22 It is noted that the proposed panels in combination with the ancillary infrastructure including substations, security fencing, CCTV cameras on security poles and various structures could have an adverse visual impact on the openness of the countryside. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been submitted with the application to identify and assess the likely significance of the landscape visual effects of the proposed development on the surrounding area.
- 5.23 The landscape impact in terms of impact on landscape character, views of the landscape from rights of way and the Chiltern AONB as well as cumulative impact were significant issues for the original scheme which formed a reason for refusal. With the current application the applicant has sought to address this matter by reducing the size of the land take (35ha smaller) with the northern section of the solar farm removed.
- 5.24 The Landscape Officer maintains objections to the revised proposal and states that the existing site has as a strongly rural character will have a strong historic continuity and limited intrusion from any modern features which is supported by historic OS maps. The introduction of a large-scale industrial development into and across a range of undeveloped, agricultural fields will result in the loss of a number of key site characteristics which contribute to its agricultural character including meadow grassland land cover, agricultural land use and the perception of tranquillity. This is a large site which will fundamentally alter the agricultural character of the site and as such identifies major adverse effect in terms of landscape character.

Visual Impact

- 5.25 There is a network of PRowS (DFU/30/1, ASA/5/2 and DFU/27/1) within the application site and the vicinity of the application site including Outer Aylesbury Ring which passes through part of the site (ASA/5/2). Eight of the fields that make up the site are crossed by PRowS.
- 5.26 In terms of physical impacts to the PRow, it is noted that those that cross the site will remain in their current positions. The PRow that cross the site will remain open during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases. However, whilst the physical access to these networks would be unchanged; the user experience will change. Footpath users moving through the site south and/or eastwards, currently experience unhindered views over wide open, agricultural landscape and up towards the Chilterns AONB. This will change and the LVIA confirms the effects would be major adverse. To mitigate against the impact to the PRowS, the Applicant is seeking to provide 13m corridors with a hedge that is grown upto 2m in height. While the Landscape Officer does recognise the mitigation, they maintain their objection considering that the experience of the PRow user would change curtailing open views and obscuring longer views towards the Chilterns AONB. The impact

is reduced to moderate adverse.

- 5.27 Currently many field boundaries benefit from tall hedgerows and they do provide screening for the site from surrounding PRow. However, some of the field boundaries have become gappy. Users moving northwest along PRow DFU/27/2 from Waldrige Manor will be able to see through the gappy hedgerow towards PV development in the next field, especially in winter.
- 5.28 This will have an adverse effect on PRow users who currently experience walking through an open, agricultural landscape with no modern features, to one where industrial PV development is visible in adjacent fields. Mitigation would include maintaining existing hedgerows to 3m height although there is concern that this alone is not adequate mitigation because there is no inter-planting proposed. Taking into consideration the mitigation proposed the level of harm is identified as moderate adverse to users of the footpaths.
- 5.29 The Landscape Officer is concerned about the failure to assess the impact of footpaths between Ford village and mixed plantation by Moreton Farm. In their view users of the footpaths experience unhindered views, southwards over open, undeveloped landscape. The development has the potential to intrude into these views resulting in moderate adverse harm.
- 5.30 In summary there is concern that the proposal would result in harm to users of the footpaths DFU/27/2, DFU/42/2, DFU/34/1, DFU/44/1, DFU/53/3, DFU/53/2 and DFU/37/2.

Chiltern Hills AONB

- 5.31 Policy NE3 of the VALP (2021) requires major development proposals affecting the AONB to demonstrate they conserve and enhance the distinctive character, tranquillity and remoteness of the AONB. Major developments are expected to have regard to important views and visual amenity from public vantage points, including key views from the steep north-west facing chalk escarpment overlooking the low clay vale and foreground views to the AONB.
- 5.32 The application site is located within 5km of the Chilterns AONB. The Chilterns AONB is visible from within the site, and the site is visible from Whiteleaf Hill in the Chilterns AONB which provides panoramic views of the Chilterns escarpments, across Aylesbury Vale. The Applicant has prepared views from the Chilterns AONB which confirms the proposed solar farm would be visible from the AONB albeit in long distance views. It is acknowledged that Bumpers Solar Farm (in the West area of Buckinghamshire) and consented Whirlbush Farm site are in close proximity however, in the view of officer's, it would not be seen as an unbroken extension of solar farms. Additional landscaping is proposed to mitigate against the impact of the proposal from the AONB.
- 5.33 However, notwithstanding this the Landscape Officer maintains an objection noting the development would result in an adverse visual impact on views from the Chilterns AONB particularly Whiteleaf Hill. The existing Bumpers Farm solar farm is clearly discernible from Whiteleaf Hill even in summer with full leaf cover, and it is located close to the proposed

solar farm. Due to its layout and scale, when viewed from Whiteleaf Hill, the proposed large scale development would be evident. It would be a notable feature in the panoramic view from the AONB. It will introduce a sizable, industrial feature into an otherwise open and expansive agricultural landscape. Although the spread of development has been reduced since the previous application, it remains a sprawling layout and is viewed side on from this sensitive viewpoint. It will introduce a sizable, industrial feature into an otherwise open and expansive agricultural landscape. Notwithstanding the mitigation proposed, the long term adverse effect would be moderate adverse.

Cumulative Impact

- 5.34 As with the previous application it is recognised that viewers currently experience panoramic views over wide, open agricultural landscape of the vale. The landscape beyond the Princes Risborough settlement (even after the expansion area is developed) is a large scale area of open countryside, with some isolated areas of settlement/development within it. Bumpers Farm PV development currently forms a discernible feature in this view, even in summer with full leaf cover. This is partly because Bumpers Farm is closer to the AONB and it is an earlier solar farm. The technology has since evolved and the solar panels now use a darker non reflective material which is likely to be less discernible in long distance views. The combined view of Bumpers Farm solar farm, the entire length of Callies Farm solar farm along with the recently permitted Whirlbush PV development (which will in the short term visually link Bumpers Farm and Callies Farm developments together from this direction), will result in a considerable new area of industrial development within the currently open and expansive agricultural landscape. This will be particularly noticeable when the deciduous hedgerow and scattered trees will have lost their foliage (6 months of the year).
- 5.35 However, the Whirlbush Farm development includes a strong planting buffer along the south-eastern boundaries which will reduce its visual impact over time. This was taken into consideration when assessing the application and when planning committee supported the officer recommendation. In the previous proposal for Callies Farm the extensive sprawling site of solar farm was a significant contribution to the argument of cumulative impact. With the current proposal at Callies Farm, the site area has been reduced in size and includes planting interspersed across the development, as well as a reduction in the height of the solar panels from 3m to 2.5m. Notwithstanding, the landscape officer considers the combined cumulative, long term adverse effect on views from the AONB would be moderate adverse. This does reflect a lesser degree of harm than was previously identified with the original proposal.
- 5.36 The landscape officer also considers that repeated views of the PV developments will be experienced by footpath users on the Outer Aylesbury Way long distance footpath (ASA/5/1) also identified as part of the Wychert Way, a locally promoted walking route. They will also be experienced from the connecting footpath ASA/9/1 and ASA/9/2, as well as from passengers on the High Wycombe to Bicester railway line. In these instances the current views of the wide open, agricultural countryside, will be replaced by open or

glimpsed views of the industrial solar farm developments at Callies Farm. The sequential cumulative long term adverse effects would be moderate adverse. Officers are mindful that the proposed development would be largely reversible and the impacts would be limited to a period of 40 years. However, this is a long period of time, during which the adverse impacts would be experienced by very many people, including those viewing the site from the Chilterns AONB. The proposal conflicts with Policies NE3 and NE4 of the VALP (2021) and Policies L5 and L7 of the Chilterns Conservation Board Position Statement (2011). Negative weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

Public Rights of Way

- Policy C4 – Protection of public rights of way

- 5.37 Policy C4 of the VALP seeks to enhance and protect public rights of way to ensure the integrity and connectivity of this resource is maintained.
- 5.38 There are a number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) crossing or within close proximity to the application site including the Outer Aylesbury Ring (OAR) recreational trail between Aston Sandford, Green Lane Farm and Midshires Way (ASA/5/1/ and ASA/5/2) to the south, the public footpath between Aston Sandford and Waldrige Manor following the local ridgeline (ASA/9/2/, DMF/130/1/ and DFU27/2) towards the centre, between Waldrige Manor and Ford village (DFU/27/1) to the north of the site. A bridleway connects Aston Sandford, Mushroom Farm and Waldrige Manor.
- 5.39 The Public Rights of Way Officer has commented on this application noting that the scheme does impact on the Rights of Way namely DFU/27/1, DFU/30/1 and ASA/5/2 in that green corridors are proposed along the footpaths to screen the solar panels from the PRoW. Previously the scheme proposed quite narrow corridors which would have had a greater impact on the amenity of users of the PRoW. The revised scheme now proposes wider footpaths i.e. the pedestrian width to be provided for Footpath DFU/27/1 and Footpath DFU/30/1 is at least 13m; while the pedestrian width for Footpath ASA/5/2 is at least 10m. Further, the development proposes to remove any stiles and replace them with gaps or gates depending on stock control, which is a further improvement. Notwithstanding the objections raised by the landscape officer, the Public Right of Way Officer considers the proposal would protect the open feel and amenity of the rights of way network subject to condition. Neutral weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

Raising the quality of place making and design

- Policy BE2 – Design of new development
 - NE4 Landscape character and locally important landscape
- 5.40 Design is considered in terms of policy BE2 and NE4 of the VALP (2021). The policy requires new development to achieve high quality design form that responds to the characteristics of the site.
- 5.41 With the previous proposal the layout of the solar farm cut across several field boundaries to mitigate against the impact of the development. As a result, the development would

have resulted in new hedge corridors around PRowS that cross through the site which would disrupt the historic field pattern. The current layout of the solar farm largely follows established field boundaries and sizes in response to the concerns raised previously.

- 5.42 The panels, arrays and associated infrastructure relatively low-level. Other than the temporary compound for the duration of the construction period, the scale and mass would remain consistent across the site. The structures are of a 'standard' design, material and form synonymous with such solar development. The design will be apparent within the parameters of the site. It is recognised the applicant has sought to confine the proposed solar farm within the existing field boundaries and mitigate its visual impact through improving existing hedging where it is sparse and through further hedge/tree planting. It is recognised that the applicant has sought to mitigate its impact where possible. On this basis, its design is considered acceptable. If planning permission was granted, details of landscaping mitigation would be required by way of a condition. Neutral weight is given to this in the planning balance.

Heritage

- BE1 Heritage assets

- 5.43 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the 'Act') requires the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their setting and any architectural features that they possess. In addition, section 72 of the Act requires the LPA to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (CA). In this context, the objective of preservation is to cause no harm, and is a matter of paramount concern in the planning process. The duties in s.66 and s.72 of the Act do not allow a local planning authority to treat the desirability of preserving the settings of listed buildings and the character and appearance of conservation areas as mere material considerations to which it can simply attach such weight as it sees fit. When an authority finds that a proposed development would harm the setting of a listed building or the character or appearance of a conservation area, it must give that harm considerable importance and weight and there should be a strong presumption against planning permission being granted.
- 5.44 Policy BE1 of the VALP (2021) seeks to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, including their setting. Policy BE1 requires development proposals that cause less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset to weigh the level of harm against the public benefits that may be gained by the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use. Policy C3 of the VALP states planning applications involving renewable energy development will be encouraged provided that there is no unacceptable adverse impact, including cumulative impact, on the historic environment including designated and non-designated assets and their settings.
- 5.45 Particular regard has been given to the effect of the scale, design, prominence and proximity of the solar farm on heritage assets and their settings, and the intervisibility between the heritage asset and the development.

- 5.46 The proposed development is set within a historic landscape which has its origins in centuries preceding the normal conquest. The landscape comprises post medieval period field enclosures which remain until this day.
- 5.47 Nearby heritage assets are situated within Ford village which include a number of listed buildings. The General Baptist Chapel, Manor Farmhouse and Ford Farmhouse are Grade II listed buildings situated over 200m from the site. Waldrige Manor is Grade II* listed located 296m from the eastern boundary of the site and a Scheduled Monument known as 'Nucleated medieval settlement east of Waldrige Manor' is also located in the area. PRow connects Waldrige Manor to the application site. A Grade II listed barn is located approximately 450m on the south eastern boundary of the site. The Aston Sandford Conservation Area is located 1km from the north western part of the site.
- 5.48 The intervening landscape is such that there is no intervisibility between the designated heritage assets and the application site, and no public viewpoints in which the application site would be experienced as part of the setting of the Grade II* Waldrige Manor. As with the previous proposal the current proposal would result in the loss of agricultural fields which make up the sites historic landscape and agricultural fields that contribute to the setting of the Grade II* listed Waldrige Manor. The harm identified is at the lower end of less than substantial harm. In line Policy BE1 which is consistent with Paragraph 202 of the NPPF, the harm identified is weighed against the public benefits of providing cleaner renewable energy. In this instance, as with the previous proposal, it is considered that the public benefits of the proposal outweigh the less than substantial harm identified to the setting of the Grade II* listed Waldrige Manor. Neutral weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

Archaeological impacts

- Policy BE1 – Heritage assets

- 5.49 Policy BE1 of the VALP (2021) requires archaeological evaluations for any proposals related to or impacting on a heritage asset and/or possible archaeological site.
- 5.50 As with the previous proposal, the application is supported by a heritage desk-based assessment which highlights evidence of Roman activity in the wider area and discusses the well-preserved medieval landscape within which the application site lies. The report concludes that the development area would have lain within the open agricultural fields of the surrounding settlements during the medieval periods.
- 5.51 Whilst the northern and southern sections of the application area have remnants of medieval ridge and furrow, which supports the conclusions of the report, these earthworks are not as prevalent within the central area, closest to the Scheduled Monument of Waldrige Manor, and it is possible that settlement associated with the manor may continue into these areas. This area is also shown on the 1803 Enclosure Map as containing a homestead. In addition, the lack of development in the wider landscape around the application site means that there is a limited understanding of the potential for pre medieval archaeological remains to be present.

- 5.52 It is considered likely that the medieval landscape may overlie earlier landscapes a Romano-British rural landscape of dispersed farmsteads, settlements and associated field systems. As discussed in the Heritage Desk-based Assessment, excavations in advance of a development at Bumpers Farm to the south of the application area recorded a previously unknown late Roman farmstead. This farmstead was located on the higher ground, such as the central eastern fields of the current application area. It is therefore considered likely that whilst there is little known or recorded archaeology within the application area, that the potential for hitherto unknown remains is high.
- 5.53 The construction of the proposed solar farm has the potential to impact on any archaeological deposits present within the site. Particularly in light of the nearby Scheduled Monument, there would be an assumption of preservation in situ of any significant remains identified. Section 4 of the Design and Access Statement submitted as part of the application (ref P21-0188) discusses the desire of the applicant to incorporate sufficient design flexibility into the proposed development. This is welcomed to allow for preservation in situ of any significant archaeology identified within the site.
- 5.54 If planning permission is granted, it has the potential to harm a heritage asset's significance without condition. Should the application be considered acceptable, a condition would be required securing appropriate investigation, recording, publication and archiving of the results in conformity with NPPF. Neutral weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

Effect on Amenity

- Policy BE3 Protection of the amenity of residents

- 5.55 Policy BE3 of the VALP (2021) notes planning permission will not be granted where a proposed development would harm the amenity of existing residents.
- 5.56 The nearest properties to the solar farm development are Waldrige Manor, the property at Lower Waldrige.
- 5.57 As with the previous proposal, the application proposal retains a field buffer between existing residential dwellings and the proposed solar farm. The scheme proposes landscape mitigation which will, in time provide effective screening to offer protection to the existing occupiers.
- 5.58 The site is largely obscured from localised views by the height of the panels, and the screening mitigation will in time reduce the visual impact. If permission is granted, a condition would be attached requiring no lighting to be permitted on the site. The proposal would not result in harm to the amenities of neighbouring occupiers to which neutral weight is attributed.

Noise Impacts

- 5.59 Any construction noise and the impact of construction traffic on residents neighbouring the site will be time limited to the construction phase of the development . It is unlikely that

noise from the plant and machinery during operation of a solar farm would be considered as a significant problem, due to its static nature.

- 5.60 Noise generating equipment will be present in the substation and inverter stations. Should the application be considered acceptable, final details of the site layout will be required to ensure the nearest residential properties are not impacted by the development in terms of noise.

Highways and Access

- Policy T4 Capacity of the transport network to deliver development
- Policy T5 Delivering transport in new development
- Policy T6 Vehicle parking

- 5.61 Policy T4 of the VALP (2021) states new development will be permitted where there is evidence that there is sufficient capacity in the transport network to accommodate the increase in travel demand as a result of the development. Paragraph 111 is clear that ‘development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on the highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the highway would be severe.’
- 5.62 As with the previous scheme the highway and access considerations remain similar and therefore the assessment reflects the comments made in the previous case officer report. The development would generate minimal traffic once the solar farm is constructed. However, during the construction of the solar farm, a significant number of HGV movements would be anticipated, which is the primary consideration from the Highway Authority’s perspective. The application submitted includes a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) which deals with the impact of the construction period.
- 5.63 The site is to be located off Owlswick Road, Ford. Two access points off Owlsick Road are to be used during the construction phase: an existing agricultural access to the north east of the site and a new access further south. Once the site is constructed and operational, an additional access is proposed off the A4129.
- 5.64 The construction period is estimated to last approximately 4 months with approximately 650 HGV movements over this period in total. Breaking this down, this equates to approximately 8 HGV visits per day. The Highways Authority is satisfied that this level of HGV movements would not have a material impact on the capacity of the local highway network.
- 5.65 There are also expected to be additional movements associated with construction staff members, however this would be managed and take place over a limited period. The Highways Authority does not consider the vehicular movements associated with staff members to have a material impact on the local highway network.
- 5.66 With regards to the two construction accesses onto Owlswick Road, the Highways Authority is satisfied that both of these access points would benefit from an adequate level of visibility commensurate with the speed limit in force subject to a planning condition if

the application is considered acceptable.

- 5.67 The CTMP also includes a routing plan showing that these construction vehicles would travel to the site from the south via the A4010 and the links further afield to the M40, A413 and A41. This route appears to be the most logical route to and from the site and avoids the lower bridge on Grove Lane.
- 5.68 Tracking has been supplied of a 15.4m long HGV and shows that the largest HGV's expected to visit the site could manoeuvre into the site via the construction accesses without over running any kerb lines or over running the opposite lane of the carriageway.
- 5.69 Once operational the site will be subject to 'approximately three or four visits to the site per week by 4x4 or small van'. These vehicles would access the site via a new access onto the A4129. Given its classification as an A class road, and the likely vehicle speeds this access should be provided with visibility splays of 2.4m x 215m in line with the guidance found in DMRB, and this has been shown on the submitted plans. The Highways Authority is satisfied with the proposal subject to condition. Neutral weight is attributed to this.

Ecology

- Policy NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity
 - Policy NE2 - River streams and corridors
- 5.70 In terms of biodiversity and ecology 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).
- 5.71 Policy NE1 of the VALP (2021) states that a net gain in biodiversity on minor and major developments will be sought by protecting, managing, enhancing and extending existing biodiversity resources, and by creating new biodiversity resources.
- 5.72 With the previous proposal concern was raised regarding the loss of 0.34ha loss of priority habitat with no clear understanding of how this loss could be compensated in an already established high quality priority habitat. As a consequence, the then submitted ecological report and amendments failed to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate biodiversity net gain and this formed a reason for refusal.
- 5.73 The submitted ecology reports accompanying this application have been considered by the ecology officer. This included further bird surveys. As a result, the proposal has omitted the placing of solar panels and excluded public access to an area that is proposed to be used as skylark habitat mitigation and compensation area. The final details of which will be secured by way of a condition.
- 5.74 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is covered within the Ecology Solutions BNG document which includes the buffer adjacent to the Local Wildlife site encompassing the skylark plot. This report and its accompanying appendices details how the scheme will generate the BNG

required under local and national planning policy.

- 5.75 The report identifies an overall BNG in both habitat and Hedge (linear) units to be positive. These gains will need to be secured through the conditioning of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP). The LEMP is expected to establish the principles of how the gains will be delivered on site. It will include management prescriptions and monitoring to ensure the measures described are achieved. Subject to the inclusion of the recommended conditions, the proposal would meet the requirements of Policy NE1 of the VALP. Neutral weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

Flood risk and drainage

- Policy I4 Flooding
- Policy Water resources and wastewater infrastructure

- 5.76 Policy I4 of the VALP (2021) require all development requiring a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) to assess all sources and forms of flooding and adhere to the advice in the latest version of the SFRA and meet the criteria set out in the Policy.
- 5.77 Unlike the previous proposal the site is entirely within Flood Zone 1 and this has resulted in the removal of the previous underground service crossing below the bed of the main river. Previously the Environment Agency raised an objection because the Flood Risk Assessment did not adequately assess the flood risk posed by the original proposal development.
- 5.78 In terms of Surface Water Flood Risk the map provided by the Environment Agency shows that most of the site lies in an area at very low risk of surface water flooding. The FRA sets out that the DNO substation lies in an area of low risk, but this will be mitigated by raising the floor level of the structure by 300mm. Control equipment will be located outside of areas of surface water flood risk, and the solar arrays, security fencing and access tracks may be in areas of low risk. The FRA suggests that the solar arrays will not result in a material increase in surface water runoff because water can filter through gaps between the panels before it disperses into the ground and therefore water does not run off into one area. The area around the solar arrays will be permanently grassed therefore reducing the risk of channelised flows. Where parts of the site area are developed with impermeable surfaces, e.g. inverters, substations etc. flows will be collected within a formalised drainage system, which may require attenuation with a controlled outflow before discharge to an identified discharge location or soakaway (where ground conditions allow). On this basis, no objections have been raised by the LLFA subject to the inclusion of the recommended conditions. Neutral weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

Agricultural Land Quality

- Policy NE7 – Best and most versatile agricultural land

- 5.79 Policy NE7 of the VALP (2021) seeks to protect the best and most versatile farmland for the longer term. The Natural England Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) defines the Best and

Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land as grade 1, 2 and 3a with lower grade land at 3b, and 4, defined by wetness and gradient of the land. Development of BMV land (1,2 and 3a) should be avoided and development directed towards land of lower grades 3b and 4.

- 5.80 As with the previous proposal, the majority of the development does not result in the loss of BMV agricultural land, using land of lower grade agricultural quality (3b). This proposal is consistent with the previous one where there are four fields that contain BMV agricultural land which is approximately 5.6ha (9% of the site). As with the previous proposal it will result in the loss of least productive agricultural land across the majority of the site with a small loss of BMV agricultural land. The policy requires that development is directed towards lower quality land which is consistent with the majority of the proposal. However, there is a small loss of BMV land but the benefits of the solar farm in supplying renewable energy outweighs this loss. Neutral weight is attributed to this in the planning balance.

Mineral Safeguarding

- Policy 1 – Safeguarding of Minerals Resources

- 5.81 With the previous proposal a significant part of the site fell within the Minerals Safeguarding Area and the proposal was not supported by a Minerals Assessment. This led to a reason for refusal because the previous development failed to demonstrate it would not sterilise mineral resources at the site. With the revised application the reduction in site area means that only a slither of the site lies within a minerals safeguarded area. Given the limited area affected and the temporary nature of the proposal, it is concluded that the proposal would not sterilise minerals resource on site. Furthermore, the development is temporary and therefore it would not sterilise minerals resource at this site. The assessment meets the requirements of Policy 1 (Safeguarding of Mineral Resources) of the BMWLP. Neutral weight is attributed this in the planning balance.

6.0 Weighing and balancing of issues / Overall Assessment

- 6.1 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:
- a) Provision of the development plan insofar as they are material,
 - b) Any local finance considerations, so far as they are material to the application (such as CIL if applicable), and,
 - c) Any other material considerations
- 6.2 The economic, social and environmental roles for the planning system, which derive from the three dimensions to sustainable development in the NPPF, require in this case that a balancing exercise be made to weigh the benefits of the proposed solar panels against

the identified harm.

6.3 The following matters, as detailed in the report must be taken into consideration:

Positive weight:

- Economic and social benefits of energy security (very significant weight)
- Provision of renewable energy (very significant weight)

Neutral weight:

- Flooding/sustainable drainage
- Minerals safeguarding
- Highways
- Layout and design
- Residential Amenity
- Archaeology
- Heritage
- Loss of agricultural land
- Biodiversity net gain
- Public Rights of Way

Negative weight

- Landscape issues:
 - Landscape character (major adverse harm)
 - Landscape and visual amenity of rights of way (moderate adverse harm)
 - Landscape – impact on the setting of the Chiltern Hills AONB (moderate adverse harm)
 - Cumulative effect upon landscape character and sequential views (moderate adverse harm)

Taken as a whole the impact on the landscape in terms of character, visual harm to users of the rights of way, setting of the Chiltern Hills AONB and the cumulative impact of similar type development is taken to be significant negative weight.

6.4 This proposal follows a refusal under ref: 21/02310/APP, and as detailed in the report seeks to address the previous reasons for refusal. As a result, the site area has reduced with the northern portion of the site excluded, the height of the panels has been reduced and the proposal is largely confined to existing field boundaries. This proposal avoids the minerals safeguarding area and reduction in site area means that the development no longer falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3. However, while there remains significant harm to

the landscape the degree of harm has to be carefully balanced against the benefits of the proposal.

- 6.5 The proposed development would make a significant contribution to energy security, renewable energy targets and towards achieving net carbon zero. The scheme will contribute positively towards the provision of Renewable Energy to meet the National aims of reducing Greenhouse gasses and towards the strategic commitment of Buckinghamshire Council towards Net Zero carbon energy production by 2050. The proposal would contribute to the local economy and provide energy security benefits. The proposal has been improved in so far as it is policy compliant in respect of most of the relevant policies. These benefits are given significant weight in favour of the development. The benefits of the proposal must be weighed against the harm identified in the report namely to the impact on the landscape character, the visual amenity of the footpaths crossing through the site and cumulative impacts, particularly when viewed from the Chiltern Hills AONB. The landscape harm, may in part, be mitigated by the proposed soft landscaping and the generous corridors being provided to the PRoW which cross the site. While this does amount to significant weight this is slightly moderated by the fact that nature of the site is 'temporary' albeit 40 years which is in itself a significant period of time. However, some consideration must be given to the fact that land will revert back to its former agricultural use once no longer required for the production of renewable energy.
- 6.6 Subject to suitable conditions, the proposal would have a neutral impact in terms of transport, design, residential amenity, agricultural land quality, ecology, flooding and drainage and the historic environment.
- 6.7 Whilst the landscaping harm is acknowledged, there are significant benefits which arise from the scheme in respect of renewable energy, the contribution the scheme would make towards net zero carbon targets and energy security.
- 6.8 The application has been assessed against the development plan as a whole and all relevant material considerations. It is recognised that the proposal would result in some harm, most notably in respect of landscape effects. However, the substantial benefits arising from this proposal would outweigh the harm and overall, the proposed solar farm would accord with the broader objectives of the development plan.

7.0 Recommendation

- 7.1 This application is being recommended for approval subject to the condition proposed and any amendments and additional conditions considered necessary.
1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date on which this permission is granted.

Reason: The time limit condition is imposed in order to comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be for a temporary period only to expire 40 years after the date of first commercial export of electricity to the grid (“the date of first export”). Written confirmation of the date of first export shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority within one month after the event.

Reason: In order to protect the visual amenity and character of the surrounding countryside and to ensure the development only exists for the lifetime of the development in accordance with policies C3, NE1, NE4, NE8, BE1 and BE2 of the VALP (2021).

3. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans/details:

- SP-01 Rev. 03 – Site Location Plan
- PLE-01 Rev. 18 – Indicative Layout Plan
- DZ-01 Rev. 16 – Ilmer Development Zone Plan
- SD-01 Rev. 02 – DNO Substation Elevations and Dimensions Plan
- SD-02 Rev. 02 – Customer Substation Elevations and Dimensions Plan
- SD-03 Rev. 01 – Indicative CCTV Posts
- SD-04 Rev.02 – Security Fence and CCTV Detail
- SD-06 Rev. 01 – Access Track Cross Section
- SD-07 Rev. 01 – Indicative Deer Fence
- SD-08 Rev. 02 – Inverter Elevations and Dimensions Plan
- SD-15 Rev. 01 – Customer Substation Floor Plan
- SD-16 Rev. 01- Inverter Floor Plan
- SD-18 Rev. 02 – Footpath Cross Section
- P21-0188 Rev. G – Landscape Strategy

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with the principles agreed in the approved plans and in the interests of proper planning.

4. Notwithstanding the approved plans hereby approved in Condition 3, no development shall take place until full details of the final locations, design, finishes and materials including details of non chrome, non reflective material to be used for the panel arrays, inverters, substation control building, substations, CCTV cameras, fencing any other structure required for the operation of the site as solar farm shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Subsequently the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in a manner which minimises the visual

impact on the character of the rural area and to comply with policies BE2, NE4, NE1, NE2, NE8, BE3 of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan and the advice within the National Planning Policy Framework.

5. No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, have undertaken a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the planning authority.

Reason: The reason for this pre-start condition is to record or safeguard any archaeological evidence that may be present at the site prior to construction to comply policy BE1 of VALP and the advice within the NPPF.

6. No development shall take place, unless a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) is submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Local Highway Authority, and the approved CTMP shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The CTMP shall include the following details:
 - The routing of construction vehicles, including temporary directional signage where appropriate.
 - Co-ordination and management of deliveries to avoid multiple deliveries at the same time and spread HGV movements.
 - Delivery hours outside of highway network peak periods.
 - Traffic management within the site to include signage, speed limits, banksmen, and internal access track widths / passing places.
 - The parking of vehicles of site personnel, operatives, and visitors off the highway.
 - Construction Staff Travel Plan.
 - Loading and unloading of plant and materials and storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development off the highway.
 - The erection and maintenance of security hoarding.
 - Wheel-washing facilities.
 - Before and after construction condition surveys of the highway and a commitment to rectify and repair any damage caused.

Reason: The reason for this pre-start condition is to minimise danger and inconvenience to highway users prior to construction.

7. No development shall take place (including demolition, ground works, vegetation clearance) until a construction environmental management plan (CEMP: Biodiversity) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The CEMP (Biodiversity) shall include the following.
 - a) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities.
 - b) Identification of “biodiversity protection zones”.

- c) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction (may be provided as a set of method statements).
- d) The location and timing of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features.
- e) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.
- f) Responsible persons and lines of communication.
- g) The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) or similarly competent person.
- h) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs. The approved CEMP shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: The reason for this pre start condition is to ensure the site is appropriately planned and laid out in the interests of improving biodiversity within Buckinghamshire and to secure an appropriate buffer adjacent to the watercourse and provide appropriate biodiversity net gain in accordance with policies NE1 and NE2 of VALP and the advice within the NPPF.

8. No development shall take place until, a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) shall be submitted to, and be approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The content of the LEMP shall include:
- a) Description and evaluation of features to be managed.
 - b) Ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management.
 - c) Aims and objectives of management.
 - d) Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives.
 - e) Prescriptions for management actions.
 - f) Preparation of a work schedule (including an annual work plan capable of being rolled forward over a five-year period).
 - g) Details of the body or organization responsible for implementation of the plan.
 - h) Ongoing monitoring and remedial measures.

The LEMP shall also include details of the legal and funding mechanism by which the long-term implementation of the plan will be secured by the developer with the management body responsible for its delivery. The plan shall also set out (where the results from monitoring show that conservation aims and objectives of the LEMP are not being met) how contingencies or remedial action will be identified, agreed, and implemented so that the development still delivers the fully functioning biodiversity objectives of the originally approved scheme.

The approved plan will be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: The reason for this pre start condition is to ensure the site is appropriately planned and laid out in the interests of improving biodiversity within Buckinghamshire and to secure

an appropriate buffer adjacent to the watercourse and provide appropriate biodiversity net gain in accordance with policies NE1 and NE2 of VALP and the advice within the NPPF.

9. The development shall be implemented in accordance with the agreed measures detailed in the Ecological Appraisal and ecological addendum note from Ecology Solutions dated March 2022 and August 2022.

Reason: To ensure that measures are undertaken in accordance with submitted plans for the benefit of important wildlife in accordance with Policy NE1 of the VALP (2021) and the advice within the NPPF.

10. No development shall take place, until a surface water drainage scheme for the site, of the hydrological and hydro-geological context of the development, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details before the development is completed. The scheme shall also include:

- Infiltration rate testing in accordance with BRE Digest 365 where infiltration components are proposed
- Siting solar arrays along ground contours (wherever possible) such that water flow between rows is dispersed evenly beneath them
- Incorporating bunds, filter drains or other measures to interrupt flows of water between rows of solar arrays to disperse water flows over the surface and promote infiltration into the soils.
- Incorporating wide grassed filter strips at the downstream side of blocks of solar arrays and maintaining the grass at a long length to interrupt water flows and promote infiltration.
- Incorporating gravel filled filter drains or swales at the downstream side of blocks of solar arrays to help infiltrate run-off (where ground conditions allow).
- Calculations to demonstrate that the proposed drainage system serving the substation can contain up to the 1 in 30 storm event without flooding. Any onsite flooding between the 1 in 30 and the 1 in 100 plus climate change storm event should be safely contained on site.
- Full construction details of all SuDS and drainage components and access tracks
- Details of proposed overland flood flow routes in the event of system exceedance or failure, with demonstration that such flows can be appropriately managed on site without increasing flood risk to occupants, or to adjacent or downstream sites.
- Detailed drainage layout with pipe numbers, gradients and pipe sizes complete, together with storage volumes of all SuDS components and details of any offsite connections

Reason: The reason for this pre-start condition is to ensure that a sustainable drainage strategy has been agreed prior to construction in accordance with Paragraph 163 of the

National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that there is a satisfactory solution to managing flood risk.

11. No development shall take place, until a “whole-life” maintenance plan for the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan shall set out how and when to maintain the full drainage system (e.g. a maintenance schedule for each drainage/SuDS component, along with details of landscape management/maintenance for the land surrounding the solar panels) during and following construction, with details of who is to be responsible for carrying out the maintenance. The plan shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: The reason for this being a pre-start condition is to ensure that maintenance arrangements have been arranged and agreed before any works commence on site that might otherwise be left unaccounted for.

12. Prior to commencement of the development, a clear width between hedges or fences of at least 13m shall be provided through which walkers can pass and re-pass along Footpaths DFU/27/1 and DFU/30/1 in the north and central parts of the site respectively, and at least 10m along Footpath ASA/5/2. These widths shall be provided at all times following commencement of the development.

Reason: The reason for this pre-start condition is to ensure the appropriate widths are factored into the proposal before any development commences on site and to ensure the openness and general amenity of footpaths through the solar farm remains in accordance with Policy C4 of the VALP (2021).

13. Prior to above ground works details of hard and soft landscape works (“the landscaping scheme”) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The landscaping scheme shall include a statement setting out the design and mitigation objectives and how these will be delivered. Soft landscape works shall include but not be limited to:

- planting plans (including mixed native hedging)
- written specifications (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment)
- schedules of plants noting species, plant supply sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate
- implementation programme (including phasing of work where relevant)
- details of additional hedgerow planting at the entrance to the site

The scheme shall be implemented no later than by the end of the first planting season following the date of first export and thereafter be maintained in accordance with the approved scheme. In the event of any of the trees, shrubs or hedges so planted dying or being seriously damaged or destroyed within 5 years of the completion of the

development, a new tree or shrub or equivalent number of trees or shrubs, of a species first approved by the Local Planning Authority, shall be planted and properly maintained in a position or positions first approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in a manner which minimises the visual impact on the character of the rural area and to comply with policies BE2, NE4, NE1, NE2, NE8, BE3 of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan and the advice within the National Planning Policy Framework.

14. Prior to the first operation of the development (first export of electricity to the grid), a maintenance schedule and a long term management plan, for the soft landscaping works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Landscape Management Plan shall include:

- a) Details of long-term design principles and objectives
- b) Management responsibilities, maintenance schedules and replacement provisions for existing retained landscape features and any landscape to be implemented as part of the approved landscape scheme.
- c) Summary plan detailing different management procedures for the types of landscape on site. The schedule and plan shall be implemented in accordance with the agreed programme.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in a manner which minimises the visual impact on the character of the rural area and to comply with policies BE2, NE4, NE1, NE2, NE8, BE3 of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan and the advice within the National Planning Policy Framework.

15. At the end of the period of 40 years from the date of grid connection, the use hereby permitted shall cease and all materials and equipment brought on the land in connection with the use permitted shall be removed and the land restored to its previous state (greenfield, agricultural land) or as otherwise agreed, in accordance with details that have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the decommissioning works taking place. Details shall include a method statement and timetable for the dismantling and removal of the solar pv development and of the associated above ground works and foundations to a depth of at least one meter below ground; and the details shall include a method statement, a traffic management plan, and a timetable for any necessary restoration works following removal of the solar pv development. The scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order to protect the visual amenity and character of the surrounding countryside and to ensure the development only exists for the lifetime of the development in accordance with policies C3, NE1, NE4, NE8, BE1 and BE2 of the VALP (2021).

16. If within the 40 year period the solar pv development does not generate any electricity to the national grid for more than 6 months in a continuous period of 12 months, then details of a scheme, to repair or remove the solar pv development and all associated infrastructure, buildings, equipment and access points, shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for its written approval within 3 months of the end of that 12 month period.

If removal of the development is required, all development and associated equipment, infrastructure and access shall be removed within 12 months of the details being approved and the details shall include a method statement and timetable for the dismantling and removal of the solar pv development and of the associated above ground works and foundations to a depth of at least one meter below ground; and the details shall include a method statement, a traffic management plan, and a timetable for any necessary restoration works following removal of the solar pv development. The scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To minimise any detriment to the visual amenity of the surrounding area and ensure decommissioning works do not have adverse highway or amenity impacts in accordance with in accordance with policies C3, NE1, NE4, NE8, BE1, BE2 and T5 of the VALP (2021).

17. Alongside the scheme for decommissioning the site, an ecological assessment report detailing site recommendations for the site post decommissioning will be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Within 12 months of the approved details, the site will thereafter only be decommissioned in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To safeguard the future ecological value of the application site subsequent to decommissioning.

18. No external lighting or CCTV cameras other than those shown on the approved plans shall be installed during the operation of the site as a solar PV facility without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the area, and to enable the Local Planning Authority to consider issues of light pollution and amenity of local residents at the appropriate time in accordance with policies BE2, NE1, NE4, NE8 of the VALP (2021).

19. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country planning (General Permitted development) Order 2015 (As amended) no fixed plant or machinery, cabling (over ground), buildings structures and erections, fences or private ways shall be erected, extended, installed or rearranged without prior permission from the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, it is appropriate to maintain control of development proposals that may have an impact on visual amenities or landscape and ecological interests of the countryside in accordance with policies C3, NE1, NE4, NE8, BE1, BE2, and T5 of the VALP (2021).

20. All temporary construction yards and temporary access tracks required to provide temporary storage of materials, parking and access in conjunction with the development shall be removed within three months of the completion of the construction works of the development hereby approved.

All temporary access tracks required to provide temporary storage of materials, parking and access in conjunction with the decommissioning of the site shall be removed and the land shall be restored to its former condition within three months of the cessation of the scheme.

Reason: To protect the character, appearance and quality of the countryside in which the development is positioned in accordance with policies C3, NE1, NE4, NE8, BE1, BE2, and T5 of the VALP (2021).

21. Should any unexpected contamination of soil or groundwater be discovered during development of the site, the Local Planning Authority should be contacted immediately. Site activities within that sub-phase or part thereof, should be temporarily suspended until such time as a procedure for addressing any such unexpected contamination, within that sub-phase or part thereof, is agreed upon with the Local Planning Authority or other regulating bodies.

Reason: In the interest of human health in accordance with Policy NE5 of the VALP (2021).

22. No development shall take place until visibility splays have been provided on both sides of the access onto Owlswick Road between a 2.4m point along the centre line of the access measured from the edge of the carriageway and a 151 metres point along the edge of the carriageway measured from the intersection of the centre line of the access and visibility splays have been provided on both sides of the access onto the A4129 between a 2.4m point along the centre line of the access measured from the edge of the carriageway and a 215m point along the edge of the carriageway measured from the intersection of the centre line of the access. The area contained within the splays shall be kept free of any obstruction exceeding 0.6 metres in height above the nearside channel level of the carriageway. The new means of access shall be sited and laid out in accordance with the approved drawing and constructed in accordance with the Buckinghamshire Council guide note "Commercial Vehicular Access Within the Public Highway".

Reason: The reason for this pre-start condition is to ensure that the design factors in safe and appropriate access off A4129 in order to minimise danger, obstruction and inconvenience to users of the adjoining highway in accordance with Policy T4 and T5 of the VALP (2021).

23. The scheme for parking and manoeuvring indicated on the submitted plans shall be laid out prior to the initial occupation of the development hereby permitted and that area shall not thereafter be used for any other purpose.

Reason: To enable vehicles to draw off, park and turn clear of the highway to minimise danger, obstruction and inconvenience to users of the adjoining highway.

Informatives

1. The applicant is advised that the highway access works will need to be constructed under a Section 184 of the Highways Act legal agreement. This agreement must be obtained from the Highway Authority before any works are carried out on any footway, carriageway, verge or other land forming part of the highway. A minimum period of 8 weeks is required to process the agreement following the receipt by the Highway Authority of a written request. Please contact the Highways Development Management Delivery Team via: highwaysdm@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
2. The applicant is advised that temporary signs on the highway and works to repair / rectify highway damage will require a highway license. Please contact the Transport for Buckinghamshire Streetworks Team via: streetworkslicences@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
3. No vehicles associated with the building operations on the development site shall be parked on the public highway so as to cause an obstruction. Any such wilful obstruction is an offence under S137 of the Highways Act 1980.
4. It is an offence under S151 of the Highways Act 1980 for vehicles leaving the development site to carry mud onto the public highway. Facilities should therefore be provided and used on the development site for cleaning the wheels of vehicles before they leave the site.
5. Cadent Gas Ltd own and operate the gas infrastructure within the area of your development. Prior to carrying out works, please register on www.linesearchbeforeudig.co.uk to submit details of the planned works for review, ensuring requirements are adhered to.

APPENDIX A: Consultation Responses and Representations

Councillor Comments

Cllr Susan Lewin

As much as I support solar farms, I tend to agree with the comments that brownfield sites are preferable to productive farmland.

Parish/Town Council Comments

Aston Sandford Parish Council

1. The objections raised in our reply to the original proposal still stand in full.
2. The reduction in area of land being used, whilst still having the same number of panels in total, indicates that the panels will be more closely packed in this revised proposal. This is therefore likely to make the solar farm more visible from the AONB as it will appear as a more solid mass of panels with less space between the rows of panels.
3. The addition of Callies Solar Farm will mean there will be well over 100 MW of solar power generation in a very localised area and as such should be called in as a National Infrastructure project. We therefore continue to object to this project.

Aston Sandford Parish Council – September 2022

I attach the response from Aston Sandford regarding the above application and would point out that our OBJECTION to this plan has not changed from the reply we sent on 23/4/2022. I also attach further background concerning emails from the applicant Jeremy Elgin and the reply sent to him on this matter.

Dinton Upon Ford Parish Council

The parish council OBJECTS/OPPOSES this application on several grounds. Some of these are akin to those expressed in regard to a rejected application for a wind turbine on the same site (12/01806).

This was also refused, again, by the Planning Department on application 21/02310/APP Owlswick Road, Ford - Construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure.

1) Siting

The development of a solar farm in an area of the Vale of Aylesbury would be detrimental to the Area of Attractive Landscape. The land is agricultural in usage and of grade 3a,3b and some grade 2. This is at odds to government policy recommending usage of brownfield sites for solar farms. The proposed site seems to have been largely chosen on the availability of an electricity substation

adjacent to the A4129 Rd. It is already alongside a solar farm at Bumpers farm. A further proposal at Whirlbush farm has been agreed, and if Callies Solar Farm was approved it would create a very large area of solar farms and occupy an area of true countryside and agricultural land thus turning it into an industrial site.

2) Visual Impact

The proposal in this application is within proximity to several Conservation Areas and to the Chiltern ANOB and thus be clearly visible from the Chiltern Ridge and not hidden by trees and hedges as claimed.

The nature of the solar farm with Solar panels 3 metres high and fencing along foot paths (3) of up to two metres high with CCTV and alert systems would be intrusive. The changes to PROW s are not in keeping with the countryside and will not enhance the biodiversity of the area.

3) Construction and decommissioning

The claim is that the disruption to the villages and the small roads of the area would be carefully managed. Our experience of the impact of building HS2 suggests otherwise, as does the extra traffic diverting around Aylesbury. The bussing in of 100 construction workers would not improve this traffic problem Although the term of this scheme is 40 years there is published evidence to suggest that decommissioning, contamination and restoration of the land scape is extremely difficult to achieve without harm to the environment and the land.

4) Impact on Heritage sites The National heritage sites at Waldridge Manor, Aston Mullins, Aston Sandford and Ford are long recognised and the impact will be as great as expressed by the previous decisions about a wind turbine on the same site made by the Secretary of State in rejecting an appeal. Ridge and furrow fields of the immediate area have been along appreciated features and represent an ancient association to the past agricultural usage. Despite the comments made in the application an applicant environmental impact assessment (EIA) is needed.

This is a potentially large scheme if considered in the context of the existing Bumpers farm and the Whirlbush farm scheme. For this reason alone the application should be considered by the strategic planning committee.

We would strongly ask that this application is rejected and are prepared to speak to our objections when it is called in to committee We will send a representative to a Development Control Meeting to oppose this application and also Call In this application.

Consultation Responses

Archaeology Officer

The construction of the proposed solar farm has the potential to impact on any archaeological deposits present within the site. Particularly in light of the nearby Scheduled Monument, there would be an assumption of preservation in situ of any significant remains identified. We note Section 4 of the Design & Access Statement submitted as part of the application (ref P21-0188) which discusses the desire of the applicant to incorporate sufficient design flexibility into the proposed development. We welcome this approach so to allow for preservation in situ of any significant archaeology identified within the site. If planning permission is granted for this

development then it may harm a heritage asset's significance so a condition should be applied to require the developer to secure appropriate investigation, recording, publication and archiving of the results in conformity with NPPF paragraph 205. With reference to the NPPF we therefore recommend that any consent granted for this development should be subject to condition.

Ecology Officer

The measures detailed within the submitted reports including the Addendum note from August 2022 are now considered to be acceptable and the report judged to be an accurate account of the ecological features present on site at the time of the assessments. A series of mitigation and protection measures are set out within the reports. The mitigation and enhancement measures detailed within the ecology reports can be secured through conditioning those points detailed within these documents. Construction impacts for the proposed development will need to be detailed within a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), to be secured via a condition Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is covered within the Ecology Solutions BNG document which now considers the buffer adjacent to the Local Wildlife site encompassing the skylark plot. This report and its accompanying appendices details how the scheme will generate the BNG required under local and national planning policy. The report identifies an overall BNG in both habitat and Hedge (linear) units to be positive. These gains will need to be secured through the conditioning of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP). This document will establish the principles of how the gains will be established on site, management prescriptions, and monitoring to ensure the measures described achieve the thresholds set out.

Environmental Health Officer

There are no environmental health objections to this application.

Highways Authority

The site is to be located off Owlswick Road, Ford. One new access point off Owlswick Road is to be used during the construction phase, which is a new access to the north east of the site. Once the site has been constructed and is operational an additional access is proposed off the A4129, and both accesses will be utilised. The applicant has essentially removed the whole northern parcel of land from the previous application as well as the cable linking to the southern parcel. The Highways Authority can confirm that this arrangement would be acceptable.

With regards to the construction access onto Owlswick Road, the Highways Authority is satisfied that this access would benefit from an adequate level of visibility commensurate with the speed limit in force, and this is something that can be secured by way of condition.

Landscape Officer

VISUAL IMPACT ISSUE 1 – ADVERSE EFFECTS ON PROW RUNNING THROUGH SITE (DFU/30/1, ASA/5/2 and DFU/27/1).

Footpath users moving through the site south and/or eastwards, currently experience unhindered views over wide open, agricultural landscape and up towards the Chilterns AONB. This would change to direct, close views over large scale PV development. The LVIA confirms effects would be MAJOR ADVERSE on these PROW users. Proposed mitigation comprises enclosing these footpaths

on both sides with hedgerows in order to eventually screen views of the directly adjacent solar panels, creating an enclosed, green corridor. Once established, this hedgerow planting would substantially change the experience of the PRoW user, curtailing open views over the surrounding landscape, and obscuring longer views up towards the Chilterns AONB. The proposed mitigation is inappropriate and the long term effect would be MODERATE ADVERSE

ISSUE 2 – ADVERSE EFFECTS ON PROW NEAR THE SITE, INCLUDING FROM WALDRIDGE MANOR (DFU/27/2)

Although many field boundaries benefit from tall hedgerows, they are often tall because they have not been managed regularly. The LVIA over relies on these hedgerows to provide total screening of the site from surrounding PRoW. In reality, many of them have become tall but very gappy. There are a number of places where this is the case, including the southwest boundary of Field 4 (MBLA Fig.1). Users moving northwest along PRoW DFU/27/2 from Waldrige Manor will be able to see through the gappy hedgerow towards PV development in the next field, most especially in winter. This will have an adverse effect on PRoW users who currently experience walking through an open, agricultural landscape with no modern features, to one where industrial PV development is visible in adjacent fields. Mitigation only proposes maintaining existing hedgerows to 3m height, but no additional inter-planting is proposed, so gaps will remain. The long term adverse effect on surrounding PRoW users would be MODERATE ADVERSE.

ISSUE 3 - ADVERSE EFFECTS ON PROW TO NORTH OF SITE (DFU/42/2, DFU/34/1, DFU/44/1, DFU/53/3, DFU/53/2 and DFU/37/2)

The LVIA fails to provide any assessment from the footpaths between Ford village and the mixed plantation by Moreton Farm. It is not agreed that the assessment from viewpoint 3 is adequate to cover these issues. That area is picked up in the ZTV and is visible from the development site (VP 6). Users currently experience unhindered views, southwards over open, undeveloped landscape. The development has the potential to intrude into these views, facilitating views over a large extent of solar farm development. The potential long term adverse effect on these PRoW users would be MODERATE ADVERSE.

ISSUE 4 – ADVERSE EFFECT ON VIEWS FROM CHILTERN AONB

(VP 4 from Whiteleaf Cross) Contrary to the assertion in the LVIA, the existing PV development at Bumpers Farm is clearly discernible from this viewpoint even in summer with full leaf cover. It is located very close to the proposed PV development at Callie's Farm and is a third of the size of it. Therefore the assertion that the proposed development will have a negligible visual effect is counter-intuitive. In contrast to Bumpers Farm and the recently permitted Whirlbush Farm PV development, the proposed development would be viewed side on from this direction, increasing its visual impact. Although the spread of development has been reduced since the previous application, it remains a sprawling layout and is viewed side on from this sensitive viewpoint. It will introduce a sizable, industrial feature into an otherwise open and expansive agricultural landscape. The long term adverse effect would be MODERATE ADVERSE.

ISSUE 5 – COMBINED CUMULATIVE ADVERSE EFFECTS ON VIEWS FROM CHILTERN AONB (VP 4 from Whiteleaf Cross) Viewers currently experience panoramic views over wide, open agricultural

landscape of the vale. The landscape beyond the Princes Risborough settlement (even after the expansion area is developed) is a large scale area of open countryside, with some isolated areas of settlement/development within it. Bumpers Farm PV development currently forms a discernible feature in this view, even in summer with full leaf cover. The combined view of Bumpers Farm solar farm, the entire length of Callies Farm solar farm along with the recently permitted Whirlbush PV development (which will in the short term visually link Bumpers Farm and Callies Farm developments together from this direction), will result in a considerable new area of industrial development within the currently open and expansive agricultural landscape. This will be particularly noticeable when the deciduous hedgerow and scattered trees will have lost their foliage (6 months of the year).

The Whirlbush Farm development includes a strong planting buffer along the south-eastern boundaries which will reduce its visual impact over time. The Callies Farm proposal has been reduced in size from the previous application. However, the combined cumulative, long term adverse effect on views from the AONB would be MODERATE ADVERSE.

ISSUE 6 – SEQUENTIAL CUMULATIVE EFFECT ON LOCALLY PROMOTED PROW Repeated views of the PV developments will be experienced by footpath users on the Outer Aylesbury Way long distance footpath (ASA/5/1) also identified as part of the Wychert Way, a locally promoted walking route. They will also be experienced from the connecting footpath ASA/9/1 and ASA/9/2, as well as from passengers on the High Wycombe to Bicester railway line. In these instances the current views of the wide open, agricultural countryside, will be replaced by open or glimpsed views of the industrial solar farm developments at Whirlbush and/or Callies Farm. The sequential cumulative long term adverse effects would be MODERATE ADVERSE.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ISSUE 7 – ADVERSE EFFECT ON CHARACTER OF SITE The existing site has as strongly rural character with a strong historic continuity and limited intrusion from any modern features. Formerly 18/19th century parliamentary enclosure that has remained unchanged in field layout or land use for well over 150 years as can be seen on 1885 OS historic maps. The introduction of a large scale industrial development into and across a range of undeveloped, agricultural fields will result in the loss of a number of key site characteristics which contribute to its agricultural character including meadow grassland landcover, strongly historic field pattern, agricultural land use and the perception of tranquillity. This will fundamentally alter the agricultural character of the site. The site also forms part of the agricultural landscape contributing to the landscape setting for the Chilterns AONB. The introduction of large scale industrial development into an otherwise open, rural and strongly historic landscape would have a long term MAJOR ADVERSE EFFECT on the landscape character of the site.

ISSUE 8 – ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER The introduction of industrial development into this largely undisturbed, rural landscape will have an adverse effect on the surrounding landscape character. The effects will spread beyond the site boundaries. The adverse effect on local landscape character would remain MODERATE ADVERSE.

Local Lead Flood Authority

The Flood Risk from Surface Water map provided by the Environment Agency shows that most of the site lies in an area at very low risk of surface water flooding. The FRA (3.32) sets out that the

DNO substation lies in an area of low risk, but this will be mitigated by raising the floor level of the structure by 300mm. Control equipment will be located outside of areas of surface water flood risk, and the solar arrays, security fencing and access tracks may be in areas of low risk. The FRA (3.78) suggests that the solar arrays will not result in a material increase in surface water runoff. No objections have been raised subject to the inclusion of the recommended conditions.

Environment Agency

Made no comment on this application.

Historic England

Made no comment on this application.

Strategic Access Officer

Footpaths DFU/21/1 and DFU/30/1 pass through the main block of the proposed development to the west and south-west of Lower Waldrige Farm. Additionally, there are two short sections of footpath to the south-west and south of the main solar farm block, namely Footpath ASA/9/2 [Plan 3] and Footpath ASA/9/2 [Plan 4], the latter forming part of the Outer Aylesbury Ring promoted route. The indicative proposals are generally acceptable from a rights of way perspective, however a condition is required to clarify footpath widths and ongoing maintenance.

Natural England

Raised no objection to the application.

Representations

Other Representations

2 comments have been received supporting the proposal:

- Support this application given the period of energy inflation, this is critical infrastructure
- This is critical infrastructure and it is desperately needed
- The approval of the solar farm will improve energy security and resilience
- There could be energy supply shortages and outages without energy infrastructure
- The approval of the solar farm should be expedited

22 comments have been received objecting to the proposal:

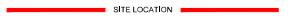
- The proposal would be detrimental to the Chiltern's AONB and damaging to the biodiversity of the area
- The impact of decommissioning the solar farm is not understood
- Concerns relating to the loss of the agricultural setting and historic agricultural use
- Brownfield sites and commercial uses should be considered first ahead of solar farms on greenfield sites
- Concerns relating to the cumulative impact of solar farms in the area
- The proposal would be visible from the Chilterns AONB which cannot be mitigated
- Concerns relating to its highways impact and the damage to roads caused by the

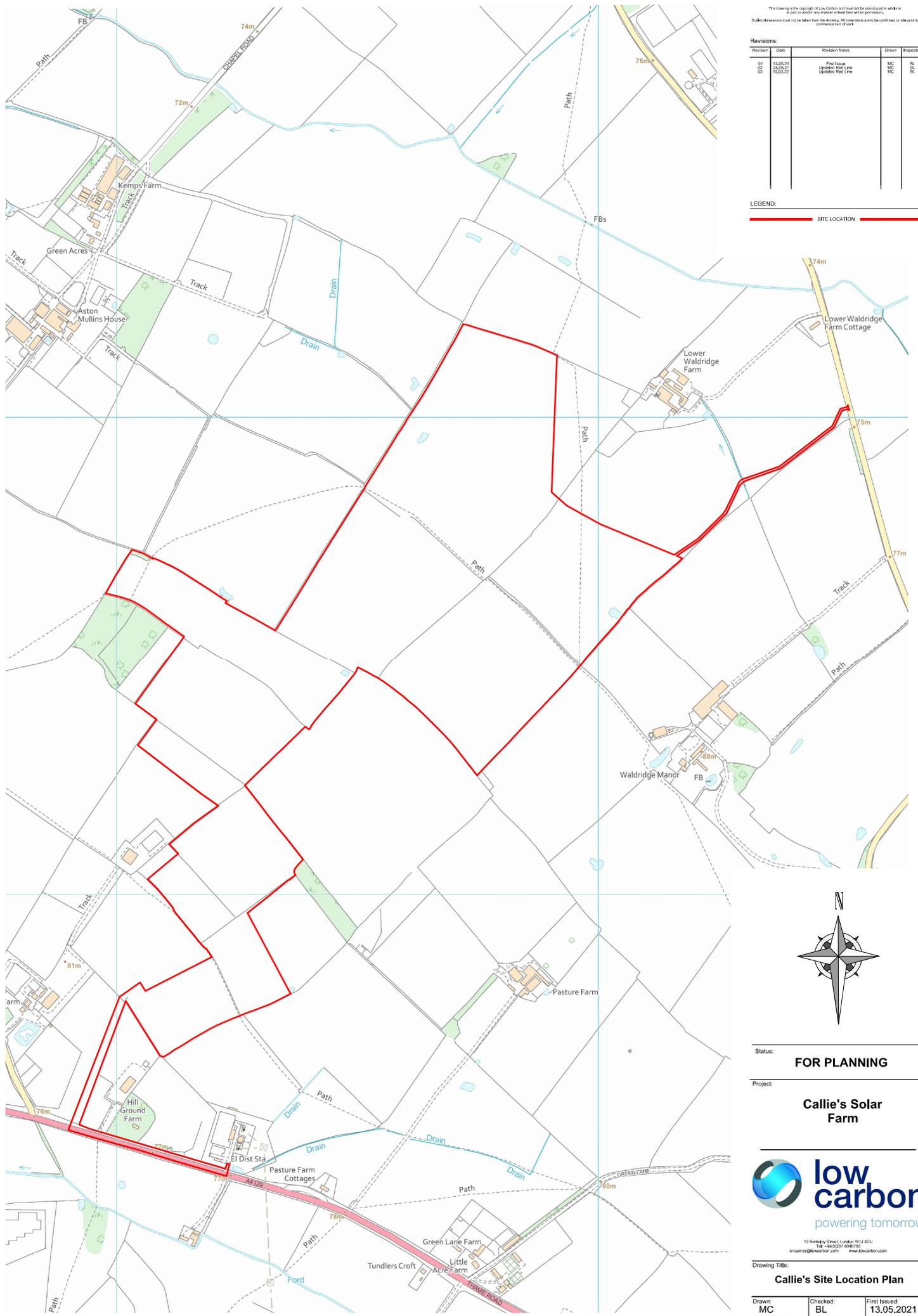
construction

- Concerns relating to adverse impacts on biodiversity and ecology
- The proposal would have an adverse impact on heritage assets including Waldrige Manor, Aston Mullins, Aston Sandford Conservation Area
- This is an inappropriate location for this development as per the secretary of state's decision in rejecting the appeal
- Concerns the ridge and furrow fields would no longer be able to be appreciated
- Rewilding of the land would be more appropriate than a solar farm
- The site is surrounded by footpaths and a national trail which would no longer be enjoyed as a result of the proposal
- The amendments to the scheme do not reduce the development area significantly enough to lessen the effects of the landscape character, PRow, historic field pattern and valued landscape qualities.
- Although lowering the height of the panels means that the proposed hedgerow would be sufficient to screen the panels, the adverse effects of the hedgerow planting along the PRow would remain the same
- The proposal would result in the industrialisation of the land between Risborough and Haddenham

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Revision	Date	Revision Notes	Drawn	Inspected
01	13.05.21	Final Issue	MC	BL
02	15.05.21	Updated Red Line	MC	BL

LEGEND:
 SITE LOCATION



Status: **FOR PLANNING**

Project: **Callie's Solar Farm**



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Drawing Title: **Callie's Site Location Plan**

Drawn: MC	Checked: BL	First Issued: 13.05.2021
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Project Code: **LCS043- SP-01**

Sheet Size: A0	Scale: 1:2500	Revision: 03
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1 CALLIE'S SITE LOCATION PLAN

Scale: 1:2500@A0

