

WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
PLANNING COMMITTEE

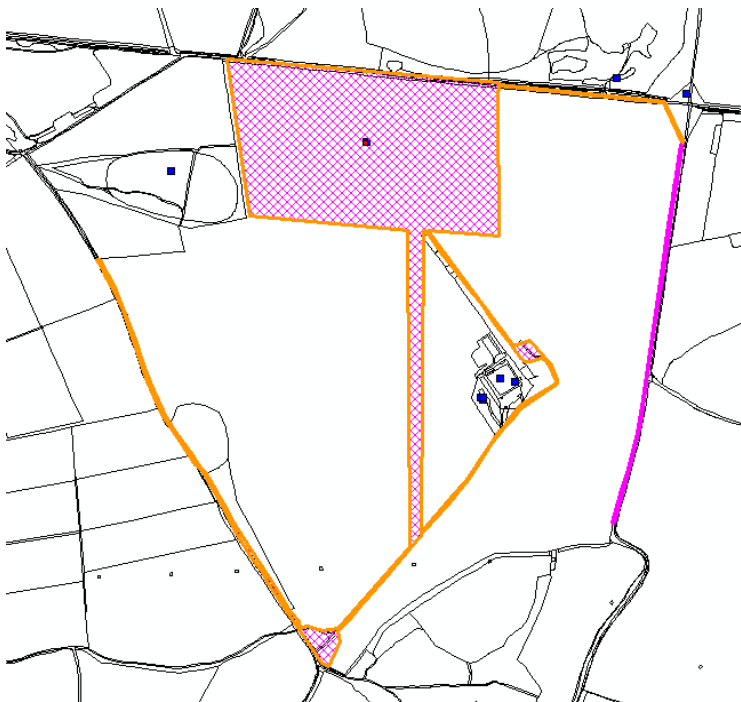
Case No: 23/01025/FUL

Proposal Description: Installation of a solar farm and associated development (AMENDMENTS RECEIVED October 2023): Additional Information including; changes to application red line; revised plans; photomontages; additional assessments and supporting information (Revised Description & Revised Details) (FURTHER DETAILS RECEIVED July 2024)

Address: Land South Of Crabwood, Sarum Road, Sparsholt, Hampshire.
Parish, or Ward if within Winchester City: Hursley
Applicants Name: Novus Renewable Services Limited
Case Officer: Mr Stephen Cornwell
Date Valid: 25 April 2023
Recommendation: Approval
Pre Application Advice Yes

Link to Planning Documents

https://planningapps.winchester.gov.uk/online-applications/search.do?action=simple&_gl=1*180j837*_ga*MjEwNDI0NDU4OS4xNjk4MTM4MjUx*_ga_DTQPZ08RGZ*MTcwNTgzNTM5MC4xNC4xLjE3MDU4MzUzOTQuMC4wLjA



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Background to Re-Consideration of This Application

For the reasons set out below, members are being asked to reconsider this application afresh, placing no weight on the previous resolution.

The reason the application is returning to committee is as follows. The planning application for the Crabwood solar farm was considered at the 7th February 2024 Planning Committee meeting. The resolution from that meeting was to approve the application subject to a legal agreement covering the terms set out in the report and with a small number of adjustments to several planning conditions that addressed matters which emerged during the debate. The decision was confirmed in the minutes that recorded the meeting and which were accepted at the March 2024 meeting.

Since February 2024, officers have been working with the applicant on the legal agreement and at the time of writing this report, it is close to completion. In normal circumstances the completion of the legal agreement would then trigger the issuing of the decision notice. However, in a letter dated 20 March 2024, Richard Buxton Environmental Planning Solicitors, acting for a group of local residents have written to the council setting out what they consider to be a number of “defects” in the committee report which they contend would make any decision unlawful. They indicate that if these defects are not addressed before any decision is issued, then the decision would be open to a Judicial Review. They suggest that the way to address the issues is for the application to be taken back to committee for re-consideration.

Legal challenges to a decision must be made within 6 weeks of the issuing of the formal decision notice. The current situation is slightly unusual in the sense the council has not yet issued any decision notice. Accordingly, the letter is not a formal challenge but more of a pre decision warning. At this stage in the determination process, it is considered appropriate to view the Environmental Planning Solicitors’ letter as a late representation and the letter has been published on the application website. This means the solicitor is placed in the same status as any party making representations in terms of being notified.

The letter sets out six issues which it is claimed are flaws in the original committee report. They relate to the way the following matters were considered:

1. Heritage Impact on Listed Buildings.
2. The consideration of Alternative Sites.
3. The interpretation of Policy MTRA4.
4. The consideration of the Agricultural Land Classification.
5. The lack of any public consultation when the Revised Landscape Plan were submitted in January 2024.
6. The way Beechcroft Tea Rooms was dealt with.

Officers have considered the contents of the letter and accept that some points could have been more clearly set out in the officer’s report on the last occasion. While that does not necessarily mean that the previous decision was unlawful it was considered appropriate to take the opportunity to bring the matter back to committee with an officer’s report that contains further detail and clarification. Members should consider the matter afresh rather than using the previous decision as a starting point.

The report has been updated to reflect the above and the information that was contained in the update sheet to the February meeting as well as addressing the matters raised by members during the debate. Further discussions with the applicant have also brought
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forward a new condition relating to the agreement of the equipment to be installed and this will be added to the list of recommended conditions. The applicant has also provided some further information about their site selection process. On 15th May 2024, the government released a statement entitled "Solar and protecting our Food Security and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land". The existence of this document is acknowledged in the report. Finally, on 20th July 2024 a new draft NPPF was published. The deadline for comments is 24 September 2024 with the new version to be adopted (presumably) at some later date. As a draft it carries little weight, and the main consideration must be on the existing adopted NPPF.

Reasons for Recommendation

The proposal results in the introduction of an important renewable energy development. Although the development does not fully comply with the policies of the development plan having regard to the setting within the landscape (Policies MTRA4, CP20 & DM23) and on its impact on heritage assets, (Policy CP20) an assessment in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been completed which confirms this harm is outweighed by public benefit.

The proposal complies with other policies of the development plan and no adverse harm is raised from other matters including protection of residential amenity, highways, assessment of glint & glare, biodiversity and drainage considerations amongst other matters.

Other material considerations, including the NPPF, support the grant of planning permission and material planning considerations do not indicate that an alternative approach should be taken.

General Comments

The application is reported to Committee because it is a major application, which has attracted objections that are contrary to the Officer's recommendation. Sparsholt Parish Council (the adjoining Parish) has also requested that the final decision is made by the planning committee if the recommendation is for approval.

Amendments to Submitted Plans and other Supporting Documents

When first submitted in April 2023, the application underwent a consultation exercise consisting of a press notice and site notices. After a review of the comments made as a result of the consultation exercise and in response to questions raised by officers, the application has undergone a series of revisions. In October 2023 revised plans and further information was submitted on the following:

- The red line to the application site was extended. It now includes the field boundary features to Sarum Road and sections of the field boundary hedgerows to Sparsholt Road and Farley Mount Road.
- Revised Application Plan.
- Revised Planning Layout Plan.
- Planning Layout with contour detail.
- Revised Landscape/Ecological Mitigation Plan.

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- Photomontages/visualisations.
- Economic Impact Assessment.
- Glint and Glare Assessment.
- Heritage Addendum (Sarum Road Heritage Impact Assessment).
- Updated Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain information.
- Updated Landscape Visual Impact Assessment.
- Revised Certificate B.

The application description was revised to reflect the submission of the new plans and documents. A second full consultation exercise (press; site notice and consultation letters) commenced October/November 2023.

Not all the originally submitted plans and supporting documents have been superseded. This is reflected in the report.

In January 2024 a further revised Landscape/Ecological Mitigation Plan was submitted showing additional planting to that already proposed along the northern boundary to Sarum Road and adjustments to the width of planting on the southern and eastern boundaries to the fenced off area. Due to the scale of the amendments that were confined to within the red line application site, it was not considered necessary to formally re-advertise those changes.

In June 2024, in response to the question on the consideration of Alternative Sites as set out in the Richard Buxton letter, the applicant has provided a compendium document that combines all the original information contained within the application on this matter, plus new information. Following receipt of this additional document containing new information, the application description has been adjusted and a further consultation exercise has been undertaken. The applicant has also corrected an error within the Agricultural Land Classification report.

Site Description

The 24-hectare site is approximately 5.4km west of the centre of Winchester and 2.5km west of the edge of the built-up area. It is part of what is identified on the Ordnance Survey map as Pitt Down. The revised red lined application site relates to land that is part of a large arable field and its boundary features. The field lies south of Sarum Road, west of Sparsholt Road and east of Farley Mount Road. The field exhibits some variation in levels. The northwest corner of the field represents the highpoint regarding levels and there is a general fall in ground levels to the south towards Farley Mount Road and to the east towards Sparsholt Road. Sarum Road also represents a change in character from predominantly open agricultural ground to the south with scattered areas of woodland to deciduous ancient woodland to the north. Pitt Down Plantation which lies to the west is a former Forestry Commission conifer woodland and represents a more recent addition. From an original oval wooded area, it appears to have been extended to its present boundaries in the inter war period. Over recent months the plantation has seen some felling undertaken, particularly on its frontage to Sarum Road. The owner who is also the owner of the application site, has indicated this is thinning work as part of the management of the plantation and is not wholesale clearance.

The main part of the application site consists of a rectangular area of open land in the

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NW corner of the field. This area is approximately 595m (east-west) by approximately 380m (north-south). At the time of the last officer's site visit, the land was down to a grass crop. To the north beyond a post and wire fence is a vegetated verge approximately 6m deep and then Sarum Road. To the west of the main part of the site beyond a weak post and wire fence is Pittdown Plantation, a mature conifer woodland. A forest school has been established in the woodland. The southern and eastern boundaries are notional lines across the open field. There are no signs of any watercourses in the field.

The red line also makes provision to use the existing vehicular access off Farley Mount Road that presently serves Pitt Down Farm. There is also provision for a power cable to run south from the main area to connect to the local distribution line that crosses the southern part of the field on pylons. The red line includes land for the construction of two sub stations to the east of the access off Farley Mount Road.

Pitt Down Farm lies roughly in the centre of the large field and is approximately 750m north of Farley Mount Road and 350m south of the main site. This group includes two dwellings, farm buildings and some barns which are in business use. The nearest unrelated dwelling to the application site is Crabwood House which is located on the north side of Sarum Road 730m to the east. The distance to Beechcroft Tea Rooms which lies on the south side of Sarum Road is approximately 790m to the east.

The site does not carry any landscape or nature conservation designations. There are no rights of way crossing the application site or any part of the remaining agricultural field. Crabwood to the north is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and to the west of this woodland is Farley Mount Country Park which is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. Both of these are ancient woodlands. Grovelands Copse that lies to the east of the location for the substations is ancient woodland. The South Downs National Park boundary is 5km (3miles) to the east beyond the southern edge of the city.

Whilst relatively close to the city, the general character of the site and the surrounding area is one of open downland in agricultural use. This proximity to the city, the presence of the county park, the provision of a number of car parking areas and an extensive network of footpaths in the woodlands to the north means the area is well used for recreational purposes such as walking, cycling and horse riding. The Clarendon Way runs along Sarum Road, although the fingerposts direct people through the vegetation which occupies the verge on the north side of Sarum Road. This verge has seen the felling of some trees over recent months.

Sarum Road is barely wide enough for two cars to pass with care and has no footpaths in the vicinity of the site. Sparsholt Road And Farley Mount Road are both single width lanes flanked by hedges (some gaps) on banks. There are some formal passing places but evidence on the ground shows people riding up the adjacent verges to pass each other, particularly on Farley Mount Road. Alternatively, people use field/property accesses to pass. Part of the section of Farley Mount Road back to Sparsholt Road from the farm access is flanked by overhanging trees. The section of Sparsholt Road from its junction with Farley Mount Road south to the Romsey Road (A3090) junction shows no real improvement in the condition of the road until the junction is reached.

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Proposal

The proposal is to establish a solar farm for a period of 40 years with an exporting capacity of approximately 20MW. The application consists of a number of elements.

- An improved access,
- A new section of roadway, (approximately 350m long)
- An extensive area of PV panels defined by a security fence (to be referred to in this report as the main site)
- An underground cable linking the main site to the sub stations to export power (approximately 1.1km long)
- Two new substation buildings

The connection from the sub stations to the Local Distribution Network is not part of the application under consideration.

The development would utilise the existing farm access off Farley Mount Road. A small improvement to the access is proposed. This existing access runs up to the cluster of buildings that form Pitt Down Farm. This group of buildings is largely screened by changes in levels and by a tree belt on its eastern side which then continues in a north westerly direction before abruptly stopping. A new roadway to serve the solar farm would run around the eastern side of this cluster of buildings and the small area of woodland and then continue up the eastern side of the tree belt before entering the main site near the SE corner of the fenced off area.

The main site would consist of south facing PV panels with supporting infrastructure. The inverters/ transformers would be in the centre of the site on either side of a service road. This central area represents a natural "valley" within the main site. The area of panels would be surrounded by 2m fencing with CCTV cameras on 3m posts spaced out along the fence line. The alignment of this fence line is shown as leaving a 26.8m gap from the northern field boundary and a 24m gap from the western field boundary.

To the western side of the access gates in the southern perimeter fence, the plan shows a strip of ground running due south linking up to the farm access road. It is proposed to export the power via an underground cable down this route to land on the eastern side of the access where two substations would be built. From here, the power would be fed into the local distribution network line that crosses the southern part of the field on pylons. It is understood that the grid power company will form that link using permitted development rights.

The application would include the following landscaping proposals within the red lined application site:

- Protection of existing screening vegetation on field boundaries to Sarum Road, Sparsholt Road and Farley Mount Road.
- Gap planting on the field boundaries to Sparsholt Road.
- New scrub planting on the northern side of the fenced off area to Sarum Road.
- A new hedge down the remaining section of Sarum Road.
- New tree screen planting on the western side of the fenced off area to Pittdown Plantation.
- New hedgerow on the southern and eastern sides of the fenced off area.

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- Area under PV panels and buffer strips around the perimeter of the fenced off area to be seeded.
- New scrub planting around the proposed substation buildings.
- A section of new hedgerow planting on the side of the access road off Farley Mount Road.

In support of the application the following documents have been submitted:

- Planning Statement
- Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (Revised)
- Ecological Impact Assessment (Revised)
- Biodiversity Check List
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (Revised)
- Design and Access Statement
- Flood Risk Assessment & Surface Water Management Plan
- Initial Settings Assessment (archaeology)
- Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment
- Heritage Statement
- Arboricultural Report
- Agricultural Land Classification (Revised)
- Construction Traffic Management Plan (Revised)
- Glint & Glare Assessment
- Sarum Road Heritage Impact Study
- Economic Assessment
- Site Selection Assessment

The following points have been taken from the documents:

- Site part of South Lynch Farm.
- Nearest listed building is grade 2 Crabwood Farmhouse to east.
- Nearest scheduled Monument is small barrow feature in woodland 1.2km to west of site.
- Nearest residential properties are 300m to south at Pitt Down Farmyard.
- Max export capacity 20MW enough power to supply 4,722 homes a year.
- Will save 4,054 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year.
- 16-week construction period.
- Site will have 2m perimeter deer fencing with CCTV cameras on 3m posts.
- Max height of panels is 3.1m above ground with panels in fixed position of 23 degree orientated south facing.
- No foundations, metal frames supported by posts pushed into ground.
- Panels non-reflective dark colour.
- Inverters mounted either on back of panels or in housings.
- Power exported via underground cable to applicant's substation, then Distribution Network Operator (DNO) substation and then linked to grid.
- Site selection based on proximity to available connection point to grid, gently south slope, high visual containment lack of any designations.
- Reduced site area to avoid archaeological area.
- Site does not carry any landscape designation.

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- Ground under panels to be seeded to allow sheep grazing as part of site management.
- Proposed enhancement work with Landscape/Ecological Management Plan. Planting in first year after completion of construction activities.
- Undertook community consultation event Autumn 2022 consisting of leafleting 250 residential properties, briefing ward members, undertaking exhibition event and attending Sparsholt PC after invitation. Comments resulted in reduction in site area and additional viewpoint from Farley Mount.
- Majority of site of low intrinsic nature conservation value.
- Retain all boundary vegetation, permanent standoff and protection areas established.
No direct or indirect effects on boundary vegetation.
- Proposal represents a 20% increase in Winchester renewable capacity.

The applicant submitted a 12-page letter with revised documents in October 2023. New points in that letter included the following:

- Note majority of 3rd party objections relate to potential impact on landscape. Have submitted photomontages showing development after 1st and 10th year. Farley Mount Road photomontage does not include section of hedgerow recently proposed.
- View from Mill Lane added into LVIA.
- Enmill Lane added into assessment. View of short duration and Sparsholt Road hedgerow screens views and this now within red line.
- Accept temporary installation of solar farm will inevitably result in some change to character of landscape. However, impact mitigated by proposed planting and reinforcement of existing hedgerows.
- Applicant agrees to contribute to monitoring of LEMP through legal agreement and suggests triggers for review of year 1, 3, 5, 10 and then every 5 years.
- Applicant reserves position on WCC Landscape Officers view that site part of a valued landscape. If Members agree with that assessment, it does not exclude their ability of supporting application as they will have to balance any harm with overriding public benefits.
- Believe through comprehensive scheme of landscape planting and long-term management visual impact will be mitigated.
- Whilst each application is different, note Secretary of State has approved 30MW solar farm in Shropshire within a valued landscape. Despite this factor being given significant weight, production of clean electricity carried significant weight as did additional planting and community benefits.
- Note scheme does have support of Hursley PC and large number of Winchester residents.
- No lighting proposed beyond small motion activated LEDs above substation doors.
- Updated bird survey shows need for 4 skylark plots and these to be delivered on neighbouring arable land.
- Regarding Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land, note a Yorkshire appeal allowed on land that included small amount of BMV land.
- Concerning food security, same inspector noted absence of national policy and guidance.
- In context, agricultural area in England is 8.9ml ha so site very small amount. Only 3.1ha of site is BMV.

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- Site is 3% of landowners wider holding and is least productive part of holding.
- Majority of site is grade 3b and that dictates how it is farmed.
- Agree to a soil management condition.
- Concern raised by 3rd party on impact of Glint and Glare on road users and Glint and Glare report is part of revised submission. No impacts predicted.
- Note objectors' preference to locate solar farms on brown field land. WCC register records only 16.1 ha of brownfield land so not as much land as this application site.
- Availability to connect to grid is key factor. Connection secured for 2024 using existing overhead line.
- Site could remain in agricultural use with sheep grazing underneath panels.
- Note objectors' reference to negative impact of local businesses. Have commissioned Economic Impact Assessment.
- Although not a material planning consideration applicant committed to a community benefit fund for the host parish council and once operational will pay Business Rates.
- Applicant agrees to an Employment and Skills Plan.
- Have calculated energy balance which is power required to construct, operate and decommission solar farm against energy production. Research shows breakeven point estimated to be 1.5 years.
- May see some reduction in efficiency during operational phase but this less than 20%.
- Sloping nature of site will not affect efficiency but does enable narrower rows which means better performance.
- At decommissioning, anticipate recycling methods will have improved.
- Solar viewed as part of mix for a flexible energy generation system.
- Substation to be positioned on a cut and fill area.

A further six-page letter has been submitted dated 24 January 2024. The following new points are taken from that letter:

- Note WCC Landscape Officer comment, whilst not supportive does say if planning permission is granted a more robust landscaping response required. Have amended scheme with additional measures.
- Note Natural England reference to potential impact on National Park (NP) that is 5km to east. Do not consider at that distance any direct impact on NP or its setting.
- Have responded to the WCC Ecologist's comment to change seed type to one with more flowering species. A chalk & Limestone Wildflower mix proposed for fenced off area.
- Applicant will install information boards at site and liaise with Fire & Rescue Service prior to solar farm becoming operational.
- Note Sparsholt PC comment on absence of a methodology or criteria in emerging local plan for considering renewables. However, this cannot be afforded any weight.
- Recently amended NPPF continues to emphasise even small-scale renewable projects provide valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gases.
- Need for action evident as 2023 hottest year on record.
- New footnote added to para 181 of NPPF referring to site selection and to consideration of poorer quality land and issue of food production.
- National Planning Policy Statements material consideration. EN-3 revised 17 January 2024 refers to solar as one of most established technologies in UK and cheapest form of electricity generation.

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- EN-3 also advises BMV land does not prohibit development of solar arrays.
- Believe comments by 3rd parties on Glint and Glare result of misunderstanding of assessment. Impact on Beechcroft Farm shop and Tea Rooms would occur after business has closed so no impact on customers. When it does occur estimate duration less than 20mins per day, so based on modelling impact determined to be low and acceptable.
- One resident stated they will be exposed more than any others to glare from solar farm in order of tens of hours and would be unable to look out of windows facing site. Green and yellow glare impacts added together =34.23hrs per year. However, methodology in Glint & Glare Assessment states green glare can be ignored when considering residential receptors. This reduces exposure to predicted level of 5.5hrs per year which is considered low impact.
- Regarding impact on operation of tea rooms, no impact from noise, odour or light pollution that would affect business. Consider any reference to potential loss of income as a private interest and not a material planning consideration. If issue given any weight, separation distance and fact tea-room not an asset of community value means no material impact.

The above-mentioned reports have been assessed by officers and specialist consultees to form this recommendation and this is discussed in greater detail throughout the report.

Following the changes to the landscaping proposals which are detailed in the committee report, the applicant's ecological consultant has reviewed if these changes affect the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculation. A note has been submitted outlining the conclusions of this review. The main points from the note are:

- Used Biodiversity Metric 4.0.
- Change to create scrub belt of 5,806m² instead of proposed neutral grassland.
- New scrub buffer zone (565m²) to be created adjacent entrance instead of modified grassland.
- Increase in width of hedgerow (southern and eastern boundaries of PV panel main site) from 1m to 5m in width, instead of neutral grassland.
- Change to type of seed mix to be used.
- Changes result in slight uplift of BNG figure from an increase of +79.25% habitat units to a new figure of +81.51%. No change to hedgerow unit figure which remains at +63.28%.

Immediately prior to the consideration of this application at the 7 February 2024 Planning Committee Meeting, the applicant circulated a three-page briefing note to the committee members which set out an "outline of the key considerations of the application and provides an overview of the biodiversity enhancements which are integral to the project". The briefing note repeated information that formed the application and which is outlined in this report. Accordingly, it is not felt necessary to repeat or summarise that information again.

In July 2024 in response to the Richard Buxton Solicitors letter, the applicant submitted a Site Selection Assessment. This included the detail that was already part of the application and further new information on how they chose this site. The following points are drawn from this Site Selection Assessment:

- This document expands on information already provided.
- No explicit requirement for sequential test relating to location of a solar farm.

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- Nothing in any policy or guidance that explicitly excludes a solar farm on agricultural land.
- Applicant not required to show no better alternative location exists, a position accepted in recent appeal decision.
- Grid connection offered was two existing pylons in line crossing field north of Farley Mount Road.
- Methodology behind site selection started with identification of a search area away from point of connection to grid.
- Viability assessment undertaken to confirm distance for search area away from connection point. This considered costs associated with making connection.
- Up to 1 km radius from connection point identified as viable distance.
- Need site minimum of 24ha area to create a viable scheme.
- Checked for previously developed land or non-agricultural land in search area.
- Commercial rooftops not considered as insufficient buildings in search area and even if they existed, not technically, commercially or financially viable option.
- Applicant very experienced in development of large-scale solar farms and not aware of a commercial business model for rooftop solar at this scale.
- Considered Agricultural Land Classification, majority land in search area grade 3.
- All grade 3 land in search area considered.
- Checked land availability through approaches to landowners. This key component after grid connection.
- Applied constraints including:
 - Environmental designations
 - Heritage designations
 - Infrastructure such as roads and railways
 - Built up areas
 - Unsuitable topography
- After applying above, created Opportunity Area with 7 sites identified within the 1km search area.
- Reviewed each site for its suitability.
- Factors influencing analysis of the 7 sites included:
 - Ongoing agricultural practices
 - Agricultural Land Classification (soil grade)
 - Ownership & availability
 - Proximity to residential properties
 - Any need for buffer zones to woodlands
 - Shading
 - Proximity to heritage assets
 - Public Rights of Way
 - Need for hard digging to connect to grid
 - Orientation of ground
- Landscape impacts considered to be similar across all the 7 sites.
- Whilst other sites exist that have potential to connect to grid, none considered more suitable from planning and environmental perspective than application site.
- Project can only be located where there is capacity on the grid.
- Project needs an agricultural land location.
- Subject to planning, site could be constructed and operating in 2025.
- Would power around 4,722 homes a year saving 4,045 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

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In separate emails the applicant has made the following points:

- that the land at the location of the substations is grade 3a.
- a clarification of the Agricultural Land Classification relating to the land under the proposed substations has slightly adjusted the % split in the agricultural land classification figures for the site. Grade 2 land is now 14.2%, grade 3a 1.3% and grade 3b is 84.6%.
- that three of the 7 search sites are locations within the South Lynch Estate with the other 4 on land owned by other parties.
- An appeal decision dated 18 July has been submitted which considers the status of the Ministerial Written Statement (MWS) of May 2024. That inspector did not consider that the MWS changed the national policy position on the use of agricultural land for solar farming and that there is no presumption against solar on BMV land.
- Applicant notes draft NPPF published 30 July 2024 with intention to remove footnote that references consideration of food production when developing agricultural land.
- Consider proposed changes in draft NPPF offer stronger support for renewables.

Relevant Planning History

22/02277/SCREEN: Screening request sought on larger site than one currently under consideration. Decision issued in November 2022 that EIA not required as part of any submission.

Surrounding Area (Other Relevant Decisions)

13/00915/FUL: Change of use of Pitt Down Plantation to Forest School/outdoor kindergarten: Approved August 2013.

15/02814/FUL: Extension to opening time to cover whole year and not just terms time: Approved February 2016.

Consultations

This application was first advertised in May 2023.

Following the receipt of revised details and plans that superseded some, but not all of the original documents, a further consultation exercise was undertaken in October/November 2023. The application description was amended to reflect the additional information. The re-consultation exercise was undertaken on the basis of this new description and the additional information provided. Following receipt of further information from the applicant relating to the Site Selection procedure (Alternatives), a further consultation exercise has been undertaken in July/August 2024. This consisted of a further press advertisement, new site notices and public consultation letters. It must be acknowledged that this information will not be of interest to all the formal consultees, and this is reflected in the number of "no responses" set out below.

Some of the original documents and those submitted as part of the first revision continue to form part of the application now under consideration. The additional information submitted in July 2024 relating to the site selection process adds to the background

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papers and does not supersede any existing document. Accordingly, all previous comments are set out below. The terms “first consultation response”, “second consultation response” and “third consultation response” are used to differentiate between the three sets of comments.

Hursley Parish Council (host PC)

First Consultation Response:

Support Application

- Aware application is controversial.
- Even placing solar panels on roofs or car parks will not have efficiencies and economies of scale of feeding straight to grid.
- This is a relatively small scheme.
- WCC set ambitious target to achieve zero carbon and parish is encouraging residents to use low energy solutions.
- Proposal on south sloping land and will be visible, minimally through hedgerows but more prominently from Sarum Road/Sparsholt Road junction and Beechcroft Farm & Shop.
- Will not be visible to walkers on Clarendon Way or from woodlands north of Sarum Road.
- Ecology officer found minimal impact on nearby SSSIs and suggested conditions.
- WCC Archaeology does not raise objections but requests careful management to preserve relics.
- WCC Landscape does raise objection. Understand this concern but consider they are outweighed by benefits of generating green energy.
- Local organisations taken keen interest in proposal. WinACC supports, CPRE objects. Sparsholt PC objects saying panels should be located elsewhere. Note site chosen on basis of land quality, proximity to grid and access. Panels will not be visible from anywhere in Sparsholt Parish except at junction of Sarum Road and Sparsholt Road.
- Property most impacted is Beechcroft Farm Shop which has outdoor seating area well used by walkers and cyclists with a clear view of site. Array of panels now smaller and farther away from Beechcroft. Hope once installed array will not be as prominent as feared and Beechcroft customers may welcome green energy.
- Having weighed all arguments, support application including numerous conditions proposed.

Second Consultation Response:

None Received.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Sparsholt Parish Council (adjoining PC)

First Consultation Response:

Objection.

- Cannot support application in this location.
- Solar farms have part to play in renewable energy, but this is too prominent a position and would have too much of a visual impact on the outstanding beautiful countryside.
- Would have massive visual impact on nearby residents, visitors, and local businesses because of its elevated position on undulating landscape.
- Government guidance states solar should not be sited on undulating landscape.

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- Site also adjacent Crab Wood SSSI close to Farley Mount and next to extremely popular Clarendon Way.
- Landscaping to mitigate effects of development would not have any real effect for 8-10 years and it will change character of area.
- Applicant has reduced area of panels, but this does not mitigate damage.
- 14% land is grade 2 which is not permitted for solar farms.
- Agree with WCC Landscape report that scheme will start to change nature of landscape in this location from agriculture to one with an industrial type of appearance and function.
- Expect WCC to fully support conclusion of their own landscape officer.
- Note developer has looked at other sites in area but claim none available despite presence of pylons.
- Appears many supporters are pro solar farms at any cost.
- Application does not comply with policies DM20, or MTRA4.
- Ask that application rejected and if likely to be approved that it is taken to planning committee for further discussion.

Second Consultation Response:

Objection.

- Revisions and mitigations only support view this absolutely wrong location.
- Undulating rising landscapes are not government recommended sites.
- Scheme will be blot on landscape for at least 8-10 years as new planting develops.
- WCC Landscape team appear to share our concerns and must be taken into consideration when determining application.
- Understand need for renewable energy and solar is one element. However, WCC has no long terms strategy or current plan to include a consultative methodology and criteria to site solar farms. Without detailed plan for all renewable energy projects the emerging local plan will be incomplete. Inappropriate sites will continue to be brought forward at considerable cost to countryside and environment.
- WCC declared climate emergency must not be at cost of threat to countryside. Council has duty to protect countryside and people's mental health. This fact being ignored by supporters.
- Appropriate sites do exist in the district such as at Three Maids Hill and the A31 near Alresford.
- Policy DM 23 (Rural Character) Outside settlement boundaries development only supported if they do not have unacceptable effect on rural character.
- Following factors should be taken into account when considering effect on rural character and sense of place:
 - Development does not accord with any WCC Development Plan.
 - Proposed site will have unacceptable effect on rural character as result of its visual intrusion resulting from its prominent position on highest point in area. This intrusion cannot be minimised and only partly covered by landscaping after 8-10 years of operation.
 - Creating an industrial size solar farm on rising undulating landscape totally contravenes part of DM23. It also does not comply with government policy on siting of solar farms.
 - Proposal in conflict with DM23 regarding impact on tranquillity.
 - Site surrounded by single track roads with passing places. Walkers, horse riders and visitors to area experience rolling countryside and far-reaching views. These views will be lost for foreseeable future.
 - Support farm diversification but not via this scheme.

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- Site only 3% of farm holding so unclear why other alternative location not found.
- Potential impact on commercial business at Beechcroft Farm.
- Applicant refers to community fund for Hurley PC but site closer to Sparsholt and will affect our residents and visitors to wider area.
- Applicant's comments on the community fund and business rates to be paid to WCC have no relevance to application and must be ignored.
- Policy CP12 (Renewable Energy) does not refer to solar farms. Without a suitable policy this application cannot be approved.
- If scheme to be supported, request application considered by Planning Committee.

Third Consultation Response:

Objection.

- Site Selection Assessment (SSA) does not address any of points raised in letter from Richard Buxton.
- Search area clustered around Point of Connection (PoC) but other PoCs can be available along same power line.
- Search does not include matters which objectors raised e.g. landscape impact.
- Other farms in area we believe not contacted despite having pylons in vicinity.
- Fields owned by South Lynch Estate dismissed as not available.
- SSA not a robust site selection process but exercise justifying current proposal.
- Applicant appears to infer that absence of policy means any objection should be dismissed and application approved. However, opposite conclusion could be drawn of no policy = refusal.
- Applicant draws support from appeal decision. Believe main issue different than Crabwood so not relevant. Other appeals can be quotes that refer to landscape impact in dismissing appeals.
- Scheme located on highest point in undulating landscape and landscape plan does nothing to mitigate situation.
- Since February 2024 Committee meeting, tree felled alongside the site due to ash dieback. This opened up views of proposed arrays.
- Present proposal is to plant small hedging along edge of Sarum Road and Sparsholt Road.
- If minded to support application, need condition that mature trees and hedging used at higher elevation than proposed, alongside fencing. However, any planting will not fully mitigate valued landscape seen from Woodman Lane & Sarum Road south.
- Report acknowledged scheme contrary to MTRA4, DM23 & CP20. Challenge report which assumes WCC Climate Emergency overrules all WCC planning policies.
- If approved would cause significant industrialisation of valued landscape.
- NPPF says solar farms not suitable for undulating landscapes.
- Object to the application and request it goes back to committee.

WCC Archaeology Officer

First Consultation Response:

No Objection subject to Conditions.

- Detailed archaeological background and context contained in submitted reports. These reviewed at both pre application stage and EIA screenings and have been accepted.
- Further report also submitted with this application.

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- Since pre app review, application has been amended to exclude area containing complex of buried features. This and creation of large buffer zone to alignment of Roman Road welcomed.
- Current proposed site considered to have some archaeological potential associated with settlement area identified to the east. These features do not comprise an overriding concern in relation to application site.
- Conditions recommended.

Second Consultation Response: **No objection, Previous Comments Still Stand.**

- Having reviewed newly submitted information (Sarum Road Heritage Impact Assessment) I concur with assessment of significance ascribed to the Roman Road and assessment of impacts (physical and to setting) likely to arise from proposals.
- Accordingly, no objection and previous advice and recommendations relating to archaeology still stand.

Third Consultation Response: **No Further Comment.**

- Have reviewed additional information, no further comment relating to archaeology.

WCC Historic Environment Officer

First Consultation Response: **Not Consulted.**

Second Consultation Response: **No Objection.**

- Key issues: impact on significance of listed buildings and impact on the significance of non-designated heritage asset.
- Proposal assessed in accordance with best practice set out in Historic England Good Practice Advice Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets.
- Closest built heritage asset is line of former Roman Road between Winchester and Old Sarum north of Salisbury. Due to length of road its setting is extensive. Includes view of development site visible through roadside hedge.
- Farley Mount Obelisk (grade 2) located in elevated position 2.1km to west. Setting of this asset also extensive afforded by its high visibility in local area and commanding views from obelisk.
- Crabwood Farmhouse (grade 2) located approximately 830m to northeast. Setting of this building is Lanham Lane and field to north and south. Views towards and from development site blocked by Crab Wood.
- Two other grade 2 houses 811m to southwest of site. Their setting includes agricultural fields to north, south and to certain extent the northwest and areas of woodland and agricultural buildings
- Roman Road (Sarum Road) still clearly discernible on the ground. Its setting makes a positive contribution to its significance and other features in area.
- Development is part of general setting of road offering some attractive views south. However, it does not make any particular positive contribution to significance of the Roman Road or ability to appreciate that significance.
- Significance of Farley Mount derives principally from its architectural and historic interest, but location (setting) is fundamental in appreciating that significance. Development site part of wider setting so contributes to that significance.
- Proposed development will change character and appearance of host field but as a small part of a much wider setting to Obelisk considered that development would at worst have only very minor adverse impact on significance of this listed building.

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- Significance of Crabwood Farmhouse, South Lynch Farmhouse and South Lynch House derives largely from their architectural interest as buildings generally typical of their period and use. Rural settings of these buildings makes a positive contribution to their significance. Application site has no visual connection with these buildings so its contribution to their significance is limited.
- Applicants viewshed analysis concludes proposed panels not visible from Farley Mount Obelisk or Crabwood Farmhouse, South Lynch Farmhouse and South Lynch house. Assuming worst case scenario that viewshed analysis not entirely accurate, not considered scheme would result in serious harm to significance of these assets.
- Do not consider proposal would have any impact of significance of listed buildings.
- Proposals will alter immediate setting of former Roman Road. However, proposal will not alter ability to appreciate historic function of road or its presence in landscape. Essential linear nature of road not altered, and its significance preserved.
- Possible view of part of application site from Farley Mount Obelisk. Not clear if panels in view. Irrespective of this, the development site represents very small element of setting, extent of change would be very small, and magnitude of impact would be very small. On this basis impact of proposal on this listed building very minor and at bottom of less than substantial category of the NPPF.
- Given nature of proposal not possible to enhance significance of heritage asset through development. As no harm to listed buildings been identified, no further enhancement or mitigation necessary.
- In light of above scheme acceptable in terms of built heritage. No amendments additional information or conditions recommended.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

WCC Drainage Engineer

First Consultation Response:

No comment, defer to Flood Authority.

- Development should not increase low risk of pluvial flooding.
- As a major development LLFA (HCC) would be statutory consultee for surface water drainage.
- Scheme does not include any foul drainage so have no comment.
- No issue with development provided surface water drainage is satisfactory to the LLFA (HCC),

Second Consultation Response:

Refer to Previous Comment.

- Looked at revised proposal, nothing more to say in terms of flooding and drainage.
- Prior comments still stand.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

WCC Ecology Officer

First Consultation Response:

Recommend Conditions.

- SSSI, SINC and Ancient Woodland all to north. Other SINC, Ancient Woodland close to east of proposed substation.
- If 30m buffer zone to north and west to existing woodland implemented then no concerns in relation to impacts on designated sites.

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- Regarding protected species, field margins suitable for reptiles, evidence of badger recorded. Hedges suitable for dormice and field of value to ground nesting birds with skylark observed during surveys.
- Satisfied that retention of habitats, provision of buffer zones and adhering to measures in Ecology report any impacts can be minimised and mitigated.
- Whilst report refers to 30% BNG no supporting information so unable to confirm this figure.
- Recommend conditions if application approved.

Second Consultation Response:

No objection subject to Conditions.

- Updated Ecological impact assessment submitted
- Bird Survey results confirm presence of 2-3 Skylark breeding territories within site boundary. Minimum of 4 skylark plots proposed as mitigation. As these located off site will need to be secured through S106 agreement.
- Mammal gates proposed in fencing to allow badgers and brown hare to continue use of site. Location of gates need to be agreed.
- Avoidance and mitigation measures in Section 7 should be conditioned.
- Revised BNG assessment submitted. Shows 79% net gain for area based habitat units and 62% net gain for hedgerow units. This demonstrated significant benefits to biodiversity.
- Landscape/Ecological Mitigation Plan shows proposed planting mixes for new habitats. To maximise biodiversity recommend including more flowering species within the solar array area.
- Plan does not include long terms management or monitoring and a Biodiversity Management and Monitoring plan should be conditioned.
- Condition covering CEMP and control over external lighting also needed.

Third Consultation Response:

No additional Comment.

- Have looked at documents, nothing appears new that ecology needs to review.

WCC Environmental Protection Officer

First Consultation Response:

No Adverse Comment.

- No adverse comment to make concerning this application

Second Consultation Response:

No Adverse Comments.

- No adverse comments regarding the proposed development

Third Consultation Response:

No Adverse Comment.

- Have reviewed submitted information, no adverse comments.

WCC Glint and Glare Assessment

(Undertaken by external consultations (Mabbetts) acting for WCC)

First Consultation Response:

N/A.

(No glint and glare assessment was submitted as part of initial documentation)

Second Consultation Response:

Clarification Required.

- Have reviewed Glint and Glare assessment submitted in support of application.
- No challenge to Methodology adopted.

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- Agree with conclusion that impact on road receptors reduced to none on condition that surrounding vegetation is maintained.
- Recommend modelling undertaken for both air traffic control towners and pilots on final approach as per US FAA guidance.
- Do not agree with statement that green glare can be ignored in assessment of impact on residential dwellings as issue here is impact on residential amenity (annoyance) and threshold for this impact likely to be lower than that covering safety impact.
- Given the topographical difference between the Residential Dwelling 5 and the Proposed Development additional evidence (such as site photographs) should be provided to justify the conclusion that vegetation will obstruct all line of sight towards the residential dwellings.
- Where intervening vegetation does not block the line of sight, consideration of other factors (such as cloud cover and additional on-site planting) should be presented as additional mitigating evidence.
- Review of the planting plan indicates that a hedgerow is proposed for the east boundary between the panels and the Proposed Development.
- Due to the elevated topography at Residential Dwelling 5, the proposed development is likely to still be visible.
- Further glare modelling analysis should be provided by Neo Environmental of the mitigation potential provided by the proposed hedgerow.
- If the hedgerow does not provide a suitable reduction in predicted glare, taller woodland planting may need to be considered.

Further Response on Additional Clarifications From Applicant

Satisfactory.

- Detailed research into amenity impacts as a result of solar panel glare is relatively limited.
- Whilst amenity is subjective, it is reasonable to state “low” impacts are likely to occur where glare is predicted to coincide with when the Sun is low in the sky.
- This is in accordance with industry guidance available at this time.
- On this basis, the conclusions would be satisfactory.

Third Consultation Response:

Not Consulted.

WCC Landscape Officer

First Consultation Response:

Objection.

- Site in a strongly rural unspoilt location with strong downland character as identified in LCA.
- Previously within Special Landscape Quality designation and next to important public right of way with open views to south.
- Strong sense of tranquillity freedom from visual and aural intrusions. Wider area known for its sensitive sites including SSSI, SINCC, proximity to Farley Mount Country Park and an area recognised in paintings for its special character (G Lambert & G Prosser).
- The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment shows some significant views/Those from Clarendon Way filtered but more open in winter. Views from junction Enmill Lane and Sparsholt Road and from Millers Lane/A3090 not examined but extensive.
- LVIA notes some views not possible to screen.

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- Application LVIA considered landscape to be moderate to high sensitivity. I consider it to be firmly in High Sensitivity category.
- LVIA focuses on visual effect and not on effects on character.
- Road users sensitivity in LVIA classed as low, however consider impact greater due to low speeds and people's perception of travelling through a special environment. Local roads used by walkers and cyclists who have high sensitivity to change.
- Gapping up hedge along Clarendon Way will block off long views to south.
- Will sub divide elevated downland with incongruous features (fences, CCTV posts, containers, substations & access road).
- 14% site is grade 2 farmland.
- Solar farm will change nature of landscape from dominantly agricultural one to one with industrial type appearance and function.
- Following policies consider relevant: DM23 (Rural Character), CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Character) & MTRA4 (Development in the Countryside).
- Notwithstanding other planning considerations assessed proposal would have significant and negative effect on character of a distinctive landscape and would therefore appear counter to policies that relate to landscape.

Further Comment:

- Responding to applicant's letter of 9 May 2023.
- No change in view of scheme after reviewing contents of letter.
- Views from some significant positions will be affected to some degree including those from Clarendon Way.
- Effects on pattern and type of landscape and therefore its character appear to be accepted.
- The Area of Special Landscape Quality is a designation superseded by the LCA. It still indicates that this is an area with special qualities.
- Scheme does not appear landscape led but rather a function of the design for solar panels.
- Landscape plan thought to lack detail and not deal adequately with scale of proposal.
- Narrow hedge around solar farm does not appear substantial enough and unlikely to provide adequate screening in longer term.
- Choice of grass mix and wildflower and grass mix rather generic. Seed provenance unlikely to be local and may not be best for soils or biodiversity.
- No landscaping proposals around the substations.
- Previous landscape comments as unfavourable effect on character of area are maintained.
- If Planning minded to support then much more robust and responsive landscape response expected fully addressing sensitivity of location, addresses effect on views from all parts of scheme, proximity to Clarendon Way and maximises biodiversity including linking to existing areas of woodland and hedgerows.

In response to a comment by one of the objectors, the Landscape Officer was asked to comment on the claim that the site should be considered as a valued landscape. In response, after assessing the characteristics of the site and the area, the Landscape officer offered the following comment:

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- there is enough weight to suggest that the value of the land south of Crab Wood and the surrounding landscape does lift this site above the ordinary and as such could be considered valued landscape.

Further clarification has resulted in the following response:

- I am of the opinion that the land and surroundings of the Crabwood solar farm proposal is a valued landscape, in accordance with the Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02/21 published by the Landscape Institute and as shown in Box 5.1 of the Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition).

Second Consultation Response:

Objection Remains as Previously Stated.

- Revised details show a progression since earlier version. Further planting and space added to landscape plan to screen and buffer solar arrays and around sub stations.
- Previous comments give greater detail.
- Attempt to improve screening creditable but falls short of providing substantial benefits. Marginal improvements insufficient to offset visual impact on surrounding landscape, especially over first two decades.
- Proposed hedgerows narrow at 2-3m creating linear feature that would give less opportunity for variation to break up outline of solar array.
- Not clear impact resulting from fence, CCTV cameras and containers in centre of array or substations as detail lacking.
- Reliance on screening to hide solar panels inadvertently removes long distance views in particular to south across Sarum Road. This particularly apparent along Clarendon Way which follows Sarum Road and used by walkers and cyclists. Views though gaps or filtered by leaves long views to south always noticeable and in winter much more open.
- LVIA assesses sensitivity of receptors as moderate to high from Clarendon Way. However other locations assessed as low which may underestimate sensitivity of people to changes to their environment and reason for visiting area for recreation.
- Photo simulations clearly demonstrate some significant views of solar panels cannot be hidden. These unhidden views exacerbate negative impact on landscape and overall environment.
- Location is in a landscape sensitive area. More than negligible effects on landscape potentially resulting in adverse impact.
- Challenges on area as set out in NLCA suggest Downs areas and their historic environment magnet for outdoor recreation.
- Notwithstanding other planning considerations encompassing climate emergency, advice here confined to effects on landscape and remains as previously stated that application likely to have harmful effect on character and tranquillity of landscape and could not be supported.
- If scheme supported, a much more robust landscape response required to mitigate visual effect, with wider planting belts and buffers, recognition in design of key views and detailed long terms management plan.

Further comment in Response to Revised Landscape Plan (January 2024)

- Efforts to address potential impact on local landscape character appreciated.

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- Revised plan represents improvement and goes some way towards mitigating negative visual impacts.
- However, revised plan does not fully compensate for overall harm development would cause to landscape.
- Negative aspects of scheme still result in significant detrimental impact on open character, valued views and setting of Clarendon Way.
- Cannot fully mitigate negative impacts within sensitive downland setting without changing fundamental character of location.

Third Consultation Response:

No Further Comment to Make.

- Noted site selection document submitted.
- Have reviewed document, determined that no further landscape comments necessary at this time.

WCC Sustainability Officer

First Consultation Response:

Not consulted.

Second Consultation Response:

Support Application.

- Application in line with national, regional and local energy and climate policies which all seek to support increase in renewable generation.
- Application clearly meets criteria for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Application also appears to meet NPPF criteria that planning authorities should approve applications if its impacts are or can be made acceptable. In this case significant number of statutory consultees confirmed they are satisfied impacts acceptable.
- Recent survey by Council found over whelming support for renewable energy generation in district with 91% of the 388-respondent agreeing. Nearly 300 respondents agreeing that ground mounted solar suitable way to achieve this.
- Understand proposal to connect to overhead cable and this indicates site well suited for proposed use.
- Our understanding that sites over 1MWp in Winchester District unable to connect until after 2036 indicating severe restriction in ability of renewable sites to connect to grid. Site therefore in fairly unique position in having correct set of circumstances to connect.
- Scheme considered to support farming operation going forward.
- Worth noting that waste likely to be classified as WEEE/hazardous waste created at decommissioning. And rule governing disposal of this type of waste must be followed.
- Would like to see specific estimate of carbon emissions created during construction and decommissioning as well as the embodied carbon in construction materials as well as panels and substations.
- Note once operational no emissions, traffic impacts minimal and two full time jobs created.
- Given contribution to decarbonisation of Winchester District and to national security and decarbonisation aims support application.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

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Environment Agency

First Consultation Response:

No Comment Made.

Second Consultation Response:

No Comment Made.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Hampshire County Council (Lead Local Flood Authority)

First Consultation Response:

No Objection.

- Site within Flood Zone 1, very low risk of flooding from surface water.
- Surface water flow paths of a low to medium risk occur within site and should be retained.
- Infiltration drainage shown to be viable through successful testing across site.
- Groundwater levels unknown however BGS records show water level at 38m below GL at Pitt Down Farm.
- Infiltration proposed through gravel areas, these large enough that minimal depth for storage of runoff required.
- Mitigation measures proposed for panels aligned with a steeper gradient.
- Consider information provided sufficient to address comment and have no objection to application.

Second Consultation Response:

No additional comments.

- Drainage strategy principles do not appear to have changed at all. No additional comments to make.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Hampshire County Council (Highway Authority)

First Consultation Response:

No Objection.

- Applicant has provided further information regarding CTMP.

Second Consultation Response:

No Objection Request Condition.

- No objection subject to the implementation of measures set out in Construction Traffic Management Plan

Third Consultation Response:

No Change to Previous Recommendation.

- Does not appear that any additional information submitted that would alter previous recommendation.

Hampshire County Council (Public Rights of Way)

First Consultation Response:

None Received.

Second Consultation Response:

None Received.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Hampshire & IoW Fire and Rescue Service

First Consultation Response:

No Reply.

Second Consultation Response:

Advisory Comments.

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- Access and facilities should be in accordance with approved Document B5 of current Building Regulations.
- Access to site should be in accordance with Hampshire Act 1983 S12.
- Following recommendations are advisory:
 - Strongly recommend solar panels can be isolated if required either individually or in banks for fire-fighters safety
 - Need to consider access and space for high reach appliance around building.
 - Additional water supplies may be necessary. Contact Water Management Team for discussion.
 - Recommend consideration given to installation of Automatic Water Fire Suppression System to promote life safety and property protection.
 - Recommend upon commissioning all fire safety systems are fully justified, fully tested and shown to be working as designed. Effectiveness should be reconfirmed periodically throughout their working lifecycles.
 - Should serious un-suppressed fire occur water environment may become polluted with fire water runoff that may include foam. Service will liaise with Environment Agency at any incident and under certain circumstances where there is a serious risk to the environment a “controlled Burn” may take place.
 - Occupier has duty to prevent and mitigate damage to water environment from fire water runoff and any other spillages.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Health And Safety Executive

First Consultation Response:

No Comment.

- Solar Farms are usually not a relevant development when considering land use in vicinity of a hazard site or major accident pipeline.
- If proposed development located within a safeguarding zone for an HSE licensed explosives site please contact HSE Explosives Inspectorate.

Second Consultation Response:

No further comments to make.

- No further comments to make.

Third Consultation Response:

No further comments to make.

National Grid

First Consultation Response:

No Reply.

Second Consultation Response:

No Reply.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Natural England

First Consultation Response:

Not Consulted.

Second Consultation Response:

No Objection subject to mitigation.

- Proposal in close proximity to Crab Wood SSSI. Without best practice methods and mitigation, risk during construction phase of pollution from machinery, equipment or materials entering SSSI. Advise Construction Environmental Management Plan secured by condition that identifies steps and procedures to avoid any impacts on species and habitats. Offer list of 10 impacts to be addressed.

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- If minded to grant planning permission contrary to advice, NE must be notified beforehand.
- Proposed development site within or close to designated landscape which is South Downs National Park. Planning Authority advised to use national and local policies together with local landscape expertise to determine this proposal. Any decision should be guided by paragraph 176 of NPPF.
- Letter sets out duties on LPA when considering development within or close to a National Park.
- Recommends a comprehensive Landscape Enhancement Plan submitted for agreement and secured with any permission.
- General advice on consideration of protected species and other natural environment issues provided at Annex to letter. The Annex includes following topics:
 - NPPF para 174 and need to protect and enhance valued landscapes through planning system.
 - Best and Most Versatile agricultural land and soils.
 - Protected Species.
 - Local sites and priority habitats and species.
 - Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees.
 - Biodiversity and wider environmental gains,
 - Green infrastructure
 - Access and Recreation.
 - Rights of Way, Access Land Coastal Access and National Trails
 - Biodiversity duty.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Southern Water

First Consultation Response:

Comment Made.

(This response is written as if responding to a general type of development that includes foul drainage. The following points are considered of relevance to this specific application).

- It is possible a public sewer could be crossing the development site.
- Good management of soakaways important to retain effective use.

Second Consultation Response:

Comment Made.

- Comments in earlier response remain unchanged.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Test Valley DC

First Consultation Response:

Not Consulted.

Second Consultation Response:

No Reply.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

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Representations:

CPRE Hampshire

First Consultation Response:

Objection.

- Generally support principle of renewable, however solar should be located on brownfield sites and roofs rather than on agricultural land. If countryside location deemed essential an acceptable scale and location within landscape is vital.
- Plan should be landscape led.
- Large scale solar rarely acceptable within valued or highly sensitive landscape.
- Cumulative impact must be considered.
- Best and most versatile land (Grade 3a and above) should not be used.
- Site within previously designated Area of Special Landscape Quality which attests that area considered to have landscape quality and scenic value above ordinary countryside. (former Proposals Map attached).
- Have visited area, consider area would still qualify as ASLQ if such designation was still in place.
- Consider it now qualifies as valued landscape.
- Located 2km west of Winchester in area identified locally as Highly Sensitive Landscape.
- Agree with WCC Landscape Officer that LVIA in error assessing landscape other than highly sensitive.
- NPPF para 174(a) (*WCC insert: now para 180(a)*) requires valued landscapes to be protected and enhanced within planning decisions.
- NPPF para 174(b) (*WCC insert: now 180 (b)*) says planning decisions should contribute and enhance natural and local environment by recognising intrinsic character and beauty of countryside.
- Development within a valued landscape should be restricted to locations where wider landscape protected and plan is landscape led. Will need to accord with Landscape Strategies in Landscape Character Assessment. One aspect of valued landscape is public enjoyment so visual amenity and tranquillity need protecting.
- With solar, not possible to protect an open landscape from significant adverse impacts on landscape character and visual amenity so refusal.
- Above matters to consider in planning balance.
- Application conflicts with MTRA4 as no operational need for countryside location.
- Design is standard layout for a solar farm and not landscape led.
- LVIA rates site as moderate to high landscape sensitivity and predicts major landscape impact prior to mitigation. Consider scheme would have significant adverse impact on Hursley Scarplands LCA (open arable exposed).
- Solar farm in this location changes nature of landscape from predominantly agriculture to industrial type appearance and function.
- Consider LVIA viewpoints understate visual impacts, underscores impact on slower cyclists and no consideration of horse riders.
- Screening relies on hedgerows along surrounding roads now gappy in places and more transparent in winter when leaves fallen.
- Consider views of greater significance than minor or negligible score in LVIA.
- LVIA also identified some views that will remain open from east on road users and on public using Beechcroft Farm Shop and Tea Rooms.
- Acknowledged moderate adverse effect on users of Clarendon Way/Sarum Road more obvious in wintertime as screen is more a thin tree belt than hedgerow.

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- Also consider would be noise impacts from associated infrastructure.
- Proposed new hedgerow mitigation would subdivide open downland which should be avoided. Will take years to grow.
- 22% site classified as BMV grade 2 which falls into NPPF definition of best and most versatile land.
- See little evidence of significant biodiversity and ecological improvements on existing solar farm sites.
- Proposal contrary to following local plan policies: MTRA4, CP20, DM22.
- If Council minded to allow application important to ensure:
 - Grade 2 land excluded
 - Maximum made of landscape mitigation
 - Enforceable conditions included ensuring maintenance of landscaping throughout life of solar farm
 - No external lighting permitted other than in emergency
 - Full consideration given to means to remove panels and equipment at end of life including need for financial bond.

Second Consultation Response:

None Received.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Winchester Action on Climate Change

First Consultation Response:

Support.

- Support application as an essential response to climate and energy crisis consistent with both national and local policies.
- Development relatively small for a solar farm. Only half size of site at Three Maids Hill.
- Contribution to grid decarbonisation very significant. Delivering 3.5% of districts consumption of electricity equivalent to 5,500 average rooftop systems.
- Subject to planning could be operational by end of 2024.
- Governments energy security plan “Powering Up Britain” commits to fivefold increase in solar by 2035.
- Plan acknowledges ground mounted solar must play a role.
- Taken together with City Council commitment to carbon neutral district by 2030 UK policy tilts planning equation still further in favour of benefit of solar.
- Suitable grid connects are very scarce, must seize opportunity.
- Appeal to those concerned over landscape impact to come to terms with reality of warming planet. Climate change threatens landscape farm more than a solar farm.
- Estimate just 1.5% of land in district needed to deliver fair contribution towards UK solar goal, if combined with full complement of rooftop solar.
- Believe premise in LVIA that view of a solar farm inflicts negative reaction on all residents, walkers and cyclists has become oversimplified. Recent national poll suggests majority of households welcome prospect of a solar farm in their locality.

Second Consultation Response:

Reaffirm Support.

- Reaffirm support for reasons set out in May 23 response.
- Prospect of stability in global energy supplies deteriorated since first consultation.
- Every addition of local renewable generation will improve UK energy security.
- Public benefit of development cannot be overstated.

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Third Consultation Response:

Support.

- Read Site Selection Assessment and Land Classification Report. Previously expressed support remains.
- Note Land Classification report reinforces previous submission that site substantially grade 3b and consequently no DEFRA restriction on use of land for solar farm.
- Regarding site selection, note site is one of few in area that cannot be seen from Farley Mount, the principal visual receptor in area
- Even if alternatives were suitable, no requirement on developer to consider them and they would be more visible from Farley Mount.
- Greatest threat to visual amenity of landscape is impact from runaway climate change.
- Note WCC declaration of Climate Emergency.
- Application one of several that seeks to place meaningful response to that emergency in location where connection to grid can be made and quickly begin to make significant contribution to climate crisis.
- Hope planning committee uses further information supplied to reinforce previous decision to permit application

Letters of Objection from the Public

First Consultation Response:

106 letters from 97 households.

Main points summarised:

- Highly visible in long views.
- Area has strong landscape quality.
- Quality agricultural land important for food production.
- 14% of site grade 2 and loss not allowed by government rules.
- With slope planting will not alleviate impacts on rural character.
- Roads totally unsuited for level of construction traffic.
- Country lanes with passing places, used by commuters.
- Will cause significant obstruction/disruption during construction.
- Solar no benefit at peak demand in winter at 1700hrs.
- Site undulating landscape, government rules say should not be used for solar.
- Will be 8 years before landscaping becomes effective.
- Proposed landscaping will change character of area.
- Will destroy area used by residents, walkers, cyclists and visitors.
- Solar should be on brownfield sites, rooftops and car parks.
- In keenness to adopt green projects should not ignore wider implications.
- Close to Crabwood SSSI, Farley Mount and next to Clarendon Way.
- Crabwood is ancient woodland & SSSI, it should be protected.
- Once lost to this type of development will never return to agricultural.
- Will affect local businesses including Beechcroft Tea Rooms by industrialising countryside.

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- Beechcroft Tea Rooms relies on views and open spaces to attract customers. These unique selling points. No mitigation offered.
- Photos applicant took from business in November 2022 left out of application.
- Developer used selective viewpoints, view behind Crab Wood Forestry depot missing.
- Objection more about choice of location than installation of solar farm itself.
- Farmer should consider another site on farm. Hope review of alternative locations is undertaken by WCC.
- No information on choice of this site within South Lynch Farm Estate.
- Areas of land within Estate closer to connection point.
- No visualisations submitted.
- Letter objecting to installation of wind farm.
- This is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Need to consider carbon from production and sourcing in China.
- Scheme contrary to DM16, DM23, CP20 & MTRA4.
- Note comments of Landscape Officer and fully support them.
- At decommissioning will panels end up in landfill.
- How will deer cross site?
- Reflection will distract drivers, walkers and cyclists.
- Guidance says not every solar scheme should be supported.
- Fences and CCTV will turn site into industrial area.
- Satellite dishes on top of sub stations.
- If approved should require higher evergreen screening from start.
- Biodiversity claims unsubstantiated.
- Question orientation of land as some parts sloping eastward.
- Question if Pitt Down Plantation will not cast shadow over site.
- No full explanation of impacts on Crabwood House or Beechcroft & Tea rooms. Significant visual impacts on these properties.
- Trees would need to be 16m tall to full screen site.
- No consideration of Glint & Glare on properties and businesses.
- Glint & Glare will affect road users at crossroads which is accident spot, cyclist death last year.
- Biodiversity improvements overstated. Half relate to planting up gaps in neglected hedgerows.
- Question how WCC will enforce that planting is properly managed.
- Community not adequately consulted, reduced time to respond.
- There are other ways to reduce carbon such as insulating home.
- No screening proposed to sub stations.
- Proposed working hours highly disruptive for people using area for leisure.
- Question real benefit to local employment.
- Chosen viewpoints selectively.
- Contrary to application, site can be seen from rooms in neighbours' property.
- Sparsholt PC not involved in applicants' consultation despite fact site on parish border.
- Original open meeting not well advertised.
- Photos should be as situation exists in winter.
- Note Hursley will benefit financially from scheme if it goes ahead.
- Scheme contrary to NPPF, DM23, CP20, MTRA4 & DM17.

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- Area part of the lungs to city.
- Loss of landscape amenity far greater than benefits of solar energy production.
- Preferred location for solar farms is flat ground.

Second Consultation Response:

67 letters from 53 households and one letter from a Planning Solicitor acting on behalf of a group of local residents (precise number not given).

Main points summarised:

- Despite amendments scheme still represents industrialisation of countryside.
- Better locations exist nearer major roads and not in middle of a popular walking, cycling area abutting SDNP.
- Scheme still visible despite additional planting.
- Not net zero when manufacturing, transportation and disposal included.
- Will still have hugely detrimental effect on Beechcroft Farm shop as well as local community. Enclose screenshots from google reviews showing appreciation of views.
- This rural area and should be left as such.
- Less damaging alternative locations available.
- Acres of flat roofs must be available through Council and city car parks.
- Solar and heat pumps should be part of any new development.
- Will totally change character of area into industrial park.
- Will have negative impact on tranquillity of area.
- Site next to major and popular footpath.
- Contrary to Hampshire Downs NCA & WCC LCA 2021.
- Site rural in character provides far reaching views.
Agree with conclusion of WCC Landscape Officer that scheme will adversely affect character of landscape.
- Changes to scheme do not overcome concerns.
- Any planting will take 8-10 years to grown.
- All photos taken in summer.
- Some of hedgerows will obstruct open spaces enjoyed by local community from road and FPs.
- Glint and Glare report shows a substantial number of properties will be adversely affected. These are Beechcroft farm shop, the farm and unnamed property on crossroads to east.
- Concerned glint and glare will affect road users. Fatal accident occurred in area and suspect shuts will occur.
- Roads used by commuters.
- Disruption to local community from construction as people will see and hear activity.
- Viewpoints selectively chosen. No view from countryside depot on south side of Crabwood to east of Sparsholt Road.
- Photomontage from Beechcroft Farm and Tea rooms shows impact that will result.
- Land should be used for growing food. North Yorkshire Council refused pp for this reason and NFU expressed concern.
- Area used as escape from city by walkers, cyclists, and joggers.
- All points made previously still valid.
- Inappropriate and detrimental to landscape.
- Scheme has negative impact on landscape located top of hill.
- Does not achieve max efficiency/yield.

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- Question if 40 years is temporary.
- Biodiversity increase could be achieved on land without solar farm.
- All previous comments on changes to character, of landscape, visual impact, issues around net zero, use of land, detrimental effect on users and local business still wholly valid.
- Council has no strategic plan for determining where optimal place for solar farms but allowing applicants to present sites.
- This a highly inappropriate site, better locations exist to achieve Councils net zero target.
- Applicant acknowledges scheme will have major impact on landscape character within site including residencies on Sarum Road.
- Application in conflict with policy DM 23 (Rural Character).
- Other measures to achieve net zero such as insulation could be made.
- Net zero did not seem to be considered when chicken farm approved on Sarum road in 2018.
- Fact applicant offering to underwrite monitoring of ecology and bio mitigation should be discounted in decision making.
- Any benefit to Council from business rates should be discounted as rates would apply wherever solar farm located.
- Scheme will have economically detrimental effect on Beechcroft Farm shop and Tea rooms which relies on views and open space to attract customers.
- Some economic benefits spurious, unlikely local construction workers used.
- Note Hursley PC offered financial contribution; understand WCC has no jurisdiction over any such payment. Any support by Hursley PC on economic merits should be discounted.
- Site closer to Sparsholt (1.7km) than Hursley (3.2km) and Sparsholt residents more negatively affected.
- 14% land is grade 2 and government rules say this should not be used.
- Government slowing down actions towards Net Zero.
- No decision should be made until WCC has properly formulated renewable energy strategy.
- No attempt to address previous concerns.
- Will negatively impact on this beautiful and historically significant area of ancient woodland and its surrounding countryside.
- Revisions show no trees on eastern and southern boundaries so impact now worse.
- Site faces southeast or southwest not true south so question efficiency of panels.
- Question efficiency of panels in shadow of Pit Down Plantation.
- Glint and Glare wrong at 6.6 to use Sparsholt Road over Beechcroft Tea Rooms as later at higher level. Means conclusions wrong.
- Economic impacts flawed and overstated.
- Question figure of 2FTE posts in operational phase.
- No consideration of impacts on other businesses.
- Over years, site has produced crops of wheat, barley, oilseed rape, potatoes and grass. All proving it is productive land.
- No evidence of systematic process to identify most suitable site on farm holding or in wider area.
- Roofs or brownfield first.
- Traffic route for vehicles means employees bypass local shops so local businesses will not benefit as claimed.

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- Proposed new rules from Ofgem means rules for waiting for links to grid will change allowing faster connections for shovel ready projects.
- February 2024 Committee Report did not give sufficient regard to the proposed impact of the solar farm on the setting of Farley Mount Oblisk. This is a grade 2 listed building located in an elevated position 2.1km to the west of the site. In support of this position, reference is made to the Historic Environment Officers full comments which in part specifically refer to this feature. Advice to the committee was flawed and the council had not complied with its duty under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- At February Committee Meeting, members advised there is no policy requirement to consider alternative sites and there was no meaningful discussion in the report on this subject. Requirement to consider alternatives is supported by caselaw with a number of specific cases quoted. Solar panels could be positioned on a different part of the applicant's land so as to cause less harm in planning terms". Because of the planning harms caused by the development, suggested that it is legally necessary for the Council to consider whether an alternative site exists that would result in less harm.
- Policy MTRA4 includes an overarching landscape harm test. Officers report indicated the scheme was in accordance with policy MTRA4 and failed to refer to the last paragraph in the policy which the scheme did not comply with. Accordingly, the report should have drawn attention to the fact the scheme was also in conflict with this policy.
- Land where the substations will be located is grade 2 and as one of the substations would remain after the decommissioning, then this land would be permanently lost to agriculture. The most compelling evidence is needed to justify inclusion of grade 2 land and this should have been brought to members attention.
- Noted applicant submitted a revised Landscape/Ecology Mitigation Plan in January 2024. No formal readvertisement was undertaken. If the contents of this letter are to be put in front of the committee, Council is invited to consider whether it would be appropriate to run a short period of consultation.
- Regarding impact on Beechcroft Team Rooms seek clarification on reference in February committee report to the absence of any policy support to protect the existing Team Room business from any impacts from the presence of the proposed solar farm.

Third Consultation Response:

54 letters from 45 households.

Main points summarised:

- Recent amendments do nothing to ameliorate my objections.
- Previous comments from May 23, November 23 and February 2024 still stand.
- No mention of construction traffic disruption.
- Since original comments of May 23, home food production figures compared to imports got considerably worse.
- Would destroy substantial area of prime food producing farmland. UK imports 46% food.
- Deputy President of NFU expressed concern over loss of agricultural land creating greater reliance on imports.
- Site unsuitable and extremely visually intrusive from all directions.
- Immediately adjacent to Crabwood SSSI, Farley Mount & Clarendon Way all vital enjoyed amenities.

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- 14% land is grade 2 not permitted for solar.
- Contrary to government advice on locating solar farms on undulating ground.
- Proposed landscaping not acceptable, no real effect for 10 years and then in winter less screening as leaves not on trees.
- WCC Landscape Officer says proposal will change natural landscape from agricultural to industrial appearance.
- Since February 2024 planning meeting number trees removed due to ash die back which will adversely affect any screening particularly increasing views from Clarendon Way.
- Note planning officers report makes WCC Climate Emergency superior to all policies, as application contravenes existing local and national policies.
- Do not recall any local plan on Climate Emergency that makes it superior over all other WCC policies. Without such superiority, application contrary to number of planning policies and must be rejected.
- 80% panels manufactured in China, made with energy when China has 60% coal fired power stations.
- 95% panels include polysilicon, nearly half material comes from factories associated with slave labour.
- No recycling arrangements for panels.
- Would destroy natural landscape.
- Glinting glass would be unattractive.
- Should be located on marginal agricultural land or previously developed land.
- Remains a purely economic proposal between developer and landowner with no account of any concerns raised by local community, visitors or WCC Landscape Officer.
- Applicant refers to support offered by appeal decision. Other appeal decisions made when applications rejected on impact on character and appearance of area.
- Officers report recognises application does not fully meet MTRA4, DM23 & CP20. Also in conflict with DM16 and NPPF para 174(b).
- Contrary to planning recommendation, indefensible that project will not be highly visible. Screening ineffectual with equipment over 3m.
- If committee consider approving application imperative further mitigation through planting trees and hedgerows included. Need substantial mature tall hedging and trees along northern and eastern boundaries near fencing to protect views.
- Overriding issue is site in wrong place for a solar farm.
- WCC has no policy on solar farm locations, so need to consider effects on landscape, local community and visitors.
- WCC needs viable plan for provision of renewables in the area.
- Site selection assessment adds nothing. Application still not showing viable alternatives. Only one option offered rest not investigated fully.
- All new buildings should have renewable energy installations.
- Green energy important but not at cost of ruining countryside.
- Scheme still detrimental to local businesses.
- Would severely impact on views from Beechcroft Tea Barn, affecting trade of local business built up over many years.
- Council ignoring local and national guidance.
- Site Selection Assessment (SSA) confirms Council did not follow due process originally.

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- SSA indicates site used for sheep grazing and this could continue if panels in situ. This statement incorrect. Site currently down to grass primarily for production of grass seed with any grazing a secondary use. Recent use of land included cereal crops, potatoes and maize. So statement in SSA incorrect. What else can be trusted?
- Glare issue on new property at Beechcroft still not addressed.
- January 2024 revised plan no longer show trees on eastern and southern boundaries.
- Glint and Glare surveys show significant impacts on Beechcroft Farm Shop, Beechcroft Farm, new unnamed property at Beechcroft and on crossroads of Sarum Road, Woodman Road & Sparsholt Road and the T junction of Enmill Lane and Sparsholt Road. Both junctions' scene of road accidents. G&G shows these junctions affected around 6pm (commuter time) but highway safety not considered, and no mitigation applied.
- At public consultation event, understood location chosen because of proximity to grid and needs south facing land. Actual site is SW or SE facing. Sections of Estate land close to grid which face true south such as land other side of Farley Mount Road.
- Panels close to Pitt Down Plantation will be in shade.
- Applicant not fully explained or explored significant visual impact that will occur on Crabwood House, Beechcroft, unnamed house at Beechcroft, and particularly on Farm shop and Tea Barn which offer unspoilt countryside views from Fairly Mount around to Portsdown Hill. Application highlights scheme will have significant detrimental effect on all these properties and businesses.
- Disappointing computer-generated images of site from Beechcroft not included in documentation within application.
- Beechcroft has small, farmed area and is reliant on added value of home-grown production being sold directly to customers through shop to survive. Shop supplied around 200 customers per week during covid.
- Proposal will cause significant financial harm to businesses and threaten livelihood of operator.
- Will severely impact on countryside views of guests using Old Dairy Holiday Cottage at Beechcroft Farm.
- Section under substations and power connection run is grade 2 land and should be protected under BMV classification. Rest of site is grade 3b but this ground still of value and seen many successful crops grown over recent years. Majority of Hampshire is grade 3 and rest 4 & 5 with small area grade 2.
- Slight change to BNG does nothing to address negative impacts.
- Gaps and inconsistencies in BNG calculation.
- Updated BNG lacking detail.
- No assessment made of short-term effects on habitat and wildlife.
- Biodiversity could be improved by landowner with any development taking place.
- SSA not extensive at all, no survey of other sites in Estate and other sites with less impact.
- SSA shows Council failed in only considering one site.
- Incomprehensible this only available site.
- Inappropriate location near ancient monument (Farley Mount) adjacent Roman Road and Crabwood SSSI.
- Note H&I/WFRS refer to increased fire risk of solar farm near woodland.

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- Need direct access track across Estate so HGVs do not need to use local lanes.
- No information on where panels and other equipment manufactured. LPA should require materials sourced from Environmentally responsible supply chain as near to project as possible regardless of cost implications.
- Question authenticity of SSA. I own search site No 7 and have no recollection of any communication so suggestion landowner said that site unavailable is untrue. This raises questions on rest of document.
- Council should execute its responsibilities under local and national planning laws and reject application.
- Applicant appears to refer to absence of local plan policies on siting renewables as support for siting anywhere. This should not be the assumption, in fact quite the opposite.
Use of appeal decision materially misleading and should not be presented.
- Proposed screening will chop up landscape.
- Government warned Councils not to accelerate decisions but ensuring Net Zero achieved in fair and meaningful way. WCC set 2030 target, Government target is 2050.
- Long term efficiency of panels unproven.
- Limited local jobs.
- Very small hedging to be planted towards Sarum Road and Sparsholt Road. Substantial mature tall hedging and trees should be used instead.
- If application to be approved should include conditions to mitigate impacts
 - Planting using mature shrubs and hedgerows
 - Ensure maintenance of landscaping throughout life of solar farm.
 - Exclude grade 2 land.
 - No external lighting other than emergency use.
 - Construction should not be carried out in summer.
 - Limit construction hours to prevent traffic issues and noise. 0700 to 1900hrs not acceptable. 0700 to 1500hr or 0900-1700hrs more acceptable.
 - Lighting during construction limited to working hrs only and not at night.
 - Roads to be washed down daily to remove mud.
 - Financial penalty if construction over runs the 16-week period.
 - Full consideration given to means of removal of panels and equipment at end of life.

Letters in Support from the Public

First Consultation Response

73 letters from 68 households.

Main points summarised:

- Should support renewables in the area to help slow global warming.
- Need alternatives and that include solar.
- Net zero can only be achieved with vast increase in renewable, need 5-fold increase so every opportunity should be taken.
- Consistent with national policy and government publications Energy Security Plan & Powering Up Britain.
- Know area well, visit it for walking and bird watching, enjoy woodlands. Assume Crabwood not disturbed by any works.
- Highly supportive.
- Development is relatively small for a solar farm but will supply 3.5% of district consumption of electricity equivalent to 5,500 average domestic rooftop systems.

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- Suitable grid connections are scarce.
- Solar Farms are temporary, silent, and inoffensive.
- Line of trees protecting views from Sarum Road. Only clearly visible from short section from Beechcroft Farm.
- Have number of solar farms near me, once operational barely noticeable.
- Consistent with both national and local policies.
- Pleased to see net biodiversity gain.
- Prefer to see solar panels than see green countryside and wildlife killed by climate change.
- Support solar farm when alternative is impacts associated with climate change (temperatures, drought & intense rainfall).
- Care appears to have been taken over siting to preserve countryside views and historic value of site.
- Site can return to agriculture in future.
- Site of little value to wildlife and not particularly good for agriculture.
- Management of habitats after installation important for BNG
- Some panels may be visible to south and east, on balance minor disadvantage.
- Solar Farms can be up and running very quickly.
- Will support farmer with regular income.
- Opportunity for WCC to show how serious it is over climate change and energy security.
- Will not involve loss of any top-grade agricultural land as majority of site 3b.
- Any impacts temporary.
- Plan to mitigate visual impact by planting.
- Please give weight to views of WINACC.
- Support, although first option should be to place panels on buildings.
- Need similar approach to actions needed during wartime when impacts on rural areas accepted.
- Site completely screen from Farley Mount and obscured views from Crab Wood path. Main views from Sparsholt Road and any gaps in hedge to be planted.
- Landscape does not carry any designation.
- Cycle in area, untroubled by prospect of proposal.
- Little impact on food production.
- Need more sustainable energy production.
- Live closer to site than anyone else and in full support.
- Note reference to sub optimal wildlife condition of site due to monoculture and spraying.

Second Consultation Response:

59 letters from 53 households

Main points summarised:

- Fully support, needed to demonstrate commitment to net zero and to energy transition.
- Raise height panels to allow grazing beneath and growth of wildflowers & plants.
- Beechcroft Farm Cafe business at risk from glint and glare. This needs mitigating.
- Intensive agricultural is almost industrial.
- Large cereal field with few breaks in size.
- Pleased to see increase in natural habitat.
- Important to reduce carbon emissions.

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- UK starting to feel impacts of climate change with extreme weather events.
- Any development will have negative impacts, with this scheme they are primarily visual and some loss of arable land.
- Significant improvements in biodiversity.
- Since application submitted, reports entitled Powering Up Britain & Energy Security Plan published. UN Sept 2023 stressed urgency to cut carbon emissions.
- Without this type of scheme cannot meet local or national targets.
- Will provide 35% of district consumption equivalent to 5,500 average domestic rooftop systems.
- Government publications promoting x5 scaling up of solar by 2025.
- Large scale ground mounted solar must play a role.
- Can compliment farming.
- Suitable grid connections are scarce and must be utilised.
- In Winchester District, over last 4 years created 7.2MW of rooftop solar. This proposal for 20MW.
- Need both rooftop schemes and solar farms.
- Scheme supported by Hursley PC.
- No residents close to site.
- Note additional hedgerows, wildflower meadows and trees proposed.
- BNG gain of 79% in habitat units and 63% in hedgerow units.
- Site is grade 3b.
- Regularly walk area, do not agree solar farm will harm views.
- Objections have to be balanced by realities of warming planet.
- Just 1.5% of land in district needed to make fair contribution.
- Public attitudes tracker reveals growing majority of households in favour of solar farms.
- This better solution than oil extraction in SDNP at Avington.
- Scheme can be rapidly implemented making immediate contribution to targets.
- Would like to see district become leader in local generation.
- Site does not contribute to area used as native woodland or for recreation.
- WCC has declared emergency.
-

Third Consultation Response:

2 letters received from 2 households

Main points summarised:

- Support application, amendments address many of issues raised by objectors.
- With passage of time, it is more pressing to act to generate renewable energy.
- Agree with case put forward by Bill Gunyon.
- Technical reports on minimal likelihood of nuisance from glint and glare very persuasive.
- Need for alternative sources of energy is paramount.

Neutral Representation

First Consultation Response

One letter received expressing neither supporting nor objecting to the application.

Main points summarised:

- Question if application encourages overly optimistic impression of likely benefits.

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- Only fraction of claimed output likely to occur due to weather, time of year and daylight hours.
- MW generation could be as little as 10% of 20MW design capacity.
- Applicant should set out true benefits of proposal so balanced consideration made.

Second Consultation Response:

None Received.

Third Consultation Response:

None Received.

Relevant Government Planning Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework December 02023

- Section 2 Achieving Sustainable development
- Section 4 Decision Making
- Section 6 Building a Strong, Competitive Economy
- Section 9 Promoting Sustainable Transport
- Section 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
- Annex 2 Glossary

National Planning Practice Guidance

- Brownfield land register
- Climate Change
- Consultation and pre-decision matters
- Flood risk and coastal change
- Historic Environment
- Light Pollution
- Natural Environment
- Planning Obligations
- Renewable and local carbon energy
- Travel Plans, Transport Assessments and Statements
- Use of planning conditions

National Policy Statements

National Policy Statement: Overarching NPS for Energy (EN-1) (January 2024)

National Policy Statement: Renewable Energy Infrastructure EN-3 (January 2024)

Winchester Local Plan Part 1 – Joint Core Strategy (LPP1).

- DS1 Development Strategy and Principles
- MTRA1 Development Strategy Market Towns and Rural Areas
- MTRA4 Development in the Countryside
- CP8 Economic Growth and Diversification
- CP10 Transport
- CP12 Renewable and Decentralised Energy
- CP14 The Effective Use of Land
- CP15 Green Infrastructure
- CP16 Biodiversity
- CP17 Flooding Flood Risk and the Water Environment

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- CP19 South Downs National Park
- CP20 Heritage and Landscape Character

Winchester District Local Plan Part 2 – Development Management and Site Allocations

- DM1 Location of New Development
- DM15 Local Distinctiveness
- DM16 Site Design Criteria
- DM17 Site Development Principles
- DM18 Access and Parking
- DM19 Development and Pollution
- DM20 Development and Noise
- DM21 Contaminated Land
- DM23 Rural Character
- DM24 Special Trees, Important Hedgerows and Ancient Woodlands
- DM25 Historic Parks and Gardens
- DM26 Archaeology
- DM29 Heritage Assets
- DM31 Locally Listed Heritage Assets

Other relevant documents

Supplementary Planning Document

- Climate Emergency Declaration carbon neutrality action plan 2020-2030
- Statement of Community Involvement 2018 and 2020
- Landscape Character Assessment March 2004 and emerging LCA December 2021
- Biodiversity Action Plan 2021
- Historic England Guidance
- Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance 2008
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 4 Published 30 June 2020
- The Setting of Heritage Assets: Good Practice Advice Planning Note 3 (2nd Edition) December 2017

Planning Considerations

Principle of development

In the following section, consideration will be given to whether the development accords with policy in principle before going on to consider the need for a general countryside location for the solar arrays before then reviewing the process through which the applicant identified this specific site. This will be followed with an assessment against individual issues.

Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and paragraph 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of the statutory test, it is necessary to consider the policies of the Development Plan and determine whether the development accords with the Development

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Plan as a whole and, if there is a conflict with the plan as a whole, whether there are other material considerations which are of such weight that planning permission should nonetheless be granted.

LPP1 policy DS1 (Development Strategy and Principles) sets an overview that all development should seek to comply with, reflecting the fundamental principles of sustainability, positive engagement, and a positive outcome. It is considered by officers that the application under consideration has the potential to achieve all these objectives providing it complies with other more issue specific local plan policies.

Policy CP12 (Renewable and Decentralised Energy) offers general support to the generation of renewable energy. Whilst the policy does not specifically refer to solar farms, they are embraced within the policy under the generic term “development of large-scale renewable energy developments”. Seven criteria are outlined that need to be considered when applying this policy. Those specifically relevant to this application are:

- impact on areas designated for their local, national or international importance, such as Gaps and the South Downs National Park, conservation areas and heritage assets, including their setting;
- contributions to national, regional & sub-regional renewable energy targets and CO2 savings;
- potential to integrate with new or existing development whilst avoiding harm to existing development and communities;
- benefits to host communities and opportunities for environmental enhancement;
- proximity to biomass plants, fuel sources and transport links;
- connection to the electricity network;
- effect on the landscape and surrounding location.

All these criteria will be considered below.

Regarding national policy, the National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy (EN-1) indicates that the Government is committed to meeting a legally binding target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050, compared to 1990 levels. In 2021 the Government committed to decarbonising the UK electricity system by 2035 in advance of the more general target date outlined above. As a general statement of the Government’s objective, these targets are considered material notwithstanding they are contained within an NPS. EN-1 also states that wind and solar are likely to be the main contributors to achieving a secure, reliable affordable & net zero electricity system by 2050. The Climate Change Act commits the UK government by law to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by 2050. Increasingly, the need for a move away from fossil fuel and towards renewable sources of energy production is supported for reasons of energy security and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. This position has only been strengthened by more recent government publications and guidance such as the Energy White Paper (Powering our Net Zero Future) and the Energy Security Strategy that refers to a fivefold increase in solar which must rely heavily on ground mounted provision.

The NPPF contains sections that are considered as supportive of solar farm schemes and sections that indicate caution in terms of the need to consider the impacts on the natural and manmade environments. Chapters 6 (Building a Strong, competitive Economy), Chapter 14 (Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change), Chapter 15 (Conserving & Enhancing the Natural environment) and Chapter 16

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(Conserving & Enhancing the Historic Environment) all contain relevant factors (for and against) to be taken into consideration.

This theme of competing factors is set out in Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy paragraph 013 (March 2015) and in the 25 March 2015 statement from the then Secretary of State. When referring to the provision of solar farms, the PPG sets out 9 matters for consideration. These are:

- encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value.
- where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.
- that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use.
- the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety.
- the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun.
- the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing.
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large-scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large-scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset.
- the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges.
- the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.

The March 2015 statement from the then Secretary of State includes the following:

“The National Planning Policy Framework includes strong protections for the natural and historic environment and is quite clear that local councils when considering development proposals should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Yet, some local communities have genuine concerns that when it comes to solar farms insufficient weight has been given to these protections and the benefits of high-quality agricultural land. As the solar strategy noted, public acceptability for solar energy is being eroded by the public response to large-scale solar farms which have sometimes been sited insensitively.

Meeting our energy goals should not be used to justify the wrong development in the wrong location and this includes the unnecessary use of high-quality agricultural land. Protecting the global environment is not an excuse to trash the local

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environment. When we published our new planning guidance in support of the Framework, we set out the particular factors relating to large scale ground mounted solar photovoltaic farms that a local council will need to consider. These include making effective use of previously developed land and, where a proposal involves agricultural land, being quite clear this is necessary and that poorer quality land is to be used in preference to land of a higher quality.

We are encouraged by the impact the guidance is having but do appreciate the continuing concerns, not least those raised in this House, about the unjustified use of high quality agricultural land. In light of these concerns we want it to be clear that any proposal for a solar farm involving the best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence. Of course, planning is a quasi-judicial process, and every application needs to be considered on its individual merits, with due process, in light of the relevant material considerations”

All the matters outlined in both documents will be considered in reaching any decision. The above does indicate that there is potential in principle for a solar farm to be supported subject to the consideration of more detailed policies.

Turning now to the question of whether a countryside location is justified, the application site lies within open countryside where LPP1 Policy MTRA4 states that development will be limited to a small number of categories. None of these categories explicitly refers to the provision of a solar farm, although the first category does refer to “development with an operational need for a countryside location, such as agriculture, horticulture or forestry”. The use of the words “such as” implies there are other activities beyond those listed, that could be consider for a countryside location if they can present an operational need. However, it should be noted that MTRA4 does include a final element that indicates even if a development proposal is acceptable under this policy, it should not cause harm to the character and landscape of the area or neighbouring uses or create inappropriate noise/light and traffic generation.

Alternatives to a countryside location such an installation on roofs or brown field land do not offer the applicant practical options. The extent of brown field land within the district is limited and under pressure for housing development. An expectation on the developer to co-ordinate sufficient roof area with the appropriate orientation and entering agreements with individual property owners is considered too onerous. The observation by the applicant in the site selection assessment that they are not aware of an extensive rooftop scheme is noted. Roof mounted solar panels can provide a useful contribution towards renewable energy generation and it does have a role to play, but this is likely to come forward as a result of individual initiatives and not at the scale that could substitute schemes of this size. When considering the above, this solar farm is considered to have an operational need that justifies a countryside location under the first part of policy MTRA4 subject to the acceptability of the scheme in the context of further policies.

In conclusion, at both the national and local level, there is support in principle for renewable energy proposals in the countryside, but a recognition that this support is not unqualified and must take account of the wider impacts of any scheme on the local environment. Every application needs to be considered on its individual circumstances and merits, in the light of the relevant development plan policies and other material considerations that apply.

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The remaining sections in this assessment will firstly consider the background behind the selection of this site and then move on to consider the individual circumstances of this development and how these relate to the development plan and other policies, as well as all other material considerations to which the application gives rise.

Following an assessment of all relevant matters, a planning balance and conclusion is reached at the end of the report.

Assessment under 2017 EIA Regulations.

The development does not fall under Schedule I of the 2017 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. The development falls within Schedule II of the regulations and the applicant did submit a screening request in October 2022 (22/02277/SCREEN). Having assessed the implications and potential impacts likely to arise from the development, an opinion was issued in November 2022 that an Environmental Impact Statement was not required as part of any submission. The same conclusion was reached upon submission of the application.

Site Selection

The applicant in the Site Selection Assessment has set out the factors considered in the identification of a site and then the search criteria through which this site was brought forward. These are:

- that the site is south facing,
- it is considered to have localised impact on landscape,
- it has good vehicle access,
- an available connection to the grid
- it is on the edge of the landowner's estate.
- Solar farms by their very nature need an extensive area for the number of panels to be displayed.

On receiving the pre challenge letter from the Environmental Planning Law solicitor in March 2024, the applicant has been invited to submit a more detailed report on the reasons behind the site selection process and how the application site came forward. The "application details" section above sets out the methodology behind the site selection. In summary the application was presented with the connection points which are two pylons on the same 66Kv line. Viability meant the applicant kept the search to within 1km of the connection point. Further refinement reduced the potential site selection down to 7 sites. Of these 3 were sites on the South Lynch Estate holding and 4 on land owned by other parties. Having reviewed a range of criteria, the current application site was chosen.

The rationale behind the choice of the application site is accepted and is considered to have addressed the concerns raised by the Richard Buxton Environmental Planning Solicitors' letter on this matter. In making this decision, weight is given to the ability to connect to the distribution power system and the observations of the sustainability officer who expresses a view that there are severe limitations on the ability to make connections over the next 10 years. This means that where such opportunities exist, then they need detailed consideration.

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The Site Selection Assessment is not accepted by Sparsholt Parish Council and by objectors as a competent piece of work. However, when considering the degree to which the landscape justifies the need for a review of alternatives, it is considered that the assessment is adequate. Regarding the criticism by one party who stated they own one of the Search Sites (no7) and do not recall any communication from the applicant, this matter has been raised with the applicant. In reply, the applicant acknowledges that the landowner of site no.7 was not approached directly. The applicant states that this site was discounted for reasons set out in the table contained within the report. This answers the concern raised by the owner of site no.7.

Impact on character and appearance of area, including those on recreational effects on users of surrounding area.

LPP1 policy MTRA4 (Development in the Countryside) seeks to limit development outside built-up areas. Of the four types of development that are envisaged as potentially being acceptable in the countryside, the only one that could apply to a solar farm is that they have an operational need for such a location based on the extent of the land take required. However, as outlined in the concluding paragraph of MTRA4, that situation must still meet the other more general tests in terms of not causing harm to the character and landscape of the area or neighbouring uses or create inappropriate noise/light and traffic generation.

Moreover, other development plan policies also need to be considered when addressing these impacts. LPP2 policy DM23 (Rural Character) seeks to protect the rural character of the site, when considering its contribution to landscape character and the visual environment. This includes keeping visual intrusion to a minimum, maintaining tranquillity, not detracting from the enjoyment of the countryside from public rights of way and assessing the type and number of vehicles associated with any development.

As the proposal intends to utilise the first section of an existing access roadway, the elements of the scheme to consider in terms of visual impact are the temporary compound, the section of new roadway, the main site where the PV panels will be erected and the two substation structures. The temporary compound is to be located on the northeast side of Pitt Down Farm and the existing tree belt. Ground levels gradually rise from the location of the compound towards Sparsholt Road and the occasional break in the roadside hedgerow and the western end of Enmill Lane may offer fleeting views of the compound. However, any visual impact will be limited to the construction period of 4 months. The new 350m roadway is shown running up the eastern side of the existing tree screen. The roadway would be 4m wide and constructed with a stone or tarmac plainings surface on a hardcore base. Views of this feature where they exist, will be limited from Sparsholt Road and at its junction with Enmill Lane. Any visual impact will be limited. The precise levels and top surface can be conditioned. The two substations are to be located on ground adjacent Farley Mount Road and would be confined on the ground by a 3m palisade fence. This facility would be in view from the section of Farley Mount Road over the boundary hedge which is to be kept low to ensure the access has adequate visibility. In recognition of this exposed position, it is proposed to plant scrub vegetation around the facility and place the access to the structures in a position that does not allow a line of sight from someone stood on the public road. Whilst these elements are in view for a limited section of the road; the planting will mitigate any impact over time. It is proposed to control the external finish of the sub stations by condition. Regarding the cable laying, this will take place down the field. The intention is

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for the cable to be placed at a depth to enable the field to continue to be cultivated after installation. Once laid, there will not be any direct signs of the presence of the cable.

The construction compound would have some limited visual impact but of a short time duration. The new roadway would be in view from the limited number of weak points in the roadside hedgerow on Sparsholt Road and this is to be addressed through the requirement to plant up these gaps. The proposed substations and its fencing would be in view from a short section of Farley Mount Road and this would be mitigated over time by the new planting. The main focus with regard to visual impact is on the main site where the solar arrays are to be positioned surrounded by the deer fencing. The remaining part of the consideration of the impact on character and appearance of area, will therefore focus on the main site.

The main site is presently part of an extensive open arable field with ground levels falling from the northwest corner to the south and east. The woodlands to the west and north create strong backstops to any views from the east, southeast and south. The section of Sarum Road east of the Sparsholt Road junction offers limited views of the main site through the verge vegetation but at the land adjacent the junction itself, there are strong open views up towards the site. These views are increased by the ground levels and the lack of any hedgerow on the field boundary. The north-western end of Millers Lane and the western end of Enmill Lane also offer views towards the main site. From the south at the existing vehicle access point, the site of the proposed substations is in view from Farley Mount Road with only a limited view of part of the main site. Generally, the nature of the topography of the land to the south of the main site and available public viewpoints means views are very limited beyond the immediate area.

There are no public footpaths crossing the application site. The field is defined by three roads (Sarum Road, Sparsholt Road and Farley Mount Road). Sarum Road is part of the former "Roman Road" linking Winchester to Old Salisbury. This is evident by its straight nature. The road is flanked by deep wooded verges on both sides. This road also carries the Clarendon Way although pedestrians are guided to use the footpath that weaves through the verge on the north side of the road. The strip of ground between the footpath and Sarum Road has seen some clearance work over recent months that have opened up views from the path. The southern verge of Sarum Road has not been subject to any clearance. With the presence of a number of car parking areas on the north side of Sarum Road offering access into the adjoining woodlands, Sarum Road is well used as an access to the countryside by vehicle drivers, walkers and cyclists. Views from Sarum Road towards the application site change throughout the year reflecting the presence of leaves on the vegetation growing on the verges. In summer, the views through to the field are mostly obscured. In the wintertime, the absence of any leaves means these views are more open but not unobstructed and landscape features beyond the site to the south can be seen.

Within the Winchester Landscape Character Classification, the site forms part of the Hursley Scarplands Landscape Character Area. This is an extensive area extending from Sarum Road in the north to Poles Lane Hursley in the south and from the district boundary to the west through to the edge of the city in the east.

The key characteristics of value and sensitivities for this area are identified as:

- Strong rural character.

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- Frequent far-reaching views but also more visually enclosed landscapes.
- Prehistoric downland barrows, drove routes and a range on enclosure processes give a strong sense of history.
- Numerous historic features including 18th century deer park, park pale and estate village at Hursley, Merdon Castle and Farley Mount. Hursley Park was much painted.
- Narrow winding and sunken lanes contrast with straight Roman roads.
- Strong landscape structure provided by numerous small areas of ancient woodland, plantation woodland, tree belts, hangers and hedgerows.
- Wooded beech and yew scarps and beech shelterbelts.
- Stone curlew nesting within arable fields.
- Important ecological habitats and SINCs including chalk grassland, juniper scrub, semi-natural ancient woodlands, 19th century plantation and Yew Hill butterfly reserve.
- Panoramic views from Farley Mount, Farley Church and Merdon Castle. Views of Winchester Cathedral and St Cross from Compton Down.
- Views from Bushfield uniquely feature the city's three major medieval building groups seemingly isolated amongst mature trees.
- The chalk downland of Oliver's Battery, Badger Farm and Bushfield form an important backdrop to views of St Cross from St Catherine's Hill.
- The scarp-and-valley features with the backdrop of Farley Down, Mount Down and Pittdown form a specific landscape contained by woodland.
- Sense of tranquillity in the north
- Built form of locally traditional materials including flint, plain clay tiles, red brick, thatch and slate.

The application site and its immediate surroundings are considered to contribute some, but not all the characteristics listed above.

The key issues that are occurring in the area are identified as the following:

- Field amalgamation and hedgerow removal leading to 'prairie' type fields and intensive farming.
- Intrusive modern farm buildings within open arable landscape
- Field subdivision with post and wire fencing.
- Introduction of non-native coniferous and evergreen hedges and close-board fences which are suburbanising features.
- Loss of parkland characteristics at Hursley Park
- Scrub encroachment and woodland plantation on scarps, loss of important habitat.
- Loss of chalk grassland.
- Ash dieback and the loss of mature trees within the landscape
- Declining farmland bird populations.
- Noise from motorway impacts tranquillity in the east.
- Derelict army base at Bushfield Camp.
- Cumulative effects of sustainable energy and infrastructure developments

The application site is considered to exhibit some, but not all of the key issues listed above.

The application is supported by a Revised Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

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The following points are taken from that document:

- Site located within undulating agricultural landscape dominated by large scale farming and woodland.
- Overriding character of local area is of a rolling semi enclosed agricultural landscape with scattered woods and copses.
- Site more open and exposed where historic hedgerow been removed.
- Most views of site within 940m radius. Most significant to east.
- Filtered views from Clarendon Way and Sarum Road.
- Predicted development will have limited visual impact primarily affecting views from east and southeast.
- Site and surroundings judged to have moderate to high sensitivity to change. Mitigation planting proposed to reduce or eliminate any potential adverse landscape and visual impacts.
- Without planting mitigation in place proposed development predicted to have major adverse visual impact upon receptors at Sarum Road residences and Farm shop. Also visual impact from Sarum Road and at crossroads. However, this predicted to be relatively minor as only eastern edge of panels visible.
- Impact on users of Clarendon Way to be minor to moderate and more obvious in winter months. In wider landscape visual impacts likely to be minor to negligible.
- Once screening established 8-10 years will reduce or eliminate any adverse visual impacts caused by development.
- Even after landscaping established some residual visual impact to properties to east resulting from their elevated position relative to site.
- In respect of impact on landscape character, development likely to have major impact on site and on those areas immediately outside site. Within wider environment development unlikely to have significant adverse landscape effects except for some minor impacts to locations further to east towards Winchester at a distance with limited views of site.
- Long term proposed mitigation planting likely to reduce any potential adverse impacts. Consider overall long-term adverse impacts upon landscape character within wider visual envelope to be relatively minor.

To further assist the assessment the applicant has submitted a number of photomontages showing the site at years one and ten. Whilst these show the views to be softened over time, from certain locations, sections of the panels would still be in view after year ten.

The scheme has attracted a large number of objections with regard to its impact on landscape character. The Service Lead – Natural Environment (Landscape) has also objected, and their comments are set out in detail above in the representations section. The site does not carry any designation such as a National Landscape. The issue has been raised by the Landscape Officer and by a number of the objectors if the site should be regarded as part of a valued landscape. This is a reference to paragraph 180(a) of the NPPF which refers to “protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.....”. All countryside has character traits that need to be considered when making a decision.

Having considered the Landscape Character Assessment and the comments made, it is accepted that this landscape is valued in terms of the landscape character traits it

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exhibits and also by the number of visitors it attracts. Accordingly, the higher test as set out in NPPF para 180 (a) applies.

Policy DM23 (Rural Character) sets out 6 factors to consider when assessing the effect of any development on rural character. The sixth factor relates to domestic extension which does not apply in this instance. The following considers each factor in turn:

1. Visual intrusion and the effect on the setting of settlements, key features in landscape or on heritage assets should be minimised and cumulative impacts considered: The application site is not subject to close up views other than from the section of Sarum Road where the development runs parallel to the road. This would be for a distance of approximately 590m. From this position the impact is seasonal and at its worst in wintertime. The mitigation planting scheme is to develop a vegetation belt that will break up/disrupt any views towards the rear of the solar panels. Whilst not completely screening the development this planting will over time reduce its overall impact on the landscape. It should also be noted that for a section of Sarum Road east down to the Sparsholt junction over a distance of approximately 440m, the views southward will remain unchanged. The consideration on the setting of the Roman Road, a non-designated heritage asset, will be dealt with separately in the Heritage section. Change will occur but localised to the site and its immediate surroundings.
2. Physical impacts: Excluding the removal of a small section of hedgerow to form widen the access off Farley Mount Road the proposal does not require the removal of any trees or hedgerows. The scheme would see the introduction of new hedgerows to define the area of panels in what is presently an open field. This will change views into the site within the wider landscape from what is presently a uniform cultivated area to the hedgerows with partial views of dark PV panels beyond against the dark background of the wooded areas. Other than its physical presence as open ground, the extensive monoculture arable field makes little contribution to the landscape. As the new hedgerows are established, they will break up the northwest corner of the field. The intention is to establish a hedgerow of some bulk and with variations in width and height, so it looks more natural. The physical impacts will vary over time and have both positive and negative aspects. In the context of the woodland areas to the north and west, it is not considered that the new planting itself has any adverse impact on landscape character.
3. Tranquillity: This factor refers to the introduction of lighting, sources or activities which could affect the quiet nature of the environment. No lighting is proposed for the development beyond limited lights that would be restricted to use only in emergencies. Noise is considered elsewhere but generally is considered acceptable. Tranquillity is also considered in the context of the enjoyment that a person would experience of walking through open and undeveloped countryside. It is acknowledged elsewhere in this report that the views of walkers using the Clarendon Way will change with the depreciation of the views southward through the verge vegetation. This is particularly true in the winter months when the vegetation is more open and particularly so now as a result of the recent felling work. However, that view will become less transparent as the 10m scrub belt on the northern edge of the main site becomes established. As noted earlier the view to the south is not affected for the section of Sarum Road east of the main site back down to the Sparsholt road junction.
4. The Development should not detract from the enjoyment of the countryside: Once the 4-month construction phase is completed, the proposal does not include any

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activity or moving parts that may attract attention, and noise will be controlled so as not to disturb anyone. When considering the growing presence of renewable energy schemes in the countryside and the limited impact on an individual that would occur, it is considered that the development will not materially detract from the enjoyment of the countryside from both private and public views such as rights of way.

5. Traffic levels should not result in harm to rural character. The construction phase will see the largest number of traffic movements associated with the development. These will be restricted to an agreed route on the main roads avoiding narrow rural lanes. In the immediate locality of the access Bankmen will be used and whilst their main concern will be securing safe traffic movements their actions should also help protect rural character. For the majority of the life of the site only occasional visits are anticipated. In the operational phase, traffic generation will be acceptable and would have no negative impact on rural character.

The applicant has responded to the valued landscape issue by drawing attention to an appeal decision from Shropshire where a solar farm within a valued landscape was approved. Whilst the valued landscape issue was afforded significant weight, the Secretary of State considered the production of electricity carried significant weight as did additional planting and community benefits.

It is accepted that the development would change the character of the site and its immediate area and by implication its contribution to the local landscape. However, from the most open view from the east at the crossroads, none of the views would reveal the panels against the skyline but set against the woodlands to the north and west. The applicant is seeking to soften the visual impacts by the provision of landscape planting around the main site. In response to the final comment from the Landscape Officer that the scheme should make provision for further planting the applicant has reinforced the planting proposal and they now consist of the following:

- Planting up gaps in roadside hedgerows
- A 10m woodland planting belt and a 14m seeded buffer strip on the western boundary of the PV site.
- A 10m wide scrub belt and a 16m seeded buffer strip on the northern boundary of the PV site.
- A new hedgerow (double staggered rows) planted down the remaining section of Sarum Road from the main site to the crossroads.
- A 5m hedgerow belt and a 3m seeded buffer strip on the southern and eastern boundaries of the PV site facing the open field.

Scrub planting around the proposed sub stations and a new hedgerow alongside the first section of the access road off Farley Mount Road is also proposed. For the avoidance of any doubt, the reference to scrub planting does not mean vegetation confined to low plants or bushes. In this instance it includes but is not limited to hazel, hawthorn, holly & wayfaring trees. In both the new scrub and hedgerows, individual trees (oaks & beech) will be planted and allowed to grow to their full height.

The establishment of the proposed planting will take a number of years to become effective. Even after establishment, it is likely that some degree of views of the panels and other faculties will remain. This will be intermittent and limited in duration. This

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assessment recognises the Landscape Officer's comments on the revised planting scheme that it is not possible to fully screen the proposed development.

In conclusion, the potential impact on landscape character has attracted objections from members of the public, from CPRE and from the WCC Landscape Officer. It is accepted that the application site is part of a valued landscape and as such that factor should be accorded significant weight. Because of the topography and publicly accessible spaces which are confined to the road network and the Clarendon Way, the degree of impact of the proposal is considered to be localised to the immediate area around the application site. However, in its early years before the landscape planting becomes established, the scheme would have an adverse impact on landscape character. As such, the proposal would not be in accordance with the guidance in the NPPF, including paragraph 180(a), the concluding paragraph of LPP1 policy MTRA4 (Development in the Countryside), policy CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Character) and LPP2 policy DM23 (Rural Character). This situation would change over time, although a situation would never be reached when the development is fully integrated into the landscape. With the landscape impact identified, it is important that this is taken into account alongside all relevant factors. As a result, a conclusion is reached on this in the Planning Balance section of this report.

Sparsholt Parish Council and some of the objectors have raised a concern that over the past 6 months tree felling has taken place within the strip of ground between Sarum Road and the path that forms the Clarendon Way. It is put forward that this has opened up views from the Clarendon Way towards the application site. Not all the vegetation on the north side of Sarum Road has been cleared and the vegetation in the strip of ground on the south side of Sarum Road has not been touched. Whilst this action has reduced the intervening screening from the Clarendon Way, it is still considered that remaining vegetation combined with the existing field boundary and the proposed 10m deep planting belt will form an adequate screen.

Development affecting the South Downs National Park

Government policy relating to National Parks is set out in English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 and The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) updated 2023. The Circular and NPPF confirm that National Parks have the highest status of protection, and the NPPF states at paragraph 182 that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in national parks and that the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations and should be given great weight in National Parks.

Within the Natural England (NE) comments is a reference to considering the potential impact of the proposal on the setting of the South Downs National Park. LPP1 policy CP19 (South Down National Park) seeks to protect the setting of the National Park. The National Park (NP) boundary follows the railway line south of Winchester and then loops around the eastern side of the city. At its closest, the NP boundary is 3 miles away from the application site. Furthermore, there is no inter-visibility between the site and a section of the built-up area of the city lies between the two sites. An email exchange with the relevant officer at NE has revealed that the fact that the Landscape Character Area that covers the application site also runs up to the NP boundary influenced their comment. NE

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indicate they wish to leave the final judgement up to the local planning authority. Having reviewed the circumstances on the ground, for the reasons set out above, it is not considered that any impact on the setting of the national park would occur, and no harm would be caused to the Park's statutory purposes. The proposal is therefore in accordance with policy CP19.

In conclusion the development will not affect the setting of or any land within the National Park and is in accordance with Section 11a of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Historic Environment

Relevant Legislation and Policy

The preservation of the special architectural/historic interest of listed buildings and their settings (section 66 P(LBCA) Act 1990; Policy DM29 & DM30 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2 Adopted 2017; Policy CP20 Winchester District Joint Core Strategy; NPPF (2023) Section 16).

The preservation of a non-designated heritage asset (Policies DM29 & DM32 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2 Adopted 2017; Policy CP20 Winchester District Joint Core Strategy; NPPF (2023) Section 16).

Section 66 sets out the requirement on an LPA when considering an application that affects a listed building or its setting to have "special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses". Section 16 of the NPPF notes amongst other matters that heritage assets are "irreplaceable assets" and that they should be "conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance". The guidance also sets out the approach to considering potential impacts. The local plan policies also recognise the importance of protecting heritage assets, but they do not offer the level of detail in the assessment as that contained in the NPPF. The consideration and assessment of due regard is required in relation to the relevant legislation and guidance as outlined within the Historic Environment/Archaeology consultation response. As such due regard has been given to Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990) which confirms that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Listed Building/Structure. Case law has established that where an authority finds that a development proposal would harm the setting of a listed building, it must give that harm "considerable importance and weight".

The historic environment section of the Planning Practice Guidance further outlines the role of the Local Planning Authority in considering the effects of new development that are in the vicinity of or affect the setting of listing buildings and heritage assets. Paragraph 205 of the NPPF advises that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset in considering the impact of a proposal on its significance (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Paragraph 206 states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Policy CP20 of LPP1 and Policy DM29 of WDLPP2 ensure that development preserves and enhances heritage assets and

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their settings. However, it is noted that a conflict with policy DM29 is triggered only where an 'unacceptable level of harm to the special interest of heritage assets or their setting' is found. Therefore, whilst DM29 is engaged, it does have a higher test if it is to be considered in conflict with the proposal.

The applicant has submitted a heritage statement and subsequently additional information in the form of a Heritage Impact Statement focusing on Sarum Road which is considered by officers to be a non-designated heritage asset under paragraph 209 of the NPPF. This is because of its historic association as a Roman Road. The following points are taken from the historic assessment documents and refer to the consideration of designated heritage assets:

- Used 1.5km study area.
- Previous work on scheme indicates potential for prehistoric, Roman post medieval and slightly less likely medieval remains within site.
- Likelihood of encountering coherent archaeological remains is high. Significance of any surviving remains likely to be low to medium. Proposal will result in limited negative effect on below ground archaeology.
- Several designated assets in wider area. Mostly Scheduled Monuments.
- Several grade II listed buildings in wider area.
- Proposed development will have no impact on fabric of Scheduled Monuments or listed buildings.
- Regarding impact on their heritage significance and setting considered at most to have limited effect.
- Preliminary Settings Assessment shows proposal would likely lead to change in wider agricultural backdrop settings of identified heritage assets including 5 scheduled monument and 1 listed building.
- Conclusion is proposal would have no effect on remains of national (or very high) significance or on remains which would warrant preservation in situ.
- Considered impact on setting of Roman Road which is still observable below the modern road.
- Likely modern road alignment sits over Roman Road or possible to north of modern alignment.
- Archaeological interest derives primarily from fabric of Road over its whole 34km length.
- Road considered of medium historical interest.
- Architectural interest of Road derives from its value in terms of expression of Roman communications and is medium.
- Historic interest derives from references to road in very early documents and symbolic value.
Overall, architectural, artistic and historic value of Roman Road rated as medium.
- Road retains much of its rural setting along its length including in vicinity of site.
- On Sarum Road views across surrounding landscape limited in all directions by woodlands and other vegetation. Those few views of site from Sarum Road form very small part of wider experience of asset.
- Cannot see Road from application site.
- In vicinity of site setting makes comparatively little contribution to significance of Rome Road.
- No known remains of Road within site.

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- Likelihood of encountering remains of Roman Road within site ranked as low.
- Significance of any surviving remains likely to be low to medium.
- At most limited negative impact on below ground archaeology.
- Setting comprises immediate adjacent rural landscape.
- Road will retain its rural setting and few views across landscape.
- Whilst solar farm visible from some landscape viewpoints, definition of Sarum Road will remain clearly legible.
- No impact on fabric of Road.
- At most very minor change to setting
- At most very limited negative impact on heritage significance. This impact less than substantial harm and at lower end of this scale.

The four-step approach to proportionate decision making set out in the Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note No 3. (2nd edition) December 2017 is considered by officers to be an appropriate way of examining the impact on designated heritage assets.

This approach recommends the following steps:

1. Identify the heritage asset that would be affected.
2. Assess the value of setting.
3. Assess the degree of impact.
4. Explore ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm.

In the context of this application, regard has been taken by officers of all the above contributions. The four-step approach is followed below, drawing heavily on the Historic Environment Officers comments on the application.

1. Identifying the heritage assets that would be affected.

The site itself does not contain any above ground heritage assets. The Historic Environment Officer identifies 5 heritage assets affected by the development. These are:

Sarum Road Roman Road (a non-designated heritage asset).
Farley Mount Obelisk grade II
Crabwood Farmhouse grade II
South Lynch Farmhouse grade II
South Lynch House grade II

The closest built heritage asset to the site is the line of the former Roman Road between Winchester and Old Sarum north of Salisbury. This runs along the northern boundary of the application site. Its setting is extensive but does include the application site. The grade II Crabwood Farmhouse on Lanham Lane is the closest listed building and is approximately 830m to the north of the main site. The official listing entry refers to the character traits of the building. By its very name, it must have strong associations with surrounding land and Lanham Lane. Other grade II listed buildings lie 811m to the SW at South Lynch. These properties are also viewed as having strong links to the land around them.

The Farley Mount Obelisk lies 2.1km to the west of the application site. It is a memorial to a favoured horse. The setting to this feature is extensive afforded by its high visibility in the local area and commanding views from the obelisk.

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2. Assessing Value of Setting

On the basis that the proposal does not physically impact on any listed building, the main focus must be on their setting. The focus should be on the contribution the application site makes to their setting. The setting of a heritage asset is defined in the glossary of the NPPF as follows:

“The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral”.

The Historic England good practice note 3 The Setting of Heritage Assets provides guidance on understanding how the concept of setting should be considered. It notes that whilst the extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations, setting is also influenced by other environmental factors and by the understanding of the historic relationship between places. It also reminds readers that the contribution of setting is not dependent on their being any public right or ability to access or experience the setting. Accordingly, it is appropriate to consider it from locations on private land.

In terms of setting, Roman Roads are often characterised by their straightness cutting across the landscape. The line of this Roman Road is still clearly discernible on the ground. It is well recorded in documentary and cartographic sources. Its setting makes a positive contribution to its significance and there are other related features in the area. The application site is part of the general setting to the Roman Road, although it does not make any particularly positive contribution to the significance of the Roman Road or an ability to appreciate that significance.

The significance of Farley Mount Obelisk derives principally from its architectural and historic interests. As a monument, its location and therefore setting is fundamental in appreciating that significance. The Obelisk offers panoramic views, and the wider landscape setting of this listed building makes a strong positive contribution to that significance. The application site is part of that setting.

The significance of Crabwood Farmhouse, South Lynch Farmhouse and South Lynch House derive in large part from their Architectural interest as typical buildings of their periods and uses. Their rural settings make a positive contribution to their significance. The application site may have had some historic connection with these farmhouses, but the site has no visual connections with them.

3. Assessing the Degree of Impact

Viewshed analysis from Geodyme, submitted by the applicant, concludes proposed solar panels would not be visible from any of the Farley Mount Obelisk or the three farmhouses. Even assuming a worst-case scenario that this is not entirely correct; due to the nature of the heritage assets, it is not considered that the scheme would result in serious harm to the significance of these assets.

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Due to nature of the three agriculturally associated buildings at Crabwood and South Lynch, and the very limited intervisibility if any between the listed buildings and the arrays, it is not considered that proposals would result in any impact on the significance of the listed buildings.

Regarding Farley Mount Obelisk, assuming a worst-case scenario that an element of the site were to be visible, the extent of change would be very small and the magnitude of the change very small. The impact on this listed building would be very minor and clearly at the bottom of the less than substantial category set out in the NPPF.

The proposals would change the immediate setting of the former Roman Road, but an ability to appreciate the historic function of road or its presence in landscape would not be altered. The essential linear form of road would remain unchanged, and its significance preserved.

4. Exploring Ways to Maximise Enhancement and avoid or minimise Harm

Given the nature of the proposal it is not considered possible to enhance the significance of any heritage asset through this development. The very low level of harm to the Obelisk would also be very difficult to further reduce. Additional planting may further change the setting and diminish commanding views of landscape. No harm to any other listed building identified so no further enhancement or mitigation necessary.

Regarding archaeological matters, the site itself is considered to contain the potential for below ground heritage assets. However, the applicant has provided sufficient details that offers a level of confidence that the scheme can proceed based on further investigation before any construction work begins. This approach is the one recommended by the Archaeological officer in their comments on the scheme. Other features lie at a distance from the site and are not directly affected by the proposal. Bowl Barrow (a scheduled monument) which lies 1km to the west of the site with the intervening area being continuous woodland. Consequently, there is no impact on the feature.

In conclusion, based on the assessments outlined above, the proposal is considered to be in conflict with policy CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Character) by virtue of the less than substantial harm to the impact on Farly Mount Obelisk, but not with policy DM 29 (Heritage Assets) as this policy refers to unacceptable harm and the proposal is assessed as producing an impact that would be less than substantial.

Policy CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Character) and policy DM29 (Heritage Assets) do not contain any reference to the less than substantial test which is set out in paragraph 208 of the NPPF or to balancing less than substantial harm against the public benefits of the proposal also set out in paragraph 208 of the NPPF. In that context both policies only offer the options of "in accordance" or "in conflict". Accordingly, the proposal should be seen in conflict with both CP20 but not DM29. However, the more recent approach as outlined in the NPPF should be used and the issue of weighing the harm against the public benefit (in accordance with paragraph 208) will be undertaken in the planning balance below. The information presented with regard to Archaeological matters means that the application is considered to be in accordance with Policy DM26. Regarding the consideration on non-designated heritage assets the requirements of paragraph 209 of the NPPF and policy DM29 have been met.

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With regard to archaeological considerations, the proposal is considered to comply with policy DM26 of LPP2. Archaeological conditions 06, 07 & 08 will secure the pre commencement investigation work, any adjustment needed in the event finds are discovered and their recording. Condition 18 which requires the site to be accessed only off Farley Mount Road and conditions 15 & 16 which will designate traffic routes avoiding Sarum Road, all seek to protect the integrity and setting of the non-designated heritage asset.

Neighbouring amenity

LPP2 policy DM17 (Site Development Principles) seeks to ensure that any development does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on adjoining properties by reason of overlooking, overshadowing or being overbearing. Policy DM20 (Development and Noise) seeks to protect residential amenity from noise that may result from a development.

The character of this area is one of scattered residential properties within the landscape. The closest residential properties are the two cottages at Pitt Down Farm approximately 400m away from the main site. These dwellings are under the control of the same landowner as the solar farm site and occupied by agricultural workers. The nearest unrelated dwelling is Crabwood House which lies 740m to the east from the main site. Beechcroft Farm shop & tea garden is 850m from the main site, whilst Beechcroft House, the old Dairy Cottage, the holiday let and a new dwelling located to the south of the farm buildings are slightly further away. The nearest residential property on Enmill Lane is approximately 900m from the main site. The woodland to the west of the main site is occupied by a Forest school and kindergarden. Whilst the change of use application that facilitated that activity had a red line outlining the whole woodland, there are no signs of these uses utilising the section of the woodland immediately adjacent to the main site.

Despite it being highlighted by an objector as an issue that has been overlooked, it is well established that the loss of a view is not a material planning consideration. However, it is necessary to consider if the development may impinge unacceptably on the living conditions and environment of the occupants of any property close to the site or impact on the more general amenities of an adjoining land use.

Views of sections of the site will be available from surrounding properties. That will change their outlook particularly from first floor windows from what are presently arable fields to the dark blue uniformity of the areas of panels. Given the relatively low height of the features that make up the development and the extensive separation distances that would exist, it means that the physical presence of the development is not considered to result in any adverse harm to the living environment and amenity of surrounding properties. Regarding any potential impact on the general amenities of the adjoining Forest school, whilst the construction phase may result in some noise disturbance that would be of a temporary duration and with no tall or moving structures it is not considered that the physical presence of the solar farm would have any adverse impact on the Forest School during the operational phase.

Concerning the issue of noise disturbance, the application contains details of indicative equipment that would be installed. This would total 4 transformers, string inverters and two substations. No detailed noise levels or max noise level details were submitted as part of the original application details. The separation distances to noise sensitive receptors, which includes residential properties and the Forest School, offer strong confidence that

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the separation distances will afford sufficient space to avoid any adverse impacts. In response to the consultations the Environmental Protection Officer did not raise any adverse comments. To ensure this situation is fully secured, the applicant has offered to accept a noise limit condition on any approval. This has the support of the Environmental Protection Officer.

In conclusion, the applicant has presented sufficient information from which it is possible to make a suitable assessment of the potential impact from the development on nearby residential properties. The conclusion of that assessment is that the scheme is acceptable based on the situation presented by the applicant. The separation distances to the nearest noise sensitive receptors will ensure no adverse impact from noise. This will be secured through a condition. On this basis, officers consider that the scheme complies with policy DM17 of LPP2. Conditions 10 (CEMP), 19 (Working Hours) & 23 (Noise) are intended to secure and protect residential amenity.

Impact Resulting from Glint and Glare

LPP2 policies DM17 (Site Development Principles) and DM19 (Development & Pollution) contain criteria that seek to protect residents and quality of life generally from light intrusion or pollution.

Following a request by officers, the applicant has submitted a glint and glare assessment. That report was prepared by a consultant commissioned by the applicant (Neo Environmental), and it addresses the question whether any harmful reflection of sunlight will occur. For general information, glint is a momentary flash of bright light whilst glare is a continuous source of bright light.

The following points are taken from the applicant's submission:

- Report considers the potential impact on roads, rail, residential dwellings, and aviation assets.
- 1km study area but 30km for aviation.
- Observation height 2m at dwellings and 1.5m for road users.
- Rankings for impacts used following:
 - High over 30hrs per year or over 30mins per day
 - Medium 20-30hrs per year or 20-30mins per day
 - Low up to 20hrs per year or up to 20mins per day
 - none
- Within study area 10 residential receptors including one residential area.
- 35 road receptors.
- 2 residential and 8 road receptors dismissed as located within no reflection zones.
- 26 aerodromes located within 30km study area of which 2 (Southampton & Farley Farm) require detailed assessment.
- No rail within 1km so scoped out.
- Can ignore green glare when assessing impact on residential dwellings.
- Solar reflection possible at 2 of 8 residential receptors. Once actual visibility factored into impact reduced to none.
- Solar reflection possible at 17 of 27 road receptors. Once actual visibility impact applied this reduced to 1 receptor.
- Regarding aviation, green glare at Runway 06 approach at Farley Farm. None predicted at Southampton or ACT.

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- No mitigation required.
- Glint & Glare affects analysed and predicted to be low or none. Therefore, no significant effects.

The Council has commissioned an external specialist consultancy to review the submitted document. In the instruction to the external specialist, they were asked to have regard to the points raised by third parties. Regarding the review of the Neo Environmental Assessment, the Council's consultant makes the following observation:

- Applicants' assessment does not follow same approach as Mabbetts would have applied, but no challenge to methodology.
- Do recommend at very least modelling undertaken for both air traffic control towers and pilots on final approach as per US FAA guidance.
- Results should be shared with relevant safeguarding authorities at assessed aerodromes.
- Do not agree with statement green glare can be ignored in assessment of impact on residential dwellings. Issue here is one of impact on amenity (annoyance) and threshold likely to be lower than one for a safety issue.
- Mabbetts agree with conclusion that impact on road receptors reduced to none. However, this on condition that surrounding vegetation is maintained.
- Given the topographical difference between the Residential Dwelling 5 and the Proposed Development additional evidence (such as site photographs) should be provided to justify the conclusion that vegetation will obstruct all line of sight towards the residential dwellings.
- Where intervening vegetation does not block the line of sight, consideration of other factors (such as cloud cover and additional on-site planting) should be presented as additional mitigating evidence.
- Review of the planting plan indicates that a hedgerow is proposed for the east boundary between the panels and the Proposed Development. However, due to the elevated topography at Residential Dwelling 5, the Proposed Development is likely to still be visible. Further glare modelling analysis should be provided by Neo Environmental of the mitigation potential provided by the proposed hedgerow.
- If the hedgerow does not provide a suitable reduction in predicted glare, taller woodland planting may need to be considered.

The review of the applicant's submitted report has accepted that the methodology and the submitted information is sound. There were elements of clarification raised by the Council's consultant.

In response, an addendum paper and a separate note have been submitted by the applicant's consultant and the following points are taken from those documents:

- Responding to Council's Consultants (Mabbetts) review of original Glint & Glare Assessment.
- Original report concluded Residential Receptors 3 & 5 would have views of solar array screened by existing vegetation and therefore glint and glare impact reduced from low to none.
- On review, screen vegetation found insufficient to screen all views. Impact on receptors now rated as low.

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- Note sun directly behind solar array at times glint & glare possible. Sun reflection will be far greater than reflections from solar array.
- Following review, now conclude solar reflections are possible at 2 of the 8 receptors.
- Although impact at receptors 3 & 5 revised from none to low, recommendations from original report that no mitigation required has not changed.
- Regarding the aviation modelling question, the two aerodromes identified (Southampton Airport and Farley Farm) were modelled. No impacts predicted upon the Airport Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) or runway approach paths. No ATCT at Farley Farm. Modelling results passed on to Southampton safeguarding team.

The Council's consultant has reviewed the applicant's response and made the following comment:

- Detailed research into amenity impacts as a result of solar panel glare is relatively limited at this time in comparison to aviation glare.
- Whilst amenity is subjective, it is reasonable to state "low" impacts are likely to occur where glare is predicted to coincide with when the Sun is low in the sky. This is in accordance with industry guidance available at this time.
- On this basis, the conclusions would be satisfactory.

In conclusion, clarifications have been made together with an adjustment to the applicant's submitted assessment on the potential impact from glint & glare. Whilst no changes are proposed to the assessment regarding aviation or road impacts, there is a reclassification on the potential impact on residential receptors 3 & 5 (the tea rooms and the new dwelling at Beechcroft Farm). In terms of the duration of any impact, low impact is rated as an impact between 0 and 20 hrs per year or between 0mins and 20mins per day. The possible impact would take place late in the day when the sun is in the western sky. The view supported by current industrial standards is that the sun would result in a greater level of reflection than any glare which may come from the panels. Under those circumstances, it is considered that LPP2 policy DM17 (Site Development Principles) and DM19 (Development & Pollution) have been complied with. Contrary to the views expressed by one of the objectors, it is considered that the potential impact on nearby residential properties has been adequately considered and addressed above.

Sustainable Transport

Policy CP10 (Transport) and policy DM18 (Access and Parking) both seek to ensure that any development has a safe means of access off and onto the highway. The applicant intends to use the existing road network from the Romsey Road (A3090) (1.3km distance) to access the site. This involves using a section of Sparsholt Road and part of Farley Mount Road. The existing activities at Pittdown Farm already attract large vehicle use. As traffic approaches the access on Farley Mount Road, it is apparent that vehicles use a wider section of the carriageway to make the right hand turn off the road into the farm access. This access presently serves the farm, the two dwellings and the business uses that occupies the former farm building. Having reached the group of buildings at the top of the access road, a new section of track would run around the eastern side of the group of buildings to a temporary compound. From here, construction traffic would run up to the main site of the solar farm. It is not intended to form any access off Sarum Road or Sparsholt Road.

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The application is accompanied by a Construction Traffic Management Plan from which the following points have been taken:

- Construction traffic will operate for 4 months.
- Road condition survey carried out before construction starts.
- Space for 20 cars to be provided within temporary compound.
- All traffic to be routed from M3 Junction 11 via Badger Farm Road, then A3090, Sparsholt Road and then Farley Mount Road.
- Possible some traffic may come from west along A3090 and then use the two local roads.
- Drivers will call ahead to ensure space on site.
- Largest delivery vehicle will be 16.5m articulated lorry.
- Existing access is 4.7m wide and currently used by large vehicles.
- Swept path analysis shows no issue at junction.
- Based on assessment, splays to be provided of 2.4m by 60.2m to north and 2.4m by 61.5m to south.
- Construction time of 0700 to 1900 hrs Monday to Friday and 0800 to 1600 hrs on Saturday.
Where possible will avoid deliveries 0800-0900hrs and 1700 to 1800hrs.
- Peak HGV deliveries in first month.
- Banksmen to assist HGV movements on Farley Mount Road.
- Average of 26 two-way trips (all vehicles) each day over the 4-month construction period.
- Wheel washing facility in compound.
- Operational traffic 1-2 visits every month by LGV or 4x4 vehicle.

The local road network is one of single width roads with traffic taking advantage of passing places, entrances or farm gates to negotiate passing other vehicles. Whilst Sarum Road is also shared with the Clarendon Way, no traffic associated with this development will use that road so its situation will not change. The Highway engineer did have some initial concerns and sought further clarification. Following receipt of this information in the form of a revised CTMP, the Engineer raises no objection to the proposal subject to the contents of the CTMP being implemented. This can be secured through a planning condition. It will also be necessary to use a condition to secure the highway condition survey and details of road signage as the information in the CTMP is not sufficient to secure those matters through that document alone. Although not requested by the Highway Engineer, WCC Planning Officers also consider that is appropriate to seek a travel plan for the construction employees that will encourage joint travel and promotes the use of the same route as HGVs. This action supports the general concept of reducing traffic movements and will seek to protect the local road network from unnecessary vehicle movements.

A number of objectors have raised a concern that glint and glare will distract road users. This matter has been assessed by the Council's consultant who concluded that there will not be an issue providing the existing vegetation is retained. It should also be noted that the red line was extended to include sections of the roadside hedgerows to secure the screening value of these features. There is no reason why they cannot share a dual function. The roadside hedgerows are secured as part of condition 28.

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One objector has proposed that the applicant create a dedicate haul road which takes all construction HGV traffic off the local road network. It is not known if the South Lynch Estate owns sufficient contiguous land from the Romsey Road(A3090) through to the site to achieve such a route, but in any event the Highway Engineer is satisfied that the local road network can be used by construction traffic so an independent haul road is not justified.

In conclusion, as the application has progressed, the applicant has provided further detail on highway related matters. This is reflected in the progression shown in the Highway Authority's comments to the final position where the imposition of a condition is proposed to secure the contents of the revised CTMP. This condition, together with the other traffic related conditions, will ensure that the requirements set out in the policies of the NPPF and local plan are met. It is also considered that the proposal complies with LPP1 policy CP10 and policy DM18 of LPP2.

Conditions 04 (Temporary Permission & Decommissioning), 05 (Cessation Before Fortieth Anniversary), 15 (CTMP), 16 (CTMP Detail to be Agreed), 17 (Creation of Visibility Splays and Improvements to Access) & 18 (Limitation on Access to Site From Farley Mount Road Only) reflect the Highway Authority's requests and other matters identified by officers to secure safe provision of access to and from the site.

Ecology and Biodiversity

LPP1 policy CP16 (Biodiversity) seeks to ensure that any development maintains, protects and enhances biodiversity. The policy also looks for the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). For clarification, the BNG requirement promoted within the Environment Act does not apply to any decision made before 12 February 2024. Nevertheless, the applicant has, from the initial submission, included as part of the overall application package an intention to increase the biodiversity of the application site.

The application is accompanied by three documents that address biodiversity. These are:

- Ecological Impact Assessment
- Tree Survey
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Metric.

As the landscaping/enhancement proposals have been revised, then further information has been presented to supplement the submitted details. This has also raised the BNG calculation.

The following points are taken from these documents and reflect the latest proposals:

- Phase 1 habitat survey undertaken.
- Site not designated.
- Crabwood is a SSSI based on its woodland character.
- Majority of site of low intrinsic nature conservation value due to monoculture and agricultural practices.
- Proposal to retain all boundary trees and hedgerows.
- No protected trees on site.
- Standoff distances will provide protection for trees.
- Will create permanent standoff and protection areas.
- No ponds or water bodies within site.
- Habitat considered to support common breeding birds and common invertebrates.

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- Some suitable habitats for bats on edge of site.
- Possible dormice present on margins specifically northern edge.
- Only skylarks could potentially be breeding on or close to site.
- Construction to take place outside bird breeding season.
- Brown hare seen on site. Species likely to be temporarily displaced during construction. Other habitat available in area so effect not considered significant.
- Negligible effects in wildlife during construction
- New edge areas will improve foraging areas.
- New planting will enhance and expand habitat.
- Mammal gates installed in fencing to allow hedgehog and badger movement.
- Proposal to adopt Biodiversity Enhancement and Sensitive Working Methods including prestart check by ecologist.
- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to be used.
- No lighting other than small motion LED light above door of substation. Details can be agreed.
- BNG of Scheme reassessed following changes using version 4 of the BNG metric. January 2024 figures show solar farm will achieve 81.25% habitat unit and 63.28% hedgerow unit increases.
- Updated bird survey shows need for 4 skylark plots. These to be agreed through a 106 agreement.

As with many arable fields, the most interesting parts of the site from a biodiversity perspective are the field perimeters and they will be protected during the construction phase. The creation of the new 10m wide woodland belt along the western boundary, the new 5m wide hedgerow along the south and eastern boundaries and the 10m deep scrub belt along the northern boundary together with their respective wildflower buffer strips will all promote an increase in biodiversity. Further planting will take place around the proposed sub stations, a new hedge on the rest of the Sarum Road boundary down to the crossroads and reinforcement of the Sparsholt Road boundary. The open ground under the panels will be sown down to grass. The seed choices for all these open areas will favour biodiversity.

An update to the bird survey has shown the need for the provision of 4 skylark plots to replace lost opportunities as a result of the development. These are to be provided on other land within the South Lynch Estate landholding. Accordingly, it will be necessary to secure the precise locations and actions to secure their delivery through a legal agreement.

Parts of Crabwood, the forested area to the North of Sarum Road is designated as ancient woodland and a site of special scientific interest. Accordingly, consideration must be given to the potential impact from the proposals on those areas. The SSSI boundary is the post and wire fence line to the north of the Clarendon Way FP. The nature of the proposal means that providing controls are imposed on the construction activities the designed area will be protected. This approach is supported by both Natural England and the Councils Ecologist. Regarding ancient woodlands, government guidance recommends that a buffer zone of 15m at a minimum should be provided to protect tree roots. The area of Crabwood that is designated, has an irregular boundary on its south side. At its closest the ancient woodland is 17m from the application site boundary. When considering that the first physical element of the scheme (the fence line) is a further 26m away, then the ancient woodland is considered to be protected. Elements within the proposed Construction

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Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) are intended to secure that the ancient woodland is further protected from any adverse impact resulting from noise or emissions associated with the development.

Grovelands Copse which lies east of the Farley Mount Road access and the first part of the access road is an ancient woodland. The proposed substations would be located approximately 40m from the designed woodland and this satisfies the 15m protective buffer zone as outlined above. The Planning Layout Plan shows a construction exclusion zone to protect perimeter vegetation, and this will also ensure the buffer zone for the areas of ancient woodland are also protected.

The Council's Ecology Officer and Natural England have commented on the scheme. Both raise no objection on the basis that conditions are imposed to protect existing biodiversity and that a Biodiversity Net Gain is achieved. They both also wish to see conditions to protect the designated woodlands to the north. Contrary to the view of some objectors who refer to a loss of wildlife, it is the officer's view that the scheme will see an overall improvement in the biodiversity of the site when compared to its current ecological value.

With a life of 40 years, officers have considered how the BNG enhancements will be delivered, maintained and monitored throughout the life of the solar farm. These can be secured through a Landscape Enhancement Management Plan (LEMP). A five-year rolling review is proposed that will enable a check on progress and the ability to make adjustments to the ongoing management regime. This review report will be submitted to the LPA for approval. Discussions have taken place with the applicant and an agreement reached that they will fund the reasonable cost of the Council's involvement in the review process throughout the life of the site. This will be secured via a legal agreement. Given the unusual extent of monitoring, which is required for this development, this contribution to the Council's costs associated are considered necessary and reasonable.

As the proposal does not involve the creation of any overnight residential accommodation or is within proximity to any European Protected Site (Solent SAC and SPA, the River Itchen SAC or Ramsar Sites), there is no need to consider any requirement for Nitrates or Phosphates mitigation or the need for an Appropriate Assessment under the Conservation of Habitats & Species (Amendment) Regulations 2011.

In conclusion, the proposal is not considered to have any adverse impact on the adjacent SSSI or ancient woodlands, whilst the additional planting as set out in the revised plan has raised the potential BNG score for the site. The outcome is that the scheme is acceptable subject to the imposition of conditions and the completion of a legal agreement. Therefore, the proposal complies with policy CP16 of the LPP1. Conditions 04 (Temporary Permission & Decommissioning), 05 (Cessation Before Fortieth Anniversary), 10 (CEMP), 14 (Landscape Enhancement), 24 Permanent Lighting Scheme) & 28 (LEMP) together with the legal agreement will secure the existing and enhanced Biodiversity on site.

Water Management

LPP1 policy CP17 (Flooding, Floor Risk and the Water Environment) requires development to avoid flood risk to people and property by following four specific actions.

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The policy also requires that any development does not cause an unacceptable deterioration to water quality and again lists four actions to achieve this.

Water management responsibilities are split between the Environment Agency and HCC who act as the Lead Local Flood Authority. The Environment Agency has responsibility for watercourses, whilst the HCC through their Surface Water Management Team (SWMT) are responsible for other matters. As the site has no watercourses within it or on its boundaries, then the main interest in this matter comes from the HCC SWMT.

The applicant is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Management Plan. The following information is taken from this document:

- Site within Flood Zone 1 which is low risk.
- Site is headwater of dry valley with no surface drainage features reflecting underlying geology.
- Water table at estimated 38m depth.
- Surface water to drip off lower edge of panels and panels not regarded as impermeable.
- Impermeable surfaces such as buildings (excluding panels) to be 493m²
- Permeable surfaces such as compound, tracks & soil mounds 6,139m²
- No increase in run off expected except in special circumstances.
- As site slopes, angle of panels aligned with gradient so increase in run off may occur and requires mitigation. Area within site where mitigation required is southwest quadrant.
- Surface water runoff from any impermeable surfaces to be directed to shallow gravel infiltration areas.
- In area of panels where slope mitigation to be provided this to consist of small check dams every 10m using hessian sacks.
- Design includes consideration for Climate Change over life of scheme.
- Surface Water Management Plan included.
- Ongoing maintenance to be undertaken by site owner/ operator.

The nature of the proposed development as a solar farm means its operation will not result in the generation of any new wastewater. The construction workforce will be serviced by a series of portaloos located in the construction compound. That waste will be removed from the site for disposal.

Regarding surface water, the development will not result in any additional surface water being generated but consideration is required of whether any surface water may be concentrated and if so, how it is disposed of. The applicant's assessment has identified a need for mitigation in the southwest quadrant of the site. THE HCC SWMT has been consulted and considers that the level of detail submitted to be sufficient and raises no objection.

In conclusion, the application is acceptable and accordingly, the scheme is considered to be in accordance with policy CP17 of LPP1. Condition 25 (Surface Water) secures the details required.

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Fire Safety

LPP2 policy DM18 (Access & Parking) seeks to ensure that the emergency services can gain access to and within a new development. There is a need for the site to be accessible to emergency vehicles and for them to be able to use the internal road network to reach the area of panels or any of the support infrastructure.

As the site is not occupied, the emergency services also need access to certain details in the event of an incident. This information includes matters such as the contact details for the operator and those of Scottish & Southern Electricity so the whole site or part of it can be isolated; precise details of what equipment and materials are on site together with their location and if there are any hazardous materials on site. This can be addressed through the provision on site of information boards or a Premises Information Box (PIB) The precise details including its location can be approved through a condition compliance submission.

An objector has referred to a reference in the fire safety consultee response to an increased risk of fire by virtue of the location of the site next to a woodland. The source of this has been checked and there is no such statement in the Fire Service letter of November 2023.

The provision of an access capable of accommodating an emergency vehicle means that the proposal would comply with the requirements of policy DM18, whilst the provision of information boards or Premises Information Boxes will ensure there is an appropriate level of information available to the emergency services to ensure they are best positioned to respond in the event of an incident. Under these circumstances it is considered that policy DM 18 of LPP2 is complied with. Condition 26 (Provision of Information for Emergency Services) secures the details required.

The Effect on and Potential Loss of Agricultural Land

On the question of the agricultural land classification and food production, best and most versatile (BMV) land is defined in the glossary to the NPPF as land of grades 1, 2 and 3a. The applicant has submitted a report on the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) of the site. The revised edition (Issue 5) reveals that the site consists of the following:

- 3.2 hectares (14.2%) of grade 2 land,
- 0.3 hectares (1.3%) of grade 3a land and
- 19 ha (84.5%) of grade 3b land.

The grade 2 land is identified in the report as a narrow strip in the eastern part of the solar panel area and under the access road as it runs up the northern side of the tree belt from the group of buildings that forms Pitt Down Farm. It has been identified that the original ALC document contained contradictory results for the section of the site close to Farley Mount Road which is to accommodate the substations. The revised ALC confirms this part of the site is grade 3a. The majority of the land (85.5%) that would accommodate the solar arrays is grade 3b land.

Government guidance indicates that the loss of land that falls into the BMV category should be avoided. This totals 3.5 hectare (15.5%) of the application site. The March 2015 written statement (WS) notes that:

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....."a solar farm involving the best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence".....

The written statement then does go on to note that each application has to be determined
....."in light of the relevant material considerations".

In May 2024 the government released a statement entitled 'solar and protecting our food security and best and most versatile (BMV) Land'. This document emphasises the need to avoid the use of BMV in the interests of food production. On balance this WS is considered to restate the existing position and not add any additional requirement on an LPA. The NPPF in paragraph 180 (a) & (b) and the accompanying footnote also recognise the need to consider the land classification and food production when making decisions.

The guidance does not indicate an absolute embargo on the inclusion of grade 2 or grade 3a land but indicates its inclusion must be justified with the most compelling evidence and then assessed in the balance with other considerations. The application states that the following:

- overall the site only represents 3% of the estate land,
- that it is located at the edge of the farm,
- that the solar farm will provide an income to the farm,
- that the field is cultivated on the basis of its overall condition and
- that its temporary use as a solar farm would allow the soil to rest and improve its health.

A soil management plan is supported by the applicant. Furthermore, the point is made that the proposed use is only temporary, and the scheme would see the return of the land to agricultural use at the end of the life of the solar farm.

Regarding the impact on food production, the information from an objector on the type of crops that the land has grown is noted but equally, the amount of land concerned is relatively small. In the southeast of England there are 1.114 million hectares of arable land under cultivation. The figures offered up by an objector on agricultural land classification in Hampshire are also noted. These are all considered to be relevant matters.

It should also be noted that the grade 2 land to the north of the vegetation screen is not cultivated but used as an access route and to support the uses of the screen vegetation as a cover for shooting by the landowner. Consequently, there would be no change to the current area of cropping. The proposed access route to the main site is also considered to be the most sensible in terms of utilising the existing access roadway to Pitt Down Farm and from a visual impact perspective. The applicants desire to create a viable generating site of 20MW is also noted. The extension of the southern edge of the main site beyond the corner of Pitt Down Plantation to remove the grade 2 strip on the eastern edge of the main site is considered to create a greater visual impact. Accordingly, the suggestion by objectors that any part of the site which is grade 2 land is removed is not accepted.

The ground upon which the two sub stations would be located is grade 3a. The ground around the large individual tree which would form an access to the sub stations is not cultivated but ground where the two substations and the screen landscape planting would be located is part of the sown crop. This ground lies at the extreme southern end of the cultivated strip that runs to the east of the access road. It was initially thought that one of

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the substations would be retained permanently and so the ground under and around it would be permanently lost to agriculture together with that land used to provide any landscaping screening. However, the applicant has now confirmed that the grid operator does not need to retain a substation on site so both sub stations can be removed as part of the decommissioning phase. The implication of this is that no ground will be permanently lost to agriculture. In the context of the overall scheme this location is considered the most appropriate for the location of the two sub stations. When considering the relevant material considerations, the temporary loss of the relatively small area of grade 2 & grade 3a land to assist in bringing forward the renewable energy scheme is considered to be justified and the compelling evidence threshold to be met.

The application does refer to the use of sheep to keep the grass areas under control during the 40-year life of the solar farm. Whilst this does maintain a link to agricultural, the use of sheep is viewed by Planning Officers as a management tool to control grass growth on site and not part of any direct intention to maintain a mixed use (solar farm & agricultural use). The use of sheep is not fixed through any management condition and accordingly, no weight is given to the use of sheep as a retained link with agriculture.

As part of the revised information package, the applicant has drawn attention to an appeal decision that allowed a solar farm in Yorkshire where 8% of the site was BMV land. As well as noting the temporary use, the inspector also said that the solar farm use would allow the arable land to rest and that government policy is to promote taking land out of agriculture for uses associated with carbon capture. The inspector also noted that the growth in solar cannot be achieved solely by the use of brownfield or roof top installations.

In conclusion, the use of 15.5% of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land is not considered by officers to conflict with national guidance on the protection of the BMV land. Furthermore, the proposal will be for 40 years, after which time it will be cleared, and all the land will revert back to its former agricultural use. There is, therefore, no objection to the temporary loss of agricultural land in this instance. Condition 11 (Soil Management Plan) will ensure that the soil remains in good health and is capable of reverting back to agricultural use after the scheme is decommissioned.

Other Topics

Economic Impact

The applicant has submitted an Economic Impact statement which sets out how the proposal would benefit the local economy. The following points are taken from that document:

- Will create 55 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs during peak construction and 75FTE in related supply chains.
- Will create 2FTE jobs in operational phase and 3FTE in related supply chains.
- NPPF paragraph 81 places significant weight on need to support economic growth and productivity.

Applicant will encourage use of local contractors.

It is proposed to seek a planning condition (Condition 09) that would require an Employment and Skills plan from the developer. This is a mechanism through which the applicant would set out actions to favour local companies, apprentices, or links with

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educational facilities. It is accepted that the PV panels and other specialist equipment is unlikely to be sourced locally. Furthermore, whilst the installation is also likely to be undertaken by fitters from the supplying company, there is potential for these workers to be staying in the local area and spending money in the local economy during the construction phase. There are other elements of the work that could benefit local firms such as the ground works and the substantial planting and its ongoing maintenance. Links to educational institutes also offers the potential for students to gain an understanding of renewables and the economics and locational requirements of solar farms to be disseminated to future generations.

A number of the objectors have expressed the view that the Council should not take into consideration any business rates that it might collect or that fact that the proposal intends to establish a community fund with Hursley Parish Council. Regarding the issue of business rates, most developments have the potential to generate business rates that could flow to the council. However, this factor does not feature as a material planning consideration in planning reports, and it is not intended to consider it as a factor in the determination of this scheme.

The applicant has indicated that a community fund would be established with Hursley Parish Council. Sparsholt Parish Council have questioned any influence the proposed fund may have on the outcome of the application and expressed a view that the scheme has a greater impact on their residents than those of Hursley. Sarum Road is the parish boundary. The existing planning policy framework makes no requirement for such a fund and as such this factor carries no weight in the determination of the application. Accordingly, it is not possible for the LPA to directly influence the nature of any fund or seek any change to the distribution of any fund. It is proposed to make the applicant aware of the Sparsholt PC view as an informative and it will then be up to the applicant to respond.

The application site represents a small percentage of the working farm and it is located in a corner of the South Lynch Estate landholding. The solar farm is not considered to represent a threat to the overall Estate business. The application will result in a new income stream to the farm business. There is the potential for the farm to be engaged in the future management of the solar farm if sheep are used to graze the fenced off area under the panels or in the planting and management of the landscaping. The provision of the skylark plots on another part of the Estate land is small in size and not considered to represent a significant secondary impact on the future management of arable farming on the Estate.

A number of objectors including Sparsholt Parish Council have raised a concern that the presence of a solar farm would have an adverse impact on the viability of the Beechcroft Farm shop and Team Rooms. This is a business that lies approximately 790m to the east of the application site on the south side of Sarum Road. In addition to the car park and shop there is an open seating area which offers views to the south and west. A holiday cottage also forms part of Beechcroft Farm. Whilst there is an open view toward the site when standing in the parking area, it is noted that as the car park fills, the presence of the vehicles would obstruct views to the west from those seated at the picnic tables. Looking toward the application site, any view would be more of the side of the panels than their front faces. They would also be viewed against the dark edge of the conifer plantation that lies to the west of the site and which forms the skyline. Nevertheless, even after the development of the new planting, some degree of a view of the PV panels is likely to

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remain. Regarding the impact on the letting of the holiday cottage it is noted that this accommodation lies east of the seating area for the tearoom and has two bedroom windows orientated towards the application site.

Policies MTRA1 (Development Strategy Market Towns and Rural Areas) and CP8 (Economic Growth and Diversification) in LPP1 does contain references to retaining rural shops and community facilities. The NPPF part 6 also includes a section on supporting a prosperous rural economy through diversification and the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities such as local shops. Given the separation distance and the absence of any persuasive evidence of harm to the shop, tearoom or the holiday cottage, it is not considered that the presence of the solar farm would have an adverse impact on the business. In the absence of any persuasive evidence to the contrary, this matter is afforded limited weight.

Matters Raised by Objectors or Supporters Not Considered Above.

It has been suggested that the Council should not make a decision in the absence of an up-to-date policy framework that may identify suitable sites. The current local plan policy that applies to the scheme puts forward a criteria-based set of considerations. This also follows national guidance. The emerging local plan will continue to follow this approach but is not sufficiently advanced to carry weight in decision making. Accordingly, there is no justification for delaying the determination of this application.

The application has attracted a substantial number of letters of objection. The scheme has also attracted a large number of letters in support. All the matters raised in the letters have been reviewed and considered when forming the recommendation. Some points remain outstanding and will be addressed below.

Contrary to the comments made by one objector, the extent of the landscape planting has not been reduced and the most recent plan is the January 2024 Landscape/Ecology Mitigation Plan. This shows planting in depth on all four sides of the fenced off area. A concern has also been expressed that the computer visualisation from Beechcroft does not form part of the application. Viewpoint No 6a is from Beechcroft Tea Rooms and shows the current view and year 1 and year 10 projections.

The suggestion that the planning decision should be influenced by the country of origin of the panels or the conditions prevalent in that country are not matters that should affect this decision. Disposal of the panels will be undertaken in accordance with the relevant regulatory background at the time.

Regarding the weight given to the applicant's appeal decision, no weight has been placed on that or any other appeal decision in reaching this recommendation. Whilst appeal decisions can offer indications of inspectors' interpretation of wider more general issues, they offer no great insight into site specific concerns. This application is determined strictly on its own merits.

Parties have asked for certain matters to be addressed by condition or in a legal agreement in the event the application is supported. These will be covered in the Planning Conditions/Obligations/Agreement Section below.

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Equality

Due regard should be given to the Equality Act 2010: Public Sector Equality Duty. Public bodies need to consciously think about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. The weight given to the Equality Duty, compared to the other factors, will depend on how much that function affects discrimination, equality of opportunity and good relations and the extent of any disadvantage that needs to be addressed. The Local Planning Authority has given due regard to this duty and the considerations do not outweigh any matters in the exercise of our duty.

Planning Balance and Conclusion.

Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and paragraph 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In accordance with paragraph 47 of the NPPF (2023), the consideration of the local planning policy framework has shown that there is general support in principle for this type of renewable energy proposal subject to the consideration of other relevant planning policies. This position is also supported by the government targets relating to carbon reduction and the production of renewable energy. The applicant has provided further information that shows the selection of this site is based on a sound and realistic assessment of alternatives.

Although the application site is located within the countryside, there are scattered residential properties in the surrounding area. The closest dwelling that is not part of the farm is Crabwood House. The proposal has no tall structures or moving parts that could adversely overwhelm any of the nearby properties. Accordingly, the nature of the proposal and the separation distances mean that there is no adverse impact on the living environment of these properties or on those of the adjoining Forest School. The site does contain equipment with the potential to generate noise, but the separation distances mean that an adverse impact on residential amenity will not occur. A glint and glare analysis has been undertaken which concluded that no adverse impact will result from the development. This analysis has been reviewed for the Council by a consultant. The consultant's review considered the methodology to be sound but sought clarification on several points. The applicant has responded, and the Council's consultant has accepted the response based on the current approach adopted by the industry.

The general issues relating to transport have been considered within the report. A detailed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) accompanies the application. A routing strategy is proposed for HGVs to keep traffic off the local roads except those section nominated. Banksmen will be used on the last section as HGVs approach the farm access off Farley Mount Road. Having sought some clarification, the Highway Engineer raises no objection subject to implementing the actions set out in the CTMP.

The current use of the site as part of an arable rotation limits its contribution to biodiversity. The field boundaries presently form the most interesting elements. These are to remain untouched with any hedgerow gaps planted up. Significant planting is proposed around

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the boundaries of the main site with the ground under the panels seeded with a wildlife mix to promote its biodiversity value. Further planting is proposed around the location of the substations. Figures provided by the applicant in January 2024 show an improvement in the biodiversity value of the site of 81% increase in habitat units and 63% increase in hedgerow units. The applicant has agreed to contribute to the resources needed to monitor a Landscape Environment Management Plan that would review and guide actions on site over the life of the development. This would be achieved through a legal agreement which will also address the provision of 4 skylark plots in compensation for those lost. The nature of the proposal and the separation distances from the development to the adjoining Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Ancient Woodland are considered acceptable to secure the protection of these areas. Planning conditions will ensure no adverse impacts during the construction and operational phases.

The development is not occupied so no foul water generation will arise. Nor will the site generate any additional clean wastewater flow from the site. Questions over water management in terms of ensuring measures to regulate the flow of surface water off the site are included.

The proposed site access and roadways will be capable of accommodating an emergency vehicle and the provision of information boards or Premises Information Boxes will provide essential information in the event of an incident.

The site has been assessed as containing both grade 2, grade 3a & grade 3b agricultural land. The definition of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land is set out in the NPPF as grades 1, 2 and 3a. The inclusion of BMV land within an application is not an absolute barrier to obtaining consent. This is stated in government guidance and is evident from other decisions made across England. When considering the material considerations associated with this application, the loss of any grade 2 or grade 3a land is considered to be justified to bring forward this renewable energy generating scheme. The amount of land lost to food production is considered low and acceptable. Any loss would only be temporary as the applicant has now confirmed that all structures can be removed as part of the decommissioning phase.

Turning to heritage matters, there are a number of grade II listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments and heritage assets in the locality. For the reasons set out above in the main body of the report the proposal is in conflict with policy CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Character). However, the NPPF and more recent caselaw sets out a scale for the consideration of impacts on heritage assets. An impact on the setting of Farley Mount Obelisk is identified but rated at less than substantial. This is at the bottom of the scale of impact. This does not mean that no impact would occur, and it carries substantial weight in decision making. The requirement is to make a judgement on the scale of the impact. When the impact is classified at less than substantial, paragraph 208 allows the harm to be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal. That judgement will be undertaken below.

Whilst the site is recognised as potentially containing archaeological evidence, it is considered that the development could proceed following an appropriate site investigation before any other work is undertaken. This approach is recommended by the Archaeological officer and secured by condition.

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The scheme is considered to attract limited economic benefits. Concerns have been raised over the potential impact on a local business. The nature of the scheme and public attitudes to the presence of solar farms are reflected in the level of representation received for and against the application. When considering the separation distance and other factors, there is not considered to be any persuasive evidence to support the concern regarding the potential impact on the businesses.

The site does not lie within any landscape designated area and is some 5km from the boundary of the South Downs National Park. There is not considered to be any impact on the setting of the National Park. It is accepted that the application site lies within an area that can be considered to be a valued landscape and as such justifies additional consideration and protection. It is also accepted that the scheme will change the character of the site itself and its immediate surroundings. Even after the proposed planting is established, a degree of change will still be evident. This position acknowledges the Landscape Officer's view that whilst the enhanced planting scheme has benefits, it will not fully screen the site, and concerns remain. In terms of proximity, the greatest impact is considered to fall on people using Sarum Road and then for a relatively short section of the road and is limited to the winter months when the vegetation is not carrying any leaf cover. Whilst not creating a total remedy, the developing vegetation belt on the northern side of the main site will reduce this impact over time. When considering the limited locations where the site is in view and that the impact is considered to be very localised, the scheme is not considered to fundamentally undermine the core values or enjoyment of the area as a resource by the public. Partial views of the main site from the Sarum Road/Sparsholt Road/Woodman Lane crossroads, whilst likely to remain, are also of limited duration and localised.

The identified harm means the scheme does not wholly comply with LPP1 policy MTRA4 (Development in the Countryside), LPP2 policy DM23 (Rural Character) and CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Character). This must be given significant weight and importance when reaching a decision. The use is temporary and the whole site would revert back to agriculture after 40 years. Furthermore, the decommissioning conditions do seek to retain any element of the new planting (which will have matured by that time) which are considered to reinforce landscape character.

The public benefits from the proposal are considered to be the contribution made towards renewable energy generation that would assist in reaching UK's Carbon reduction target. The Council's also has its own zero carbon target of 2030, following the declaration of a Climate Emergency in June 2019. It would also reinforce home security of energy supply and secure significant biodiversity enhancements. The goal of carbon reduction in energy generation is viewed as an important national target to prevent the negative impacts of climate change in society. Achieving the national target is considered to afford significant weight in support of the scheme.

When the clear and substantial positive public benefits of the scheme are weighed against the landscape and heritage asset impacts, the balance is considered by officers to favour support for the application due to the carbon reductions/net zero target and the resulting public benefits, notwithstanding the consequent conflict with landscape policies MTRA4 (Development in the Countryside), CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Character) and DM23 (Rural Character) and the conflict with Heritage policy CP20 (Heritage and Landscape Policy). The following conditions are proposed to support the assessment and outcome of the planning balance as outlined above: 04 (Temporary consent and Decommissioning),
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05(Early Cessation), 10(CEMP), 14(Landscape Enhancement), 27(Tree Replacement & Seed Failure), 28(LEMP) and the legal agreement.

This assessment is reached having taken full account of Section (a) of para 180 of the NPPF (2023), Policies MTRA4 & CP20 of WDLPP1 and policy DM23 of WDLPP2 and having regard to the comments made by the consultees and external parties.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Section 38(6) requires that a determination is made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development complies with a number of development plan policies, as identified above. There is a conflict with policies MTRA4 CP20 & DM23 as a result of the impact on the landscape and heritage assets referred to above but, given the outcome of the assessment recommended in the NPPF, whilst this conflict has been considered, it does not warrant refusal of the application in this instance. Accordingly, when making the planning balance, and after consideration of the application against the full extent of the policy framework the application is considered acceptable. As such the officer's recommendation is to grant planning permission.

Planning Conditions/Obligations/Agreements

Regarding the use of conditions, the Local Planning Authority has had regard to the guidance on the use of conditions laid down in Section 70 (1) (a) of the Act, and the 6 tests set out in paragraph 56 of the NPPF. The draft set of conditions has been discussed with the applicant. A number of the consultees have asked for conditions to be imposed if the application is granted. Officers have used these requests as a foundation to develop the set of recommended condition set out below.

Sparsholt Parish Council and several of the objectors have asked for certain matters to be addressed by condition if the application is supported. It is requested that mature planting is used instead of the transplant sized species in the belief this will form a more immediate presence and accelerated visual screen. The applicant has been asked to comment on the use of mature stock plants. The response is that whilst this may be possible, there are reasons that support the use of smaller plants. These are:

- Smaller trees have healthier root systems and are more resilient.
- Smaller trees have a fast growth rate once established and will outperform mature plants in similar conditions.
- Smaller trees require less care and have a higher survival rate.
- Small trees have a smaller carbon footprint.
- Greater variety of small plant species available including native species that are better suited to localised conditions.
- Once established small plant can be pruned for a healthy structure.

Clearly there are positive and negative aspects associated with the choice of species size on planting. Against the points listed above is the enhanced screening in the early years 1-8. Having considered the matter, the view is maintained that any initial benefits are outweighed by the longer-term gains. The establishment of plants was considered previously, and the view taken that the one critical factor to aid establishment of new planting was watering. Accordingly, this has been included in the relevant conditions (14&28) to promote rapid establishment and growth.

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Other requests are that the construction hours are limited to an 8-hour working day, that lighting is controlled, and that the roads are washed down every day. Regarding the construction hours, the applicant is seeking the ability to operate a 12-hour working day. On balance there is no fundamental reason why the working day should be constrained. It must be noted that the 16-week construction period was based on a 12-hour day so reducing that to 8 would result in extending the construction period beyond 16 weeks. In that context the suggestion that a financial penalty is imposed for any construction over run is considered unreasonable. Construction and operational lighting would be controlled by condition, As the construction traffic would be using the existing access roadway it has not been felt necessary to impose a wheel washing condition. A general reference not to carry mud out onto the roads has been included within the CTMP condition (no15).

In seeking the planning obligation for the LEMP and the provision of the skylark plots, the Local Planning Authority has had regard to the tests laid down in para 57 of the NPPF and CIL regulation 122 which requires the obligations to be necessary; relevant to planning; directly related to the proposed development; fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development and reasonable in all other respects.

Some objectors have asked that the decommissioning is secured through a financial bond. There is no national or local policy to support of such an approach. The approach to be adopted at the time would be to seek a remedy from the applicant and if that does not result in the desired outcome then the Council could seek a resolution from the landowner. Having reviewed the request, it is not considered appropriate to seek a decommissioning bond. Nor is it reasonable to suggest that the Council imposes a financial penalty if the construction period over runs or that we nominate the source of materials and equipment that are installed on the site. Objectors have asked that the landscaping is maintained throughout the life of the site and this would be addressed through the LEMP requirement that would form a condition (No 28) and part of the legal agreement.

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Recommendation: Approval subject to conditions and the completion of a legal agreement for the LEMP as set out in condition 28, the recovery of costs associated with the monitoring of the LEMP every five years, (after Establishment) over the 40 year life of the development and the provision of 4 skylark plots.

Legal Agreement – Heads of Terms

1. Terms of Landscape Ecological Management Plan as set out in condition 28.
2. Recovery of costs associated with the monitoring of the Landscape Ecological Management Plan every five years, (after Establishment) over the 40-year life of the development.
3. Establishment and delivery of 4 skylark plots elsewhere on the farm holding over the 40 year life of the development.

Conditions

Time Limit

- 01 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 (1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

Approved Plans

- 02 Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority the development shall be carried out in accordance with the deposited plans and drawings as stated below:
- Corylus drawing entitled Planning Layout drawing number PF/397/11/02 revision T dated 8 January 2024.
 - Corylus drawing entitled Landscape/Ecology Mitigation Plan drawing number PF/397/12 Revision M dated 8 January 2024.
 - Corylus drawing entitled Application Plan drawing number PF/397/13 Revision G dated 13 September 2023.
 - Corylus drawing entitled Planning Layout Detailing Contours drawing number PF/397/15 dated 13 September 2022.
 - Corylus drawing entitled Cross Section A-A drawing number PF/397/16 dated 11 January 2024.
 - Corylus Cross Section West B-B drawing number PF/397/17 dated 16 January 2024.
 - Corylus drawing entitled PV Panel Details drawing number PF-387-11-01 revision A dated 26 January 2023.
 - Corylus drawing entitled CCTV & Fence Details drawing number PF-387-11-02 revision C dated 23 January 2024.
 - Corylus drawing entitled Substation Details: Palisade Fence drawing number PF-397-11-03 dated 26 October 2022.

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- Corylus drawing entitled Customer Substation drawing number PF-397-11-04 dated 26 October 2022.
- Corylus drawing entitled DNO Substation drawing number PF-397-11-05 dated 26 October 2022.
- Corylus drawing entitled Spare Container Store drawing number PF-397-11-06 dated 26 October 2022.
- Corylus drawing entitled Indicative Transformer drawing number PF-397-11-07 dated 26 October 2022.
- Novus drawing entitled Access Track (Solar) drawing number 16 dated 21 February 2023
- Novus drawing entitled Security Gate Detail drawing number VI date 8 April 2022.

For the avoidance of any doubt, any residual presence of any superseded plan in any document does not imply any consent for the detail shown on that plan.

Reason: For certainty and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans and details.

Notification of First Export Date

03. Within 1 month of the date of first export of electricity, confirmation shall be given in writing to the local planning authority of the date of first export to the Grid.

Reason: To ensure that the trigger time for other actions is recorded.

Temporary Permission & Decommissioning

- 04 The development hereby permitted shall cease on or before the expiry of a 40-year period from the date of the first export of electricity.

The land shall thereafter be restored to its former condition in accordance with a scheme of decommissioning work (the Decommissioning Scheme),

The decommissioning scheme shall include:

- the removal of the solar panels and associated above ground works approved under this permission
- the management and timing of any works.
- a traffic management plan to address likely traffic impact issues during the decommissioning period.
- an environmental management plan to include details of measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife and habitats and to identify any elements of planting/habitat to be retained.
- details of site restoration.
- an implementation timetable.

The Decommissioning Scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing no later than 39 years and 6 months from the date of the first export of electricity, and subsequently implemented as approved.

Reason: To ensure that the site is restored in the long-term interests of the visual character of the surrounding area to comply with policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2 and that the effects of site decommissioning on the

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highway network is mitigated in the interests of highway safety in accordance with policy DM18 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Cessation Before Fortieth Anniversary

05. In the event the site ceases to generate electricity for export to the grid for a continuous period of 12 months prior to the end of the 40 year period, and unless otherwise agreed in writing with the local planning authority, a scheme of decommissioning works (the Early Decommissioning Scheme) shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning authority no later than 3 months from the end of the 12 month period.

The scheme shall include:

- the removal of the solar panels and associated above ground works approved under this permission
- the management and timing of any works.
- a traffic management plan to address likely traffic impact issues during the decommissioning period.
- an environmental management plan to include details of measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife and habitats and to identify any elements of planting/habitat to be retained.
- details of site restoration.
- an implementation timetable.

The decommissioning shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: To ensure that the site is restored in the long-term interests of the visual character of the surrounding area to comply with policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2 and that the effects of site decommissioning on the highway network is mitigated in the interests of highway safety in accordance with policy DM18 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Archaeology

06 No development or any works of site preparation shall take place until the applicant or their agents or successors in title have implemented a programme of archaeological assessment (comprising trial trenching) in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation that has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing.

Reason: To assess the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits that might be present and the impact of the development upon these heritage assets. Policy DM26 Winchester District Local Plan Part 2; Policy CP20 of the Winchester District Joint Core Strategy

Archaeology

07 No development or any works of site preparation shall take place until the applicant or their agents or successors in title have implemented a programme of archaeological mitigation works, based on the results of the trial trenching, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation that has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. No development or site preparation shall take place other than in accordance with the Written Scheme of

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Investigation approved by the LPA. The Written Scheme of Investigation shall include:

- The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording.
- Provision for post investigation assessment, reporting and dissemination
- Provision to be made for deposition of the analysis and records of the site investigation (archive)
- Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the Written Scheme of Investigation.

Reason: To mitigate the effect of the development upon any heritage assets and to ensure that information regarding these heritage assets is preserved by record for future generations. Policy DM26 Winchester District Local Plan Part 2; Policy CP20 of the Winchester District Joint Core Strategy.

Archaeology

08 Following completion of all archaeological fieldwork, within 12 months (unless otherwise agreed in writing) a report will be produced in accordance with an approved programme including where appropriate post-excavation assessment, specialist analysis and reports and publication. The report shall be submitted to and approved by the local authority.

Reason: To ensure that evidence from the historic environment contributing to our knowledge and understanding of our past is captured and made publicly available. Policy DM26 Winchester District Local Plan Part 2; Policy CP20 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 Joint Core Strategy.

Employment and Skills Plan

09 No phase of the authorised development may commence until an employment and skills plan in relation to the construction of the authorised development (which accords with the employment and skills template) has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority.
The employment and skills plan must identify opportunities for access to employment, apprenticeships, supply chain opportunities, engagement with educational institutions and community support and engagement in connection with the construction of the authorised development, and the means for publicising such opportunities. The approved employment and skills plan must be implemented as approved during the construction of the authorised development.

Reason: To maximise economic, employment and engagement opportunities for the population of the district and to comply with the intentions of policy CP8 of LPP1

Construction Environment Management Plan

10 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The CEMP will address the following having regard to measures to protect the nearby SSSI, SINCs/Ancient Woodlands or disturbance to important species and habitats:

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- a) The implementation of the measures set out in paragraph 7.12 of the Revised Ecological Impact Assessment version Vf2 dated 22 September 2023.
- b) The installation of the perimeter fencing on the northern and western boundaries as shown on the approved plans before any other activity is undertaken within that part of the site that would contain the solar panels.
- c) Details to achieve the exclusion of any activity (other than planting) within the full buffer zone between the fencing and the site boundary vegetation to the north and west of that part of the site that would contain the solar panels together with details to exclude activity within the Construction Exclusion Zone as shown on Corylus drawing entitled Planning Layout drawing number PF/397/11/02 revision T dated 8 January 2024.
- d) Storage of construction materials/chemicals and equipment.
- e) Timing of work to avoid the bird nesting/breeding seasons.
- f) Provision of mammal ramps for open excavations
- g) Details of the use of an Ecological Clerk of Works.
- h) Measures to prevent pollution from chemicals and/or fuel spillage or escape during construction.
- i) Dust suppression, mitigation, and avoidance measures.
- j) A public communications strategy including a complaints procedure with contact names, telephone numbers, roles and responsibilities.
- k) Noise/visual/vibration reduction measures to be applied to construction activity.
- l) Measures to ensure best practice is adopted for use of any construction equipment or vehicles during the construction phase including minimising any exhaust or noise emissions.
- m) Waste collection and disposal.
- n) Details of any lighting to be used during the construction phase including the avoidance of light spillage into boundary habitats and glare.
- o) Any actions required in respect of badger activity or presence on site or within the immediate vicinity.

The works shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that all construction work in relation to the application does not cause materially harmful effects on nearby land, properties, businesses, and the wider environment.

Soil Management Plan

- 11 No development or other operations (including site preparation and any groundworks) shall commence until a Soils Management Plan has been submitted to and been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan should set out the means to be used to protect soils during construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of the solar farm such that the objectives of the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan required by Condition 26 are not compromised and crop growing agricultural operations may resume following the operational life of the solar farm.

Reason: To ensure that the condition of the soil is retained, maintained and enhanced through the various phases of the life of the solar farm development and into its restoration at the cessation of the use.

Details New Access Road.

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- 12 Before any construction is commenced on the new access road, details of the existing ground levels and the proposed levels of the new roadway together with the top surface finish to the road and any measures to deal with surface water shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The road shall then be constructed in accordance with the approved details and the surface treatment, and any drainage measures shall be retained in their approved condition for the life of the solar farm.

Reason: To protect the surrounding area during the temporary use of the land in accordance with policy DM29 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Details Temporary Compound

- 13 Before the temporary compound is established, details of its construction with regard to existing and proposed ground levels, the separation and storage of any soil or sub soil and the methodology to be adopted to protect ground water from the risk of pollution shall be submitted to and approved in writing with the local planning authority. The submitted details shall also include the timeframe for the decommissioning of the compound once the development has been implemented and the export of power has commenced. The construction, operation and decommissioning of the compound shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To protect the surrounding area during the temporary use of the land in accordance with policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Landscape Enhancement

- 14 The landscaping enhancement proposals as set out on the Corylus plan entitled Landscape/Ecological Mitigation Plan drawing number PF/397/12 revision M dated 8 January 2024 shall be implemented within the first planting season following the first export of power from the site. Details of a schedule for proposed plant watering shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority before any planting takes place. The schedule to be adhered to, until the plants are established.

Reason: To ensure that the landscape character of the site and its contribution to the wider area is maintained and to comply with the intentions of policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Construction Traffic Management Plan (Implementation of Agreed Detail)

- 15 All the measures outlined within the Construction Traffic Management Plan produced by Rappor Consultants Ltd dated July 2023 Revision 03 shall be implemented in full during the construction phase. The measures shall include (but not limited to) the following:
- Routing of Construction Traffic to Site
 - Use of Banksmen.
 - Construction Traffic Management
 - Construction Access
 - Deliveries

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- Construction Compound
- Parking
- Vehicle Passing
- Mitigation Measures for Noise, Vibration Dust and Dirt.
- Actions to ensure no mud or other material is carried out onto the highway from the site
- Contractor Responsibility.

Reason: To manage construction traffic in the interests of highway safety and in accordance with policy DM18 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2

Construction Traffic Management Plan (Detail to be Agreed)

16 Before any of the development hereby permitted is first commenced, further details shall be submitted to and approved in writing with the local planning authority with regard to the following matters:

- a) The methodology to be adopted and the timetable relating to the highway conditions survey
- b) Details for the provision and display of directional signage to guide all traffic towards and away from the site along the nominated route.
- c) Details of an employee travel plan that will set out proposals to minimise the number of individual vehicle movements to the site and to set out measures to discourage the use of the local road network other than the sections of Farley Mount Road and Sparsholt Road that forms part of the construction route for traffic from and back to the A3090 as set out in Appendix C to the CTMP.

Where further details are approved, those details shall be implemented in accordance with any approval or timetable.

Reason: To manage construction traffic in the interests of highway safety and in accordance with policy DM18 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Creation of Visibility Splays and Improvements to Access

17 Before any of the development hereby approved is first commenced, including the pre commencement archaeological investigation work, the access widening and the visibility splays as set out on the Rappor plan entitled Access Visibility Assessment drawing number SK01 Revision B dated 19 October 2022 and which is attached as appendix G to the Construction Traffic Management Plan dated July 2023 TMP shall be formed and retained during the construction phase. The lines of sight splays shown on the approved plans shall be kept free of any obstruction exceeding 0.6m metre in height above the adjacent carriageway and shall be subsequently maintained so during the construction phase.

Reason: To provide a satisfactory access in the interests of highway safety and to comply with the intentions of policy DM18 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Limitation on Access to Site From Farley Mount Road Only

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- 18 All vehicular and pedestrian traffic associated with the proposed development shall access and exit the site via the improved access off Farley Mount Road and by no other means.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to comply with the intentions of policy DM18 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Working Hours

- 19 All work relating to the construction of the development hereby approved, shall only take place between the hours of 0700 hours to 1900 hours Monday to Friday and 0800 hours to 1600 hours on Saturdays and at no time on Sundays, Bank Holidays or Public Holidays unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the general rural character of the area, the amenities of surrounding residential properties and to comply with the intentions of policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2

Colour of Structures

- 20 Before any structure, equipment or infrastructure including the supporting frames for the PV panels is first brought onto the site, details of the intended finish colour shall be submitted to and approved in writing with the local planning authority. The items shall be finished in this colour and shall be retained in this finish hereafter.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory visual relationship between the new development and the surrounding area to comply with the intentions of policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Details of Capacity and Equipment

- 21 Prior to the installation of any solar panels or inverters, confirmation that the panels will have a non-reflective coating together with details of the capacity of the solar panels and inverter sizing, shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This will include details on the total AC output from the site based on total inverter capacity.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans and details, in compliance with the provisions of National Policy Statement EN-3 (January 2024) paragraph 2.10.95, and footnote 92.

Levels Detail

- 22 Details relating to existing and proposed ground levels for those locations where any item of equipment, infrastructure or building (but excluding the solar arrays) is to be placed, shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority before the structure is brought onto the site. The development shall then take place in accordance with the approved detail.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory visual relationship between the new development and the surrounding area to comply with the intentions of policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

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Noise Condition

- 23 The noise rating levels, LAr, Tr (cumulative noise level from all fixed plant serving the solar farm) shall not exceed 30 dBA at the nearest noise sensitive receptor. The noise rating level shall be measured and assessed in accordance with the methodology within BS 4142:2014+A1:2019 unless otherwise agreed with the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and the protection of the local environment and to comply with the intentions of policy DM20 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2

Permanent Lighting Scheme

- 24 Before any permanent lighting is installed on site, details of the individual light unit, its technical specification including its location, height above ground, measures to avoid light spillage, its powers and the circumstances when it would be used shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. All external lighting shall be installed in accordance with the specifications and locations set out in the scheme and maintained thereafter in accordance with the scheme. Under no circumstances should any other external lighting be installed.

Reason: To protect the character and appearance of the countryside; to ensure that the ecological value of the site is not adversely impacted upon by the development and to comply with the intentions of policy DM 17 of LPP2

Surface Water

- 25 Prior to the first export of any electricity generated by the development hereby permitted, the drainage and infiltration system shall be constructed in accordance with the details as set out in the Flood Risk Assessment & Surface Water Management Plan from Corylus Ltd Revision 3 dated February 2023. The drainage measures shall be retained and maintained hereafter so long as the solar farm is operational.

Reason: To ensure that surface water run-off is released in a controlled way and to comply with the intentions of policy CP17 of LPP1.

Provision of Information for Emergency Services

- 26 Prior to the first export of any electricity generated by the development hereby permitted, details for the provision and display of emergency information shall be installed within the site at appropriate locations. The details of the information, the nature of the display (Premises Information Box or board) and the proposed locations that would hold or display the information shall be submitted to and approved in writing with the local planning authority. The submitted information shall include a plan of the site identifying the structures that are located within it, the point of connection to the grid, method to isolate panels, contact details for parties and details of any inflammable substances or hazardous substances on site.

The approved information shall be placed in the agreed locations before any electricity is exported from the site and retained so long as electricity is generated by the site. The details shall be reviewed and updated as required.

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Reason: To ensure that Emergency Services has adequate access and information of the layout of the site and its contents before entering the facility and to comply with the intentions of policy DM18 of LLP2.

Tree Replacement or Seeding Failure

27 If within a period of 5 years from the date of planting, any trees, shrubs plants die, are removed or, in the opinion of the local planning authority, become seriously damaged or defective, others of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted or sown at the same place, in the next planting season, unless the local planning authority gives its written consent to any variation. Any failure with regard to the seeding areas within a period of 5 years shall be replaced with additional seed of the approved mix and applied at the same rate and time of year as the original seeding took place.

Reason: To ensure that the landscape character of the site and its contribution to the wider area is maintained and to comply with the intentions of policy DM23 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 2.

Landscape and Ecological Management Plan

28 Within one month of the first export of any power, a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP), (drawing on the contents of the Revised Ecological Assessment version Vf2 dated 22 September 2023 and on the detail shown in the Corylus drawing entitled Landscape/Ecology Mitigation Plan drawing number PF/397/12 Revision M dated 8 January 2024 shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The LEMP will address the post landscape scheme establishment and long-term commitments to manage the red lined application site to ensure that it delivers on the proposed landscape and biodiversity enhancements. This includes the maintenance of the existing and reinforced hedgerows that bound Sarum Road, Sparsholt Road and Fairly Mount Road to ensure that they continue to screen the site from view. The content of the LEMP shall include the following:

- (a) Aims and objectives of management to achieve or exceed the Biodiversity Net Gain figures of a 81.51% increase in habitat units and 63.28% increase in hedgerow units.
- (b) Description and evaluation of existing and proposed features to be managed.
- (c) Ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management.
- (d) Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives.
- (e) Prescriptions for management actions.
- (f) Details of a schedule for proposed plant watering. The schedule to be adhered to until the plants are established.
- (g) Purpose and conservation objectives for the proposed enhancement measures;
- (h) Proposed management of the roadside hedgerows (including minimum heights to be maintained) to ensure they continue to provide an effective screen to the application site.
- (i) The intended management regime to be adopted with regard to the three seeded areas (under the solar panels inside the fenced off area, the shaded area and the peripheral wildflower strip as shown on the Corylus drawing entitled Landscape/Ecology Mitigation Plan drawing number PF/397/12 Revision L dated 8 January 2024.

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- (j) Replacement planting or seeding in the event of loss after the 5-year establishment period.
- (k) Preparation of an annual work schedule for the implementation of management actions.
- (l) Details of the body or organisation responsible for implementation of the plan.
- (m) Details of the timetable for monitoring and review of management actions, that will then influence successive management action and the role of the local planning authority within that process.

The LEMP shall also set out (where the results from monitoring show that conservation aims and objectives of the LEMP are not being met) how contingencies and/or remedial action will be identified, agreed and implemented so that the development still delivers the fully functioning landscape and biodiversity objectives of the originally approved scheme. The LEMP will be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To deliver the landscape enhancements and the biodiversity net gain promoted as part of the scheme and to comply with policy DM23 of the Winchester DM26 Winchester District Local Plan Part 2 and policy CP16 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 Joint Core Strategy.

Informatives:

1. In accordance with paragraph 38 of the NPPF, Winchester City Council (WCC) takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals, working with applicants and agents to achieve the best solution. To this end WCC:

- offer a pre-application advice service and,
- update applicants/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application, where possible suggesting alternative solutions.

In this instance pre application discussions took place, numerous meetings have been held with the agent to clarify matters and discuss whether objections to the scheme could be overcome. The proposed conditions have also been discussed with the applicant.

2. The Local Planning Authority has taken account of the following development plan policies and proposals:

Winchester Local Plan Part 1 – Joint Core Strategy (LPP1).

- DS1 Development Strategy and Principles
- MTRA1 Policies MTRA1 Development Strategy Market Towns and Rural Areas
- MTRA4 Development in the Countryside
- CP8 Economic Growth and Diversification
- CP10 Transport
- CP12 Renewable and Decentralised Energy
- CP14 The Effective Use of Land
- CP15 Green Infrastructure
- CP16 Biodiversity

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- CP17 Flooding Flood Risk and the Water Environment
- CP19 South Downs National Park
- CP20 Heritage and Landscape Character

Winchester District Local Plan Part 2 – Development Management and Site Allocations

- DM1 Location of New Development
- DM15 Local Distinctiveness
- DM16 Site Design Criteria
- DM17 Site Development Principles
- DM18 Access and Parking
- DM19 Development and Pollution
- DM20 Development and Noise
- DM21 Contaminated Lane
- DM23 Rural Character
- DM24 Special Trees, Important Hedgerows and Ancient Woodlands
- DM25 Historic Parks and Gardens
- DM26 Archaeology
- DM29 Heritage Assets
- DM31 Locally Listed Heritage Assets

3. This permission is granted for the following reasons:

An assessment has been undertaken having regard to Policies and Proposals of the Development Plan set out above including the NPPF and other material considerations. The conclusion of that assessment is that there is insufficient weight to justify a refusal of the application. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning permission should therefore be granted.

4. Where allegations of noise from works are substantiated by the Environmental Protection Team, a Notice limiting the hours of operation under The Control of Pollution Act may be served.

5. During Construction, no materials should be burnt on site. Where allegations of statutory nuisance are substantiated by the Environmental Protection Team, an Abatement Notice may be served under The Environmental Protection Act 1990. The applicant is reminded that the emission of dark smoke through the burning of materials is a direct offence under The Clean Air Act 1993.

6. Please be respectful to your neighbours including those along the access route and the environment when carrying out your development. Ensure that the site is well organised, clean and tidy and that facilities, stored materials, vehicles and plant are located to minimise disruption. Please consider the impact on your neighbours by informing them of the works and minimising air, light and noise pollution and minimising the impact of deliveries, parking and working on public or private roads. Any damage to these areas should be remediated as soon as is practically possible.

For further advice, please refer to the Construction Code of Practise

<http://www.ccscheme.org.uk/index.php/ccs-ltd/what-is-the-ccs/code-of-consideratepractice>

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7. Further information and guidance for developers on construction good practice can be found on the Winchester City Council website:

<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/environment/pollution/construction-sites/>

8. The Council notes the reference to the establishment of a community fund in association with Hursley Parish Council. The establishment and distribution of any such fund is a matter that falls outside the control of the local planning authority. Sparsholt Parish Council which lies to the north of the application site has expressed a view that given their proximity to the application site, consideration should be given to their inclusion within any funding arrangement. The local planning authority requests that you give the view of Sparsholt Parish Council due consideration.

9. Assistance in formulating the response to the Employment and Skills Plan condition may be found on the following WCC website:

<https://www.winchester.gov.uk/business/employment/employment-and-skills-plans?>