

Application Number:	P/FUL/2025/00485
Webpage:	https://planning.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/
Site address:	Land At Cruxton Farm, Cruxton Lane, Cruxton
Proposal:	Construction of a temporary solar farm, to include the installation of solar photovoltaic panels, with substations, inverters, perimeter fencing, landscaping and other associated works.
Applicant name:	Enviromena Asset Management UK Limited
Case Officer:	Matthew Pochin-Hawkes
Ward Member(s):	Cllr Eysenck

1. Reason application is going to committee:

- 1.1 The application has been brought to the Strategic Planning Committee for determination based on the scale of the proposal (major application) and because the planning officer's recommendation differs from the recommendation of the Parish Council.

2. Summary of recommendation:

- 2.1 Refuse planning permission for the following reasons:
1. The proposed development by reason of its appearance, scale and positioning would have a detrimental impact upon the character, landscape and visual quality of the Dorset National Landscape and existing public rights of way. The impacts would not be sufficiently mitigated contrary to policies ENV1, COM7 and COM11 of the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan (2015). The proposal constitutes major development in the Dorset National Landscape and exceptional circumstances to justify the development have not been demonstrated, and, owing to the impacts on the National Landscape, granting of the proposals is not considered to be in the public interest, in conflict with Para. 190 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). The benefits of the proposal are not considered to outweigh the harm of the development, failing to comply with Local Plan policy COM11 and the Dorset AONB Management Plan 2019-2024.

3. Key planning issues

Issue	Conclusion
Principle of development	Principle to be considered against Local Plan policy COM 11.
Impacts on agricultural land	Acceptable.
Landscape and visual impacts	Exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated. There would be significant adverse landscape and visual effects. The proposals would adversely affect existing rights of way.
Heritage	Acceptable, subject to conditions.

Issue	Conclusion
Residential amenity	Acceptable, subject to conditions.
Highways	Acceptable, subject to conditions.
Biodiversity	Acceptable, subject to conditions.
Trees	Acceptable, subject to conditions.
Flood risk and drainage	Acceptable, subject to conditions.

4. Description of site

- 4.1 The application site is comprised of agricultural land located across two agricultural fields at Cruxton Farm which lies 0.7km south-west of Dorchester Road (A356). The site includes an existing agricultural farm track that serves the site from Cruxton Farm. The boundaries of the site are formed of a mixture of dense hedgerow and mature trees. The western boundary of the site has a public right of way which runs along the boundary in the northern field and continues to run along the western boundary of the southern field. A further public right of way runs along the southern boundary of the site. Both public rights of way form part of the Macmillan Way; a long-distance walking route from Boston to Abbotsbury.
- 4.2 The nearest properties to the site are situated in Cruxton (circa 550m north-east), dispersed dwellings in Notton including Notton Hill Barn Cottages (circa 300m south) and Greenford Farm (circa 700m west).
- 4.3 The application site falls within the Dorset National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB).
- 4.4 Other solar farms in the area include:
- Rampisham Down: A 17.3MW solar farm on the north side of the A356 opposite the former BBC World Service site, approximately 7km northwest of the application site. The development involved the removal of non-telecommunications masts associated with the former use of the site. Planning references: WD/D/14/002974 and WD/D/19/001433.
 - Southern Counties Shooting Ground: A 9.5MW solar farm to the east and south of the go-kart track at Southern Counties Shooting Ground, approximately 7km northeast of the application site. Planning references WD/D/18/001652 and WD/D/14/003367.

5. Description of development

- 5.1 The proposed development involves the construction of a solar farm, to include the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, with substations, inverters, perimeter fencing, landscaping and other associated works. The cable route between the point of connection (POC) to the site is not included in the application. The POC is located approximately 60m to the east of the site. The permission is sought for a temporary period of 40 years and would have a capacity of 10MW.
- 5.2 The proposed solar farm has the following components:
- PV array (fixed panels)
 - Transformer stations (no. 4)
 - Customer substation

- District Network Operator (DNO) substation
- CCTV
- Perimeter fence

5.3 Details for these components are as follows:

Table 5.1 – Components of the planning application

Component	Detail
PV array	The panels would be set at an angle of 20 degrees facing south towards the sun. The front, lower edge of the module arrays would be 0.60m above the ground, with a maximum height of 2.27m on the rear, upper edge. Panels measure 4.70m in length. Each row would be spaced a minimum of 3.2m apart to prevent overshadowing of panels by other panels. The panels would be mounted on a mounting structure fixed to the ground with piles.
Transformer stations	Four transformers are proposed within the centre of the PV arrays, two in the north field and two in the south field. The transformers, associated feeder pillars and cabinets would sit on a 5.5m x 5.5m square concrete plinth. The feeder pillar would be approximately 2.49m in height and the transformer would be enclosed by a mesh security fence.
Customer substation	A customer substation is proposed in the south west corner of the northern field to the west of the solar array. It would be enclosed by the perimeter fence. The rectangular building would be oriented north/south and has dimensions of approximately 6.61m length x 2.60m width x 3.07m height.
DNO substation	A DNO substation is proposed to the south of the customer substation outside of the perimeter fence enclosing the solar farm. The rectangular building would be oriented north/south and has dimensions of approximately 9.00m length x 2.80m width x 3.39m height.
Perimeter fence	A deer fence of 2.0m in height would be installed around the perimeter of the solar farm, enclosing all components save for the DNO substation. It would provide some protection against theft or vandalism and enclose livestock.
CCTV	In addition, 13 pole mounted CCTV security cameras (approximately 3m high) would be installed around the perimeter fence.

6. Background and relevant planning history

6.1 The site has a detailed planning history having been subject to a previous planning application for a similar development (P/FUL/2021/01920) and associated recovered planning inquiry (APP/D1265/W/23/3317593) (the 'appeal scheme'). The planning application was refused by planning committee in November 2022 and the appeal was

dismissed in September 2024. Detailed reasoning and judgements are set out in the Inspector's Report to the Secretary of State and Decision Letter from the Secretary of State¹.

P/FUL/2021/01920

Decision: REF

Decision Date: 08/11/2022

Install ground-mounted solar panel photovoltaic solar arrays, substations, inverter stations, security fencing, access tracks, landscaping and other ancillary infrastructure.

- 6.2 The development is EIA development. This was confirmed through an EIA Screening Opinion issued by the Local Planning Authority and a Screening Direction issued by the Secretary of State.

P/ESC/2024/04962

Decision: EIA

Decision Date: 23/09/2024

Request for EIA screening opinion

- 6.3 The applicant has undertaken one round of pre-application engagement with Dorset Council planning and landscape officers and the Dorset National Landscape Team. The pre-application proposals were similar to the current proposals, relating to a 10MW solar farm.

- 6.4 The advice can be viewed on the Council's planning register. In summary, the pre-application advice noted the draft proposals had sought to respond to the shortcomings of the appeal scheme and, subject to full assessment, would seem to reduce the harm of the development and increase some of the benefits. Detailed comments from the Council's Senior Landscape Officer and the Dorset National Landscape Team were provided. The planning officer advised that they had concerns that the changes did not go far enough in seeking to reduce the landscape effects and maintain the attractiveness of existing rights of way and that it may not be possible to achieve this given the constraints of the site and extent of development.

P/PAP/2024/00632

Decision: RES

Decision Date: 10/12/2024

Install ground-mounted solar panel photovoltaic solar arrays, substations, inverter stations, security fencing, access tracks, landscaping and other ancillary infrastructure.

- 6.5 The design changes from the appeal scheme are as follows:

1. Removing solar panels from the northern extent of the site to create an approximate 80m offset between the existing northern boundary of the site and the proposed solar farm fencing.
2. Planting of wildflower grassland in place of the solar panels which are proposed to be removed.
3. Creation of rest area, including picnic bench and information boards (on renewable energy) within the open space adjacent to the existing right of way.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recovered-appeal-land-at-crupton-farm-crupton-lane-crupton-ref-3317593-3-april-2024>

4. Removal of DNO substation enclosure previously proposed in the north west corner of the site.
5. New hedgerow planting to the north of the solar panels.
6. Additional tree and shrub planting along the existing northern boundary of the site and between the two fields which make up the proposed solar farm.
7. Relocation of solar panels and associated fencing further away from the Macmillan Way, to create a 10m clear route bound by existing and proposed landscaping to form a 'green lane' along the western and southern boundaries of the site. Note the width varies around the perimeter of the site.
8. Re-configured solar panel layout.
9. Consequential reduction in generating capacity from 11.8MW to 10MW.

6.6 The revised proposal also carries forward the following elements which were proposed as part of the appeal scheme:

1. Permissive path to the west of the site.
2. Hedgerow reinforcement.
3. Proposed management of other boundary vegetation.

7. List of relevant constraints

Dorset National Landscape

Outside defined development boundary

Landscape Character; Chalk Valley and Downland; Upper Frome Valley

Public rights of way:

- Footpath S23/13 – along the western boundary of the west
- Footpath S23/14 – along the southern boundary of the site

Setting of Scheduled Monuments:

- Grimstone Down - Multi-period landscape including an Iron Age or Romano British settlement, part of an associated field system, six bowl barrows and an enclosure 600m south east of Langford Farm. Historic England reference: 1003771.
- Two bowl barrows 1250m east of Notton Hill Barn. Historic England reference: 1004544.
- Bowl barrow 140m south east of Broadwater Cottage. Historic England reference: 1016376.
- Frampton Roman Villa. Historic England reference: 1002683.
- Part of a Later Iron Age or Romano-British settlement 590m north west of Compton Barn. Historic England reference: 1003234.
- Field System W of Fore Hill. Historic England reference: 1002866.

Setting of Listed Buildings:

- Grade II* Listed Building. West Cruxton Farmhouse. Historic England reference: 1287680.

- Grade II Listed Building. Numbers 1 and 2 Cruxton Cottages. Historic England reference: 1216302.
- Grade II Listed Building. Dairy Cottage. Historic England reference: 1215138.
- Grade II Listed Building. Manor Farmhouse, Cruxton. Historic England reference: 1288233.
- Grade II Listed Building. Bridge Over River Frome, Leading to Notton Farm. Historic England reference: 1216502.

Existing and higher potential ecological network – north eastern corner of the site.

Flood Zone 1

8. Consultations

- 8.1 The following is a summary of consultee responses received. All consultee responses can be viewed in full on the Council's website.

Consultees

Environment Agency

- 8.2 No objection. Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) recommended to be secured via planning condition.

Historic England

- 8.3 Following consultation on the amended plans at the recommendation of the Council's Conservation Officer, Historic England confirmed it would not be offering advice in this instance. Historic England recommends that the views of the Council's specialist conservation and archaeological advisors are sought.

National Highways

- 8.4 Traffic impacts of development once operational is likely to be minimal. It is necessary to ensure safe and suitable arrangements will be in place for managing traffic during the construction phase of development.
- 8.5 Subject to the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) measures being implemented in full for the duration of works, suitable controls will be implemented to minimise the risk to trunk road traffic during the construction of the development to an acceptable degree. CTMP should be secured via a planning condition.

Natural England

Initial plans

- 8.6 Any decision should take full account of the Dorset National Landscape Team's advice and give the necessary weight to the relevant Dorset National Landscape Management Plan policies.
- 8.7 Natural England supports the urgent need for renewable energy as a means of helping to address the very serious ongoing consequences of climate change. Natural England therefore fully accepts that the proposals in themselves will provide a substantial environmental benefit. This needs to be measured against the adverse impact on the natural environment and assessed against the NPPF (notably Para. 189 and 190).
- 8.8 The need for renewable energy should not on its own be considered as an exceptional circumstance. Nor should the availability of a connection to the grid, or grid capacity, be considered as an "exceptional circumstance". Grid connections are not limited to locations within National Landscapes, and their local availability should not justify a major development within a nationally protected landscape.
- 8.9 The proposal will only make a modest contribution to renewable targets.
- 8.10 The scope for siting solar farm developments on alternative sites both within Dorset and further afield is therefore a key consideration for the determination of the application.
- 8.11 Natural England does not consider that the landscape and visual impacts of the scheme are likely to be reduced to an acceptable level over time through on site screening.
- 8.12 It is also important to note that since the previous application for a solar facility at this site that Natural England has acquired land which will form an extension to the Hogcliff National Nature Reserve (NNR). The extension includes land that was not previously publicly accessible and which lies on higher ground than the existing open access land, affording closer views of the application site from a higher elevation. The proposed solar array will be a significant presence in the views available from the extension to the NNR which are currently over unspoilt open farmland that form a special character of the National Landscape.
- 8.13 Ecological benefits of the scheme are not a significant consideration in the context of modifying the harm caused to the Dorset National Landscape.

Revised plans

- 8.14 Natural England maintained its objection noting the proposed changes do not substantially alter the adverse impacts the proposal would have on the special qualities of the National Landscape.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

- 8.15 No comments received.

Dorset National Landscape Team

- 8.15 The National Landscape Team objected to the initial plans and continue to object to the revised plans.

Initial plans

- 8.16 The landscape and visual impacts are significant and weigh heavily against permission being granted. Whilst some modifications have been made to the design and layout compared to the refused application (P/FUL/2021/01920), the amendments do not make the development acceptable in this highly sensitive location.
- 8.17 The proposed development is of quasi-industrial appearance and foreseeably adversely affects some of the special qualities that underpin the designation of the Dorset National Landscape, particularly:
- 'Uninterrupted panoramic views to appreciate the complex pattern and textures of the surrounding landscapes'
 - 'Striking sequences of beautiful countryside that are unique in Britain'
 - 'Tranquillity and remoteness'
 - 'Undeveloped rural character'
- 8.18 The significance of the impacts on the National Landscape remain substantially underrepresented in the updated Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). Effects are underestimated from a number of viewpoints (VPs) with inadequate weight afforded to a substantive loss of far-reaching views from VPs 25 and 26. The alternative permissive route would not provide a view of equivalent panoramic value to that which would be lost.
- 8.19 There are a multitude of viewpoint locations within Hog Cliff NNR and Fore Hill from which the development would be clearly identifiable as a solar farm and would result in material harm to visual amenity. The relatively wide distribution and common occurrence of impacts in and around the enlarged NNR suggest that there would be a significant long-term impact upon the visual amenity of visitors to this site, who are likely to be highly appreciative of the character and qualities of Dorset National Landscape. These impacts weigh heavily against the application, as do impacts upon some of the wider viewpoints beyond the NNR.
- 8.20 The National Landscape Team also comment on alternatives and the weight to be afforded the available grid connection and grid constraints.

Revised plans

- 8.21 The National Landscape Team maintains its objection and considers their earlier comments on the original plans remain valid in substance. The number of 'significant' effects have been underestimated and that the Year 5 effects have also been underestimated. Justification for the use of the site in relation to grid capacity constraints is lacking.
- 8.22 In respect of the National Landscape's special qualities, the National Landscape Team state that 'wildlife of national and international significance' is listed amongst the special qualities of the National Landscape and should biodiversity consultees identify gains that are likely to be beneficial for designated sites and protected species, in particular, these

could be linked to this specific special quality. Otherwise, more generalised gains may be considered in the context of NPPF 189, which notes that the conservation and enhancement of wildlife in a National Landscape is an 'important consideration', but does suggest that this is attributed 'great weight'.

Planning Policy

- 8.23 Draw attention to relevant planning policy and material planning considerations, including the NPPF and Dorset Council's Planning for Climate Changes: Interim Guidance and Position Statement.
- 8.24 With regard to the assessment of the proposal against para 190(b) of the NPPF, the applicant will need to justify the proposed location of the development in the National Landscape, through submission of details which may include viability assessment of alternative options, and an assessment of alternative locations for the development.
- 8.25 Significant weight should be given to the benefits of the proposal for renewable energy, and great weight must be given to the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape. Whether the proposal is in accordance with the development plan depends on the extent of adverse impacts on the landscape, whether impacts can be satisfactorily addressed or mitigated, and whether exceptional circumstances for the development can be demonstrated in line with para 190 of the NPPF.

Landscape

- 8.26 The Council's Senior Landscape Officer objected to the original proposals and continues to object to the revised scheme. In summary:

Original plans

- 8.27 The proposals would not be consistent with the form, scale and pattern of the existing landscape.
- 8.28 The proposals would not maintain uninterrupted panoramic views within the National Landscape – the two field parcels of solar panels would appear visually discordant in a wide range of views and would disrupt the existing visual 'flow' of undeveloped farmed slopes.
- 8.29 The proposed development would fail to retain existing landscape pattern and characteristic features – as the new planting would transform an otherwise 'open field' into one with 'vegetated corridors'.
- 8.30 The visual effects have been underestimated for the majority of Viewpoints. The site is visible from a wide-ranging arc that runs from the north through to the east where views towards the Site would be freely available from public rights of way and extensive areas of Open Access Land (OAL). The Hog Cliff NNR is actively being promoted for the enjoyment of the local population. The Site would be prominent within numerous elevated positions within this OAL – where the sloping landform of the Site would make it impossible to fully mitigate the effects.

- 8.31 The landscape officer disagrees with the applicant that the proposed development could be successfully accommodated within the site and surrounding landscape with only very limited adverse temporary but long-term residual effects on landscape character or visual amenity as a whole.
- 8.32 The proposals would significantly alter the character and appearance of the part of the Macmillan Way which passes the site. The proposed landscaping, panels and associated infrastructure would effectively 'block' valued views, channel the route and disrupt the skyline. There would be clear harm to the recreational benefits of the route.
- 8.33 Given the topography of the site and its relationship with the slopes to the northeast of the River Frome – the adverse effects could not be satisfactorily mitigated.

Revised plans

- 8.34 Objections maintained. Note the introduction of 3m high CCTV camera poles alongside the Macmillan Way would exacerbate visual effects.

Rights of Way Officer

- 8.35 Note the proposals would directly affect public rights of way and note that free passage of the public must be ensured at all times.

Trees

- 8.36 Conditions recommended to ensure the development is carried out in compliance with the submitted Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Retention / Removal and Protection Plan within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement.

Conservation

- 8.37 No objection. The proposals would not cause heritage harm to identified heritage assets. Following liaison with the council's Senior Archaeologist, the Conservation Officer recommended that Historic England be consulted in respect of Scheduled Monuments and archaeology.

Highways

- 8.38 The Highways Authority considers that the proposal does not present a material harm to the transport network or to highway safety and consequentially has no objection.

Economic Development

- 8.39 No objection. Following receipt of amended plans (including socio-economic information) the Economic Development Team noted that the applicant's estimates seem reasonable commenting that the most important figures for Dorset are the c. six full time equivalent (FTE) jobs during the lifetime of the project (operations and maintenance) and the 55 person-years during the expected construction phase of up to 6-months.

Environmental Assessment

- 8.40 Comment on the Environmental Statement (ES) and confirm it provides the necessary information to constitute an ES.

Environmental Protection

- 8.41 Confirm the Environmental Protection team has no comments to make.

Flood Risk Management (Lead Local Flood Authority)

- 8.42 Recommend conditions in respect of surface water management, surface water maintenance and soil management. The conditions are recommended to prevent the increased risk of flooding, protect water quality and improve habitat and amenity.

Natural Environment Team (NET)

- 8.43 The NET has no objection to the proposals and recommend conditioning the proposed mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures outlined in the Ecology Assessment Report v6 (dated 3 October 2025). The submitted report outlines numerous on-site habitat creation and enhancement measures including Other Neutral Grassland creation, hedgerow and tree planting to improve existing ecological connectivity on-site. On-site areas marked as existing or higher potential ecological networks have been designated as such within the BNG assessments using the strategic significance multiplier. Mitigation has also been embedded predominantly to the vegetated boundary features which will possess minimum 5m buffer from any development, to retain the value of these habitats and features for protected species such as nesting birds, roosting bats, foraging/commuting bats, and badgers. The development footprint is also restricted to habitats of lower value with little botanical interest such as arable fields and Modified Grassland. The delivery of BNG on-site has been shown to be feasible, delivering a 41% gain in area habitats and 21% gain in linear habitats (hedgerows) through on-site habitat creation and enhancement of the above-mentioned habitats. When considering all of the above, these ecological proposals would create a positive impact for nesting birds, foraging and roosting bats through retained, enhanced and created habitats with greater suitability for these species than the current baseline habitats that are currently present within the National Landscape.
- 8.44 Conditions related to a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) are also recommended and the NET

has issued a Certificate of Approval confirming the proposed development adequately addresses impacts on biodiversity.

Public Health Dorset

8.45 No objection.

Sustainability Team

8.46 No comments received.

Dorset Fire & Rescue Service

8.47 No comments received.

Dorset Police Architectural Liaison Officer

8.48 In relation to the original plans, the officer makes recommendations to tackle concerns regarding the lack of security measures being put in place. They note solar farms are increasingly being targeted for theft and vandalism, particularly in relation to the high value equipment on site, including the photovoltaic (PV) panels, inverters, batteries and cabling. The proposed deer fence is not a security fence and can be easily breached. Suggest CCTV and lighting is the minimum security required for a solar farm.

8.49 No comments were received in response to the amended plans consultation.

Dorset Wildlife Trust

8.50 No comments received.

National Air Traffic Services (NATS)

8.51 The proposed development does not conflict with NATS' safeguarding criteria.

Ramblers Association

8.52 Support the provision of a rest area including picnic bench and information boards within the open space in the northern field.

8.53 Note the Highways Authority will need to be satisfied that motorised vehicles can use the public rights of way for construction purposes. Such use should be supported by mitigation measures to ensure safety.

8.54 The Ramblers Association recommend that the Local Planning Authority require planting along the boundary of the solar farm fence next to rights of way to provide screening to ensure it does not spoil the experience of using the path.

Compton Valence Parish Council

8.55 No comments received.

Wynford Eagle Parish Council

8.56 No comments received.

Maiden Newton and Frome Vauchurch Parish Council

8.57 In response to the original plans consultation, the Parish Council confirmed support for the application. The Council welcomes the updated access arrangements to the site, the additional mitigation measures that have been put in place, and the inclusion of a community benefit fund to support local initiatives. These enhancements further strengthen the case for the development and its contribution to both sustainable energy and the local area.

8.58 In response to the amended plans consultation, the Parish Council maintained its support and raised no objections.

Eggardon Ward Councillor (Cllr Neil Eysenk)

8.59 No comments received.

Representations received

Dorset Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)

8.60 Dorset CPRE object to the application. The landscape is stated to be of exceptional quality. Dorset CPRE draws attention to the previous refusal on the site and raises concern that the development would conflict with NNPf Paragraph 189.

8.61 Dorset CPRE state solar panels should be placed on roofs and that the proposal is not needed. It will cause severe damage to the Dorset National Landscape.

Third parties

8.62 Six comments from third parties have been received. Five are objections and one is in support. The objections include an objection from Notton Valley Farm. They raise the following points, in summary:

Support

- Need – It is vital that substantial clean energy can be provided wherever possible.
- With the amendments made, temporary consent should be supported.

Objection

- Principle – Location within the Dorset National Landscape is inappropriate. More suitable locations such as former industrial or factory sites should be used.

- Alternatives – Wind power is more effective. Solar panels should be required on the roofs of new buildings.
- Landscape – Harm to landscape character. Proposed landscape screening is insufficient. The proposals will not maintain or enhance local identity and distinctiveness. The site is highly visible.
- National Landscape – Harm to Dorset National Landscape through development of an undeveloped site. Adverse impact on special qualities. Exceptional circumstances are not demonstrated. Proposal should be located outside of the National Landscape.
- Rights of way – Proposals would harm existing rights of way. There are concerns the landowner would not maintain the permissive paths for unrestricted use of the public.
- Heritage – Harm to the setting of heritage assets.
- Highways – Use of Greenford Lane access route for construction traffic must be strictly enforced. Traffic should avoid Maiden Newton village and Cruxton Lane. Signs to manage construction traffic should be erected. Proposed construction route is unsuitable.
- Flooding – The proposals will increase run off and flood risk which will adversely affect land and wildlife.
- Ecology – Fencing will have adverse effects on wildlife.
- Noise – Adverse impacts caused by equipment.
- Land contamination – Solar panels become toxic and will not be recycled.
- Agricultural land – The land will be so damaged it will not be returned to agricultural use at the end of the lifetime of the development.
- Planning balance – Adverse impacts are not outweighed by the benefits of the proposal.

Total - objections	Total - support	Total - comments
5	1	6

9. Duties

- 9.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that the determination of planning applications must be in accordance with the development plan unless material circumstances indicate otherwise.
- 9.2 Clause 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) requires Local Planning Authorities to seek to further the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Landscape (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty).
- 9.3 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that when considering whether to grant planning permission for a development which affects a listed building or its setting, there is a general duty 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.

- 9.4 Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened ‘biodiversity duty’ to require public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, determine policies and specific objectives to further the biodiversity objective and take action as it considers appropriate in light of those policies and objectives.

10. Relevant policies

Development plan

- 10.1 The development plan comprises:

Local Plan Adopted West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan:

The following policies are considered to be relevant to this proposal:

- INT1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- ENV1: Landscape, seascape & sites of other geological interest
- ENV2: Wildlife and habitats
- ENV4: Heritage assets
- ENV5: Flood risk
- ENV10: The landscape and townscape setting
- ENV12: The design and positioning of buildings
- ENV16: Amenity
- SUS2: Distribution of development
- ECON8: Diversification of land-based rural businesses
- COM7: Creating a safe & efficient transport network
- COM11: Renewable energy development

Material considerations

Emerging local plans:

- 10.2 Paragraph 49 of the NPPF provides that Local Planning Authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:

- the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
- the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant plan policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and
- the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the NPPF (the closer the policies in the emerging plan are to the policies of the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

- 10.3 The Dorset Council Local Plan Options consultation took place between January and March 2021 with further consultation undertaken between 18 August – 13 October 2025. Being at a very early stage of preparation, the relevant policies in the draft plan should be accorded very limited weight in decision making.

Emerging neighbourhood plans

10.4 Maiden Newton & Frome Vauchurch - In preparation – limited weight applied to decision making.

National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (as amended 2025)

10.5 Paragraph 11 sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay. Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date then permission should be granted unless specific NPPF policies protecting areas or assets provide a strong reason for refusal and/or any adverse impacts of approval would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole, with particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well designed places and providing affordable homes.

10.6 Other relevant NPPF sections include:

- Section 4 'Decision making': Para 39 - Local Planning Authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available...and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
- Section 6 'Building a strong, competitive economy', paragraphs 88 and 89 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' promotes the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, through conversion of existing buildings, the erection of well-designed new buildings, and supports sustainable tourism and leisure developments where identified needs are not met by existing rural service centres.
- Section 11 'Making effective use of land'.
- Section 12 'Achieving well designed places' This indicates that all development to be of a high quality in design, and the relationship and visual impact of it to be compatible with the surroundings. In particular, and amongst other things, Paragraphs 131 – 141 advise that:

The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development.

Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design.

- Section 14 'Meeting the challenges of climate change, flooding and coastal change'. The planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and renewable energy infrastructure (Para. 161). Paragraph 168 states that "when determining planning applications for all forms of renewable and low carbon energy developments and their associated infrastructure, Local Planning Authorities should:
 - a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the proposal's contribution to a net zero future;

b) recognise that small-scale and community-led projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions;”

- Section 15 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment’- In National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), paragraph 189 requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty. Paragraphs 192-195 set out how biodiversity is to be protected and encourage net gains for biodiversity.
- Section 16 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’- Paragraph 212 says that when considering designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. The effect of an application on the significance of non-designated heritage assets should also be taken into account (Para. 216).

National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

10.7 Relevant sections of the NPPG notes:

- 10.8 Increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses. Planning has an important role in the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure in locations where the local environmental impact is acceptable. Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 5-001-20140306.
- 10.9 The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively. Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327.
- 10.10 In considering planning applications it is important to be clear that... local topography is an important factor in assessing whether wind turbines and large scale solar farms could have a damaging effect on landscape and recognise that the impact can be as great in predominately flat landscapes as in hilly or mountainous areas... proposals in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and in areas close to them where there could be an adverse impact on the protected area, will need careful consideration... Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 5-007-20140306.

National Policy, Government Guidance and Strategy

- Climate Change Act 2008
- UK Solar PV Strategy (DECC, 2014)
- Energy White Paper: Powering out net zero future (HM Government, December 2020)
- Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener (HM Government, 2021)
- British Energy Security Strategy (HM Government, 2022)
- The Growth Plan (HM Treasury, September 2022)
- Powering Up Britain (HM Government, 2023)
- Powering Up Britain Energy Security Plan (HM Government, 2023)

- Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (DESNZ, 2024)
- Draft updated Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (DESNZ, 2025)
- National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (DESNZ, 2024)
- Draft updated National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (DESNZ, 2025)
- Clean Power 2030: Advice on achieving clean power for Great Britain by 2030 (NESO, 2024)
- Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A new era of clean electricity (DESNZ, 2024)
- Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes (DEFRA, 2024)
- Solar Roadmap: UK Powered by Solar (DESNZ, 2025)
- UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy (HM Treasury, 2025)

Supplementary Planning Documents, Guidance and Evidence

- Dorset AONB Landscape Character Assessment
- Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy, Dorset Council (15 July 2021)
- Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023-25 Refresh (March 2023)
- Planning for Climate Change: Interim Guidance and Position Statement (December 2023)
- Dorset AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 (extended to end of 2025 with the agreement of Dorset Council Cabinet 17/12/2024)
- Dorset Low Carbon Energy Route Map and Evidence Base: Energy Opportunities for Decarbonising Dorset (Regen, 2021)
- Dorset Council Grid Capacity Assessment: Constraint Analysis (Dorset Council, 2023)

11. Human rights

- 11.1 Article 6 - right to a fair trial.
- 11.2 Article 8 - right to respect for private and family life and home.
- 11.3 The first protocol of Article 1 protection of property.
- 11.4 This recommendation is based on adopted development plan policies, the application of which does not prejudice the human rights of the applicant or any third party.

12. Public Sector Equalities Duty

- 12.1 As set out in the Equalities Act 2010, all public bodies, in discharging their functions must have “due regard” to this duty. There are 3 main aims:
 - Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics

- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where participation is disproportionately low.

12.2 Whilst there is no absolute requirement to fully remove any disadvantage the Duty is to have “regard to” and remove or minimise disadvantage and in considering the merits of this planning application the planning authority has taken into consideration the requirements of the Public Sector Equalities Duty. It is not considered that the application will affect anyone with protected characteristics.

13. Public Benefits

13.1 Subject to appropriately securing any benefits via planning conditions and/or a Section 106 Legal Agreement, the proposals would provide a number of financial and non-financial benefits, including public benefits. These are summarised in the table below:

Table 13.1 – Public benefits

What	Amount / value
Material considerations	
Contributing towards the provision of renewable energy, tackling climate change and energy security	10MW solar farm supporting the equivalent annual electricity needs of an estimated 5,142 households. Reducing reliance on non-renewable energy sources (unquantified).
Biodiversity net gain	+41.71% habitat units. +20.95% hedgerow units.
Recreation	Alternative permissive route to the west of the site. Rest/picnic area.
Employment and employee spending during construction, operation and decommissioning ²	Construction jobs during construction phase of up to 6-months (77 gross / 61 net person years of which 55 gross / 23 net could take place in Dorset) Operational and maintenance jobs during 40-year lifetime of development (6.6 FTE gross / 5.2 FTE net of which 5.9 FTE gross / 3.9 FTE net could take place in Dorset) Decommissioning jobs during the 6-month decommissioning (3.7 gross / 2.9 net person years of which 3.7 gross and 1.6 net could take place in Dorset)

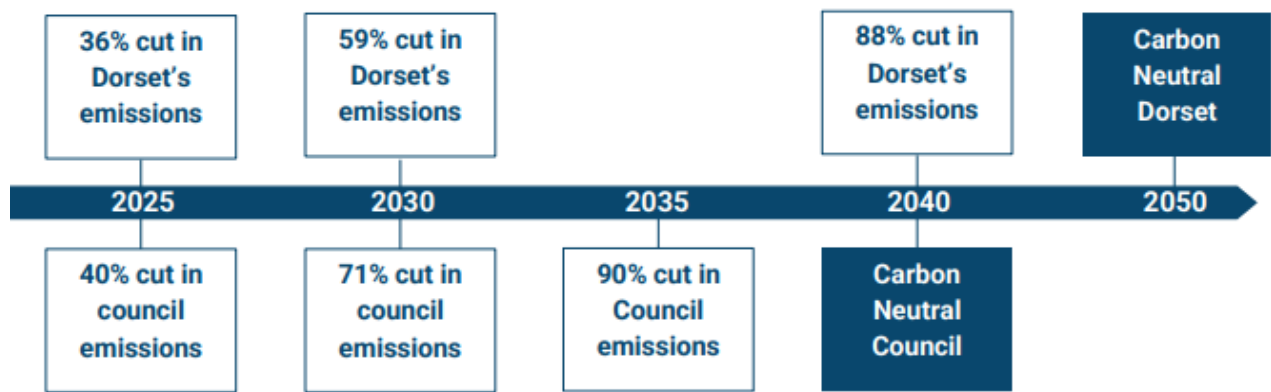
² As estimated by the applicant (Socio-Economic Benefits Statement, July 2025)

What	Amount / value
	Wages a proportion of which would be spent locally (£7.7m gross / £6.1m net of which £5.8m gross / £2.6m net could take place in Dorset)
Gross value added through construction, operation and decommissioning ¹	Gross value added (£12.5m gross / £10m net of which £9.7m gross and £4.1m net could take place in Dorset)
Soil quality	Improved through resting of soil from intensive agriculture and enhancement through sheep farming.
Farm diversification	Diversifying an existing farm through providing a reliable income stream estimated to be approximately £50,000 per year to the farmer.
Non material considerations	
Business rates	In line with ratable value.
Community benefit fund	£20,000

14. Environmental implications

- 14.1 At a national level the Government aims to reduce carbon emissions by 81% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2035 and fully decarbonise the electricity grid by 2030. The Government aims to achieve these targets in a number of ways, including development of up to 50GW of offshore wind by 2030 and a fivefold increase in solar by 2035 (Powering Up Britain, 2023). 45-47GW of solar is targeted by 2030 from over 18GW at present (Solar Roadmap, 2025).
- 14.2 The Government's Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener (October 2021) acknowledges that the path to net zero in 2050 will respond to the innovation and adoption of new technologies over time. Whilst the exact technology and energy mix in 2050 cannot be known now, the Government identifies a number of green technologies, which interact to meet demand across sectors.
- 14.3 More recently the Overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy (EN-1) (2024) states at paragraph 1.2.1 that EN-1, in combination with any relevant technology specific NPSs, may be a material consideration in decision making on energy generation applications that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Paragraph 1.2.2 advises that whether the policies in EN-1 are material and to what extent, will be judged on a case-by-case basis and will depend on the extent to which the matters are already covered by applicable planning policy. Paragraph 2.3.3 states: "our objectives for the energy system are to ensure our supply of energy always remains secure, reliable, affordable, and consistent with meeting our target to cut GHG emissions to net zero by 2050, including through delivery of our carbon budgets and Nationally Determined Contribution. This will require a step change in the decarbonisation of our energy system".
- 14.4 The NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (2024) covers nationally significant renewable electricity generating stations and confirms the Government's commitment to sustained growth on solar capacity. It confirms the Government's expectation to achieve up to 70GW of solar deployment by 2035.

- 14.5 In November 2024 the newly formed National Energy System Operator (NESO) put forward conclusions as part of its official advice to new ministers on how to reach Labour's election pledge to decarbonise the power system by 2030. The publication titled 'Clean Power 2030: Advice on achieving clean power for Great Britain by 2030' lays out pathways for how Great Britain can achieve a clean power system by 2030. The clean power pathways sees a four-to-fivefold increase in demand flexibility, an increase in grid connected battery storage from 5 GW to over 22 GW, more pumped storage and major expansions in onshore wind (from 14 GW to 27 GW) and solar (from 15 GW to 47 GW) along with nuclear plant life extensions. The report notes that "unprecedented volumes of clean energy infrastructure projects are needed to meet the Government's energy ambitions" and that "a once in a generation shift in approach and in the pace of delivery is required."
- 14.6 The Government's 'Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A new era of clean electricity' (December 2024) calls for radical action to achieve clean power by 2030. The Action Plan reiterates the need for grid connections queue reform from a 'first come, first served' basis to a system which prioritises projects based on readiness alone; thereby helping to respond to local energy planning and national need. It highlights the capacity of solar projects in the connections queue to 2030 exceeds requirements for NESO's 'further flex and renewables scenario'.
- 14.7 The Government's recent 'Solar Roadmap: UK Powered by Solar' (2025) outlines actions for industry and government to overcome the challenges of delivering solar. It recognises local communities have a vital role to play in helping deliver the Government's net zero and energy security ambitions and it is important that communities can benefit from, and participate in, the deployment of new low carbon energy technologies in their local areas. The Roadmap acknowledges that England's landscapes will need to change over the next 25 years to support climate change mitigation and adaptation, food production and clean energy.
- 14.8 Alongside the need to deliver renewable energy projects at pace, the Government has also committed to halting the decline in species abundance and protecting 30% of UK land by 2030. By 2042, the Government has committed to increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels; restore or create at least 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife rich habitats; reduce the risk of species extinction; restore 75% of sites of special scientific interest to favourable condition (Environment Improvement Plan, 2023).
- 14.9 The NPPF (Para.168) sets out that when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, Local Planning Authorities should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to significant cutting of greenhouse gas emissions. It also sets out that applications should be approved if the impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.
- 14.10 Dorset Council accepts that energy needs to be produced from renewable sources and the Council must aim to provide this within its administrative area. The Council recognised this by declaring a climate emergency in May 2019, with the aim of taking a lead as an authority in tackling climate change. In November 2019 this was escalated to a Climate and Ecological Emergency. On 28 July 2024 Dorset Council also declared a Nature Emergency. The Council is a founding partner in the Dorset Clean Energy Super Cluster and recognises the holistic social-economic and environmental benefits and opportunities of delivering renewable and low-carbon energy.
- 14.11 Dorset Council's Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 to 2025 Refresh (2023) established targets for Dorset Council to become carbon neutral as a council by 2040 and a carbon neutral county by 2050, frontloaded by interim targets as follows:



- 14.12 The above targets have since been brought forward by 5 years via the Dorset Council Plan 2024 to 2029 (adopted December 2024). The Plan seeks for the Council to achieve net zero by 2035 and for the entire county to become net zero by 2045.
- 14.13 The Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 to 2025 Refresh includes a number of missions. 'Mission 1: Renewable Generation' identifies the deployment of renewables and storage to support the overarching mission of decarbonising the grid. It notes "Dorset has made good progress on solar locally but needs faster growth in renewable generation and storage capacity, grid upgrades, and smarter, flexible demand management... Dorset is an untapped resource of solar, wind and tidal energy. It needs to deliver at scale, manage grid and national planning constraints, and take every opportunity for small- and large-scale deployment."
- 14.14 Dorset Council published the Climate Change: Interim Guidance and Position Statement in December 2023. It notes climate change will be given significant weight as a material consideration in the balance when determining applications, in line with the legislative and national policy context.
- 14.15 The Dorset Council Plan 2024 to 2029 establishes four priorities to be delivered in the next five years, to 2029. They include responding to the climate and nature crisis. The Plan notes that addressing the climate and nature emergencies is vital for current and future generations and is one of the most urgent challenges facing the world today, demanding immediate and decisive action.
- 14.16 The proposed solar farm would have a capacity of 10MW. It would help to support local, national, and international targets through the provision of renewable energy, thereby reducing carbon emissions and helping to decarbonise the grid. It would also contribute towards energy security. The applicant estimates that the solar farm has the potential to serve the electricity needs of approximately 5,142 homes. The applicant has confirmed that they have secured a Point of Connection (POC) to the distribution network northeast of the application site. The proposal therefore has potential to make an early positive contribution towards the above objectives.
- 14.17 It is recognised that the environmental benefits should be balanced against the environmental impacts of the development, including: embodied carbon in construction materials (some of which can be recycled); associated transport emissions during construction and operation; and the partial development of a greenfield site with associated landscaping. Whilst specific assessment of emissions from activities related to the manufacturing, construction and decommissioning of the development has not been undertaken as part of this planning application, the adverse impacts associated with manufacturing, construction and decommissioning are considered to be limited in the context of the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and

the proposal's contribution to a net zero future – which the NPPF calls for decision makers to attribute significant weight to (Para. 168).

- 14.18 A community benefit fund of £20,000 has been suggested by the developer. However, this would not be secured by legal agreement as it would be unlikely to meet the tests required for a Section 106 obligation. It is therefore not a material planning consideration in the determination of this application.

15. Planning Assessment

Principle of development

- 15.1 Development outside defined development boundaries is strictly controlled and proposals for the generation of renewable energy are a stated exemption to the restriction, subject to having particular regard to the need for the protection of the countryside and environmental constraints. Local Plan policy COM11 relates specifically to renewable energy provision. It establishes that renewable energy developments will be allowed wherever possible if the benefits of the development significantly outweigh any harm. This supporting policy context is subject to ensuring:
- any adverse impacts on the local landscape, townscape or areas of historical interest can be satisfactorily assimilated;
 - the proposal minimises harm to residential amenity by virtue of noise, vibration, overshadowing, flicker, or other detrimental emissions, during construction, its operation and decommissioning;
 - adverse impacts upon designated wildlife sites, nature conservation interests, and biodiversity are satisfactorily mitigated.
- 15.2 At the planning inquiry for the dismissed appeal, the Inspector noted that policy COM11 “sets a higher bar than the NPPF and so may be said to be inconsistent with it” and that “the effect of the policy is to require a judgement to be made on a balance between harm, mitigation and benefits” (Para. 164). Acknowledging this, officers have considered whether the benefits of the development outweigh any harm.
- 15.3 Within National Landscapes, the NPPF establishes that permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development would be in the public interest (Para. 190).
- 15.4 The proposal for the generation of renewable energy is acceptable in principle by virtue of the broad support for renewable energy development under policy COM 11 of the Local Plan. However, this is caveated that planning permission will only be granted provided that any adverse impacts can be adequately mitigated and the benefits that the scheme will deliver outweigh the adverse impacts that remain. Further, this is also subject to demonstrating necessary exceptional circumstances and that the development would be in the public interest. Further considerations are addressed in the following sections of this report.
- 15.5 As planning permission is sought on a temporary, albeit very long-term basis, a planning condition would be required to ensure the lifetime of the solar farm does not exceed 40 years.

Impacts on agricultural land

- 15.6 The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Report (May 2021) submitted in relation to the previously refused application has been resubmitted. The ALC concludes that the majority (56%) of the site is Grade 3b 'Moderate Quality' agricultural land (10ha), with a smaller, although significant, portion (44%) of Grade 3a 'Good Quality' agricultural land (8ha). Therefore, just over half of the application site comprises lower quality agricultural land and the site does not include any Grade 1 or Grade 2 agricultural land. It is considered that based on the applicant's Sequential Analysis Study, poorer quality land is not available in the 3km study area and that overall it has been adequately demonstrated that the proposed development would limit the use of best and most versatile agricultural land. This accords with Local Plan policy ENV8, which states the council will steer built development towards areas of poorer quality land where it is available.
- 15.7 The applicant has also confirmed that the land enclosed with fencing would be grazed once development is operational to give a dual benefit of being agriculturally productive whilst generating renewable energy. The submitted Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) explains that a suitable grazing mix would be applied to the site and that an appropriate grazing regime could be employed. As set out in the LEMP, is expected to involve rotation of livestock across the farm likely comprising light intermittent grazing by sheep between late August / September and November where conditions allow. During the spring and summer (March to August), sheep would be removed or stocking density reduced to allow summer flowering plants to set seed, with grazing removed in the winter period in order to prevent the compaction of wet earth. The LEMP would need to be secured via planning condition to secure the benefits of co-grazing.
- 15.8 Whilst the potential of the agricultural land would be limited over the lifetime of the development (i.e. it could not be used for extensive arable use as it is today), it is agreed that the resting of the land from intensive agriculture for the lifetime of the development would bring some **limited benefits** to soil quality and the longer term productivity of the land. Following the 40-year life of the solar farm, the site could be returned to agricultural use. Subject to securing the removal of all infrastructure and concrete foundations via a suitably worded condition, the long-term impacts on agricultural land would be acceptable and there would be no permanent loss of best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 15.9 On balance, the temporary and limited loss of the potential to use best and most versatile agricultural land for more productive arable uses over the lifetime of the development, having regard to soil improvements and grazing, is considered to carry **limited adverse weight** in the planning balance.

Landscape and visual impacts

- 15.10 The site is located wholly within the Dorset National Landscape wherein Local Plan policy ENV1 confirms i) exceptional landscapes will be protected, taking into account the objectives of the Dorset AONB Management Plan, with development which would harm the character, special qualities or natural beauty of the AONB, including their characteristic landscape quality and diversity, uninterrupted panoramic views, individual landmarks, and sense of tranquillity and remoteness not being permitted. Development should ii) be located and designed so that it does not detract from and, where reasonable, enhances the local landscape character and that iii) appropriate measures are required to moderate adverse landscape effects of development.
- 15.11 Policy ENV10 relates to landscape and townscape setting. It notes all development proposals should contribute positively to the maintenance and enhancement of local identity

and distinctiveness, with development being informed by the character of the site and its surroundings. Development should only be permitted where sufficient hard and soft landscaping to successfully integrate development with the character of the site and surrounding area is provided.

- 15.12 The NPPF (Para. 189) requires that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes which has the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) protects the AONB to conserve and enhance its natural beauty and places a duty on Local Planning Authority's to seek to further the purposes of such areas.
- 15.13 The application site is located within the Dorset National Landscape which was designated in 1959 (formally as an AONB), the statutory purposes of which are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated area.
- 15.14 Dorset National Landscape has a number of special qualities that make it a unique and outstanding place, underpinning its designation as a nationally important landscape. The Statement of Significance within the Dorset AONB Management Plan identifies the special qualities of the Dorset National Landscape as:
- 'Contrast and diversity – a microcosm of England's finest landscapes': comprising a collection of fine landscapes, beautiful countryside that are unique in Britain, areas of higher ground which allow uninterrupted panoramic views to appreciate the complex pattern and textures of the surrounding landscape, sense of tranquillity and remoteness, dark night skies and undeveloped rural character.
 - 'Wildlife of national and international significance': including an unusually rich range of habitats and associated species.
 - 'A living textbook of historical record of rural England': notably along the coast, archaeological sites and through the field and settlement patterns and their associated hedges, banks and stone walls.
 - 'A rich legacy of cultural associations': in art, literature and music.
- 15.15 Key policies within the Dorset AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 comprise:
- C1.a: Development that does not conserve and enhance the National Landscape will only be supported if it is necessary and in the public interest. Major development decisions will need to include detailed consideration of relevant exceptional circumstances.
 - C2.d: The key test of a proposal against the statutory purpose of the AONB will be its ability to demonstrate that the proposed change would conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty.
 - C2.e: The conservation and enhancement of the AONB's special qualities will be a significant consideration in the planning balance.
 - C2.f: Proposals that are harmful to the character and appearance of the area will not be permitted unless there are benefits that clearly outweigh the significant protection afforded to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. Where impacts cannot be mitigated, planning gain and compensatory measures will be considered.
- 15.16 Whilst the proposal is not a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (2023), which is considered to be a material consideration, states that measures seeking to further the purposes of National Landscapes should be sufficient, appropriate and proportionate to the type and scale of the

development (Para. 5.10.7). It further notes that whilst energy projects should produce sustainable infrastructure sensitive to place, the nature of energy infrastructure projects will often limit the extent to which it can contribute to the enhancement of the quality of an area (Para. 4.7.2). In respect of decision making by the Secretary of State (SoS), EN-1 states that the SoS should be satisfied that the applicant has considered both functionality (including fitness for purpose and sustainability) and aesthetics (including its contribution to the quality of the area in which it would be located, any potential amenity benefits, and visual impacts on the landscape or seascape) as far as possible (Para. 4.7.11)

- 15.17 Planning Practice Guidance notes that the “deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively... in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero” (013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327).
- 15.18 Chapter 5 of the applicant’s Environmental Statement (ES) considers the significant effects on landscape and visual amenity. It explains (Para. 5.2.39) that the proposed development has “been sensitively sited and designed by locating the development in such a position where the number of potential receptors is limited; where views of the full extent of the solar arrays are minimised; by limiting the proposed height of development; by maintaining public rights of way (PRoW) on existing alignments in protected corridors; by creating an alternative permitted footpath route; by providing a rest area for PRoW and permitted footpath users set within open land that safeguards eastward views along the Frome Valley; and by retention and enhancement of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees that screen the site and maintain field patterns that contribute to local character; by establishing grassland, a wildflower meadow, and nature conservation features for the lifetime of the proposed development; and by managing existing and proposed hedgerows, trees, grassland and meadow in such a way as to make a positive contribution to the overall green infrastructure and ecological networks of this part of the National Landscape.”. The ES contends that the proposals would maintain uninterrupted panoramic views within the National Landscape.
- 15.19 Key terms within the ES for considering the typical descriptors of landscape and visual effects are as follows:

Table 14.1 – Typical descriptors of adverse landscape effects

NO CHANGE	The proposed changes would not be visible and there would be no change to landscape character.
MINOR ADVERSE	Slightly: - not quite fit the character (including value) of the landscape; - be a variance with characteristic features and elements; - detract from sense of place.
MODERATE ADVERSE	Moderately: - conflict with the character (including value) of the landscape; - have an adverse effect on characteristic features or elements; - diminish a sense of place.
MAJOR ADVERSE	Substantially: - be at variance with the character (including value) of the landscape; - degrade or diminish the integrity of a range of characteristic features and elements or cause them to be lost; - change a sense of place.

Table 14.2 – Typical descriptors of visual effects

MINOR ADVERSE	Proposals would result in a slight deterioration in the view.
MODERATE ADVERSE	Proposals would result in a clear deterioration in the view.
MAJOR ADVERSE	Proposals would result in a major deterioration in the view.

15.20 In respect of **visual effects**, the ES considers 29 Viewpoints (VPs) from the surrounding PRoW network, open access land (OAL) and road network. The ES considers visual effects during the construction period (assumed 3.5 months) (short term), at Years 1, 5³ and 15 of operation (medium term) and during the 6-month decommissioning period (short term). Significance of effects are graded from negligible, minor, moderate and major, with only major effects being considered significant for the purposes of the ES. The landscape consultant's methodology identifies only four significant visual effects from close-range VPs on the Macmillan Way either close (VP11) or adjacent (VPs 10, 25 and 26) to the proposed solar farm:

Table 14.3 – Major (significant) Visual Effects

VP	Location	Major effects
VP10	From PRoW Footpath S29/19 (Macmillan Way), looking south	Construction and Year 1
VP11	From PRoW Footpaths S29/19 & S29/20 junction (Macmillan Way)	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP25	From Macmillan Way/PRoW S29/19 within Site	Construction and Year 1
VP26	From Macmillan Way/PRoW S29/19 within Site	Construction and Year 1

15.21 For VPs 10, 25 and 26, the ES considers that the magnitude of change will reduce from 'high' at Year 1 to 'low' at Year 5. This change reduces the significance of the effects from Major to Moderate (not significant). At Year 15 and during decommissioning, effects from VPs 10, 25 and 26 are judged to reduce to Negligible. The rationale for the reduction in visual effects is based on the screening effect of the hedgerow to be planted between the Macmillan Way and the solar farm.

15.22 Moderate visual effects are identified from a range of VPs:

Table 14.4 – Moderate Visual Effects

VP	Location	Moderate effects
VP3	From PRoW Bridleways S29/8 and S29/12 junction at Fore Hill, looking south west	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP4	Langcombe Bottom OAL, looking south west	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP5	From Farm Hill Bottom/Hog Cliff NNR & OAL, looking south west	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning

³ Only VPs 10, 25, 26 and 28 were assessed at Year 5.

VP6	From Bridleway S29/11 and Hog Cliff Bottom OAL, looking southwest	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP10	From PRoW Footpath S29/19 (Macmillan Way), looking south	Year 5
VP15	From Fore Hill at junction of PRoW S29/12 and S29/24	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP16	From PRoW S29/24 and Open Access Land east of Maiden Newton	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP17	From PRoW S29/10 south of Blastmoor Hill Barn	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP18	From Hog Cliff Bottom Open Access Land east of PRoW S29/11	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP19	From Hog Cliff Bottom Open Access Land east of PRoW S29/11	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP22	From PRoW S29/26 north of railway line	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP23	From PRoW S29/16 southwest of Hyde Crook	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP24	From Fore Hill PRoW S29/12 south of S29/9	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP25	From Macmillan Way/PRoW S29/19 within Site	Year 5
VP26	From Macmillan Way/PRoW S29/19 within Site	Year 5
VP27	From extended Hogs Cliff NNR on informal path alignment looking south-southwest	Construction, Year 1, Year 15 and Decommissioning
VP28	From Wessex Ridgeway/PRoW S29/6 at junction with A37, looking southsouthwest	Construction, Year 1 and Year 5

15.23 Minor visual effects were identified from VPs 7, with all other visual effects being identified as either negligible or no change.

15.24 In respect of **landscape effect**, the ES does not identify any significant effects. Moderate effects are considered in respect of:

- Land cover (trees and hedgerows) and grassland – at Year 15 and decommissioning the proposals are judged to enhance tree, hedgerow and grassland cover across the site with a Moderate beneficial effect.
- Public Right of Way and Open Access Land – Moderate adverse effects during the construction and decommissioning periods.
- Landscape Character within the site – During construction and decommissioning the proposals would introduce increased activity in the landscape and during operation the proposals would introduce built form into an area with little existing built development.

15.25 The Council's Senior Landscape Architect and the Dorset National Landscape Team disagree with the conclusions of the ES. Both disagree with the methodology adopted by the applicant's landscape consultant and consider it sets the bar too high resulting in visual effects being underestimated and several significant effects being excluded.

- 15.26 The Council's Senior Landscape Officer considers the proposals would not be consistent with the form, scale and pattern of the existing landscape. They are of the opinion the development would not maintain uninterrupted panoramic views within the National Landscape. The Officer considers the proposal would be at complete variance with the prevailing landscape character and the structure and alignment of the solar arrays would be clearly discernible (notably from VP3). In respect of the close-range VPs, the Dorset National Landscape Team considers that the suggested reduction in visual impacts from VPs 10, 25 and 26 from Major to Moderate (i.e. from major to clear deterioration of the view) by Year 5 is not realistic, due to factors including the limited time for planting to mature and the limited efficacy of screening in the winter months. Both the National Landscape Team and the Council's Senior Landscape Architect consider that the loss of extensive panoramic views from the site has not been adequately accounted for due to views northwards and north-eastwards being significantly impacted by the proposed landscaping and solar panels.
- 15.27 From longer range views, the Council's Senior Landscape Architect considers the proposals would introduce new skyline elements (VP4) and have a wider impact on Hog Cliff NNR due to the improved access and seating/viewing areas that have been introduced. The Dorset National Landscape Team disagree with the applicant's assertion that the visual effects would be localised and limited. Notably 14 VPs are judged by the applicant's landscape consultant to experience Moderate visual effects throughout the operation of the development (see Table 14.4 above). The Dorset National Landscape Team disagrees with the applicant that these impacts are not 'significant' and notes the applicant's assessment indicates the proposed mitigation is not anticipated to make a substantive difference during the lifetime of the development. Overall, the Dorset National Landscape Team considers the impacts on the National Landscape are considered to be substantially underrepresented with significant impacts considered from the expanded Hog Cliff National Nature Reserved (including VP5) and Fore Hill (VP3). The Dorset National Landscape Team further consider that the proposals would be of quasi-industrial appearance, would be in contrast and juxtaposition with the underlying 'natural' character of the site and its wider landscape setting and would foreseeably adversely affect some of the special qualities of the National Landscape.
- 15.28 Of relevance to the comments from the Council's Senior Landscape Architect and the Dorset National Landscape Team, it is noted that the Inspector for the dismissed appeal observed that the methodology of only 'major' effects being significant "would mean that the LVIA downgrades and underplays the significance of moderate impacts on the landscape..." and that "the inconsistency between the LVIA methodology and the overall ES (and SEI) methodology means that the appellant's evidence has tended to underestimate the impacts of the proposal." These deficiencies remain.
- 15.29 Natural England also objects. It considers the proposals will have long term significant adverse visual impacts on the National Landscape, including from viewpoints within the Hog Cliff NNR and the numerous parcels of OAL and PRoW. The proposals are not considered to serve to conserve, or enhance the special qualities or landscape and scenic beauty of the Dorset National Landscape and are therefore considered contrary to the policies and aims of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan (Policies C2.d, C2.e and C2.f) and contrary to Local Plan policy ENV1 that seek to protect and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape.
- 15.30 The Planning Officer agrees with the Council's Senior Landscape Architect Dorset National Landscape Team that landscape and visual impacts have been underestimated. Owing to the sloping topography of the site on the south side of the Frome Valley, the visual effects would be apparent from a wide viewing arc. Despite the design changes from the appeal

scheme, the proposed solar farm would still be highly visible from a range of viewpoints and the proposed mitigation would be incapable of sufficiently moderating the visual effects over the 40-year lifetime of the development. The proposals would significantly adversely affect the character and visual quality of the landscape and the photomontages show the proposals would be clearly visible for what it is from a range of viewpoints included from the expanded Hog Cliff NNR. The **harm is judged to be significant, to which great weight be applied**. The proposals are considered to conflict with Local Plan ENV1.

Special qualities

- 15.31 In respect to the special qualities of the National Landscape, the Planning Officer disagrees with the applicant that the proposals would maintain **uninterrupted panoramic views** within the National Landscape.
- 15.32 Whilst the proposals would affect a relatively small part of the National Landscape, it is clear that the proposals would curtail opportunities for panoramic views from a large section of the Macmillan Way as it passes the solar farm (including from VPs 11, 25 and 26) for the lifetime of the development. The Dorset National Landscape Team consider that the montages from VPs 25 and 26 show a substantive loss of the far-reaching views that can presently be achieved towards the Purbeck Hills. The Council's Senior Landscape Officer observes that the photomontages clearly illustrate the likely disruption to existing views and do not show the 3.0m high pole mounted CCTV cameras proposed along the fence line. It is recognised that these panoramic views are only possible at certain times of the year depending on the type of crops being grown in the fields of the site. For example, during a site visit in August 2025, the Planning Officer observed that maize significantly limited visibility. However, such views would be restored following harvest. The publicly accessible area proposed to the north of the solar farm and the proposed permissive route to the west of the Macmillan Way are not considered to sufficiently compensate for the loss of uninterrupted panoramic views due to views being of lesser extent and complexity. Provision and maintenance of the permissive route and publicly accessible area may be reasonable to secure via Section 106 Agreement if the decision maker were to consider the mitigation to be sufficient and resolve to grant planning permission.
- 15.33 The Dorset National Landscape Team considers that overall, the **undeveloped rural character**, with a **sense of remoteness and tranquillity** are among the defining characteristics, with the site largely expressing these. As existing, modern development and intrusive features have a limited impact. Notably, as one moves through the site from north to south, aspects of tranquillity and remoteness increase. At the northern end of the site, in the vicinity of VP10, part of Maiden Newton is visible together with local farm buildings. The Planning Officer observed that vehicles were visible along the A37. Vehicles were also faintly audible from the northern part of the site alongside a natural soundscape of birds, leaves and livestock. As one moves to the south of the site, the sound of traffic dissipates and the lowlands of the valley floor, within which Maiden Newton sits, falls out of view. At the highest point of the site, in the vicinity of VP11, there is the strongest sense of tranquillity and remoteness owing to a natural soundscape and long-distance views with limited perception of urban development.
- 15.34 The proposals would introduce built development to the site which has been described as 'quasi-industrial' by the Dorset National Landscape Team. It would be recognisable as a solar farm from a number of VPs, including the elevated locations of Hog Cliff NNR (VP5) and Fore Hill (VP3) and surrounding areas which contain a number of other viewpoints. From closer range views where the solar farm and associated infrastructure (including fencing, substations and CCTV cameras) would be visible, the proposals would significantly undermine undeveloped rural character through the introduction of discordant built

development. This harm would be greatest immediately adjacent to the solar farm, particularly prior to the establishment of landscape screening. The landscape screening itself would limit the ability to appreciate long-distance views and thereby perceive the remoteness and undeveloped rural character of this part of the National Landscape. Visibility of 3m high pole mounted CCTV cameras would further reduce the perception of remoteness.

- 15.35 Consultation responses raise concern with noise impacts. Officers requested information from the applicant in respect of noise to justify the claim in the ES that the proposals would not generate any noise. In response, the applicant's Planning Statement Addendum states the substations would generate no noise and that the transformers and inverters would only generate a very low level of noise; a low hum. The applicant states that if someone can hear the noise of the transformers and inverters they would be trespassing and draws attention to the Solar Roadmap (2025), which notes solar farms "operate almost silently". Whilst noise impacts have not been quantitatively assessed, officers consider that the proposed development would be unlikely to have an adverse effect on auditory tranquillity due the distance between the transformers/inverters and PRoW (approximately 110m at the closest point).
- 15.36 Wildlife of national and international significance is a further special quality of the National Landscape. In this regard, the proposals would have a beneficial effect through the biodiversity net gains, tree planting and hedgerows which have potential to support wildlife including foraging and roosting bats, nesting birds and hedgehogs.
- 15.37 Overall, and taking into account the benefits to wildlife, it is considered that the proposals would harm the National Landscape's special qualities, including uninterrupted panoramic views, tranquillity and remoteness and undeveloped rural character in conflict with Local Plan policy ENV1 and the Dorset AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 (policy C2.e).

Exceptional circumstances

- 15.38 The NPPF (Para. 189) explains that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing National Landscapes and that conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations. Conversely harm to National Landscapes should be afforded great weight.
- 15.39 Paragraph 190 states that:
- "When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development⁶⁷ other than in **exceptional circumstances**, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the **public interest**. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:
- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
 - b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
 - c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated."
- 15.40 For the purposes of Para. 190, 'major development' is defined as being a matter for the decision maker, taking account of the nature, scale and setting of the development, and whether it could have a significant impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated. The proposed development is considered to constitute major development

given the scale of the proposed solar farm and significant impacts on the natural beauty of the National Landscape. This view is consistent with the appeal scheme and is accepted by the applicant.

- 15.41 Accordingly, in line with Paragraph 190, it is necessary to assess whether the development would be in the public interest and whether exceptional circumstances exist, having regard to an assessment of a), b) and c).

Do exceptional circumstances exist?

- 15.42 Paragraph 190 of the NPPF is clear that the consideration set out at a), b) and c) are to inform the assessment of major applications within the National Landscape. This infers that major development may be justified by other exceptional circumstances in addition to the consideration of a), b) and c). Each is assessed in turn followed by consideration of other circumstances:

NPPF Para. 190 Part a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy

- 15.43 The proposed solar farm would have an approximate generation capacity of 10MW, enough electricity to meet the electricity needs of approximately 5,142 homes. As such, the development would provide a valuable source of renewable energy which would help to tackle climate change, contribute towards net zero and support energy security.
- 15.44 As previously stated in the principle of development section of this report, the proposal for the generation of renewable energy is acceptable in principle by virtue of the broad support for renewable energy development under policy COM11 of the adopted Local Plan. Paragraph 168 of the NPPF states, among other requirements, that Councils should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy, and give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable energy generation and the proposal's contribution to a net zero future. The need for renewable energy development is therefore accepted and is urgently required at an international, national and local level. The Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and recognises it needs to deliver at scale to achieve objectives. Responding to the climate and nature crisis is a strategic priority of the Council. The provision of renewable energy and the associated benefits is therefore considered to carry **significant weight** consistent with the Council's Interim Guidance and Position Statement (2023). Despite this urgent need, it is concluded through the assessment that follows that the contribution of the development towards both national and local needs for renewable energy is not essential (as was concluded by the appeal Inspector, Para. 155) given the need is considered capable of being met in other ways.
- 15.45 If the development is permitted, there would be a range of beneficial effects on the local economy through job creation during the construction period (up to 6-months), 40-year operation and 6-month decommissioning period of the solar farm. These temporary jobs would be wide-ranging, including construction workers, solar farm technicians and maintenance staff, and agricultural employees associated with the maintenance of the landscaping and sheep farming within the enclosure of the solar farm.
- 15.46 The applicant has estimated that the proposals would deliver a wide range of socio-economic benefits through job creation, spending by employees and investment in the local economy (see Table 13.1). The Council's Economic Development Team notes the estimates seem reasonable and the most important figures for Dorset are the c. 6FTE gross

jobs estimated to be created in Dorset associated with operations and maintenance over the 40-year lifetime of the development and the 55 gross person-years of employment in Dorset during the construction phase. Officers also consider that the 3.7 gross person years associated with decommissioning are also important. Further indirect beneficial effects on the local economy would accrue through spending by employees, a proportion of which would be captured within the local economy. The proposals would also support a growing sector within the UK economy.

- 15.47 The NPPF (Para. 85) states significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. However, as established in case law⁴, this does not give blanket assignment of significant weight to all economic benefits and instead affords significant weight to the objective of supporting economic growth and productivity. Taking into account the extent of the benefits, and noting the solar farm proposals do not predominantly support economic growth and productivity, the socio-economic benefits are considered to carry **limited weight** in the planning balance. Whilst the associated effects on the local economy would be beneficial, given their temporary nature and limited number, the jobs are not considered to be crucial for the local economy.
- 15.48 Additionally, the applicant advises the proposal would help to diversify the existing farm by providing a reliable income stream of approximately £50,000 per year to the farmer by diversifying their income. Whilst no evidence has been submitted to indicate that the solar farm is needed from a viability perspective, the contribution has potential to support the ongoing management of the farm and wider rural economy. Diversification is broadly supported by the NPPF (Para. 88). At a local level, policy ECON8 supports diversification projects where they are in keeping with rural character and comprises ancillary development that relates well to existing development. This is subject to the proposed diversification making an on-going contribution to sustaining the enterprise. For the reasons set out above, the proposals are not considered to be in keeping with rural character and there is therefore conflict with policy ECON8. Nevertheless, diversification of the farm to accommodate a solar farm is considered to carry limited positive weight in the planning balance. Should the decision maker resolve to grant planning permission, it may be appropriate to seek to secure the on-going contribution to the farm by way of a Section 106 Agreement if the contribution is considered necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms.
- 15.49 If the proposal were to be refused, the agricultural use of the site would likely continue. This would support a limited number of agricultural jobs.
- 15.50 In summary, there is a need for the development and the beneficial effects of approving the development on the local economy are considered to be afforded **limited weight**. The proposal would make a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions, tackling climate change, responding to the climate emergency and contributing towards energy security. This carries **significant positive weight**.

NPPF Para. 190 Part b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way

The cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area

⁴ Bewley Homes PLC v Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities & Anor [2024] EWHC 1166 (Admin) (16 May 2024)

- 15.51 The Council's Planning for Climate Change Interim Guidance and Position Statement (December 2023) states that where the siting of a development is informed by grid connection and capacity, applicants will need to justify the proposed location through submission of details explaining how this has informed the site selection, including a viability assessment of alternative options and locations (Para. 3.3).
- 15.52 The site is located entirely within the Dorset National Landscape. The proposed point of connection (POC) to the electricity distribution network is located approximately 60m from the application site boundary, close to Cruxton. The POC is approximately 5.8km from the closest boundary of the Dorset National Landscape. Therefore, if the POC were to be utilised to serve a solar farm outside of the National Landscape cabling would need to extend a minimum of 5.8km (as the crow flies). The actual length of cabling would likely be significantly longer than 5.8km given cabling would not be installed in a straight line.
- 15.53 The application is supported by a Sequential Analysis Study (SAS) (dated November 2021) which was submitted in association with the earlier planning application (P/FUL/2021/01920). The study was primarily prepared in response to part of the site consisting of grade 3a best and most versatile agricultural land. The SAS focuses on a 3km study area from the site to assess potential availability of alternative sites. The SAS advises that the Electricity System Operator (ESO) has confirmed that there is sufficient capacity for the solar farm and that a 3km study area from the site was chosen given it is necessary for the solar farm to be located within proximity of the electricity network. The SAS considers a total of 22 alternative sites all of which were subject of the National Landscape designation owing to the site being approximately 5.8km deep into the National Landscape. The SAS does not assess other sites or POCs where there may be capacity for the development, for example within the plan area outside of that 3km catchment.
- 15.54 The applicant's Planning Statement notes that additional distance from a POC decreases viability due to the additional costs of cables, their installation, greater third party landowner negotiations, environmental management and mitigation. This is accepted. The Planning Statement (Para. 6.22) also notes that within the Maiden Newton area, the grid remains highly constrained and investigations into available capacity on areas outside of the National Landscape reveal no suitable sites – only sites that would have been too costly to connect to the grid which would have made the project unviable. This claim is undermined by the fact that the applicant submitted a planning application for a slightly larger 12MW solar farm at land south of Motcombe Road, Motcombe, in June 2025 (P/FUL/2025/03674). That site lies approximately 150m west of the Cramborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape at its closest point. Whilst the application is currently under officer consideration, the submission indicates that the applicant considers the development to be viable and there may be scope, subject to planning, to develop a solar farm of similar scale outside of the National Landscape.
- 15.55 Officers also note that there is a live planning application for a significantly larger 40MW solar farm with 20MW battery energy storage system (BESS) on land at Caswell Farm, Sherborne, also outside of any National Landscape designation (P/FUL/2025/03066). Further large-scale low-carbon and renewable energy projects have also been granted in recent years outside of the National Landscape, including the following since 2023:

Table 14.5 – Large-scale renewable and low-carbon permissions since 2023

Application Reference	Location	Capacity (MW)	Decision
P/FUL/2021/02046	Park Farm, Gillingham	45MW Solar farm	Appeal allowed February 2023

P/FUL/2022/02429	Galton Manor Farm, Owermoigne	30MW Solar farm	Granted March 2023
P/FUL/2021/01018	North Dairy Farm, Pulham	49.99MW Solar farm	Granted January 2024
P/FUL/2023/06578	Holt Road, Three Legged Cross	47.5MW BESS	Granted July 2024
P/FUL/2023/02819	Post Farm, Lytchett Minster	32MW BESS	Granted November 2024
P/FUL/2023/04657	Chickerell Court Farm	400MW BESS	Granted January 2025
P/FUL/2024/04447	Land North of Eweleaze Spinney, Chickerell	50MW BESS	Granted April 2025
P/FUL/2023/03415	Woodlands Manor Farm, Horton	30MW Solar Farm	Granted May 2025
P/FUL/2023/02829	North Farm, Horton	19.88MW Solar farm	Granted May 2025

**Totals 704.37MW solar and BESS
174.87MW solar**

- 15.56 This further suggests there is scope to develop solar farms and other energy projects outside of the National Landscape within Dorset.
- 15.57 In relation to the appeal scheme, the Inspector concluded that the megawattage available at the POC would not justify the cost of a connection to a site outside the National Landscape, and so there was no need for viability evidence to be provided to demonstrate that any site making use of POC would be limited to a radius of 3km (Para. 154). Despite the absence of viability evidence, given the megawattage of the proposed solar farm has reduced by approximately 15% (from 11.8MW to 10MW) compared to the appeal scheme, it is accepted that development of a solar farm of similar scale outside of the Dorset National Landscapes would not be viable if the proposed POC were to be utilised.
- 15.58 The Inspector for the appeal concluded that “in a constrained grid, capacity should be used wherever possible” (Para. 153). This was informed by the Inspector’s assessment that the “primary substation in the Maiden Newton area was one of the few anywhere in Dorset outside the built-up area of Bournemouth itself identified as having unconstrained capacity to accept generation” (Para. 152).
- 15.59 During the assessment of this application officers invited the applicant to elaborate on the constrained nature of the grid in the Maiden Newton area and the investigations it had undertaken to assesses available capacity in areas outside of the National Landscape to inform the conclusion that there were no suitable alternative sites. Information was requested in respect of current capacity within the network, the extent of search, and scope and feasibility to site the solar farm within less sensitive parts of the National Landscape and outside of the National Landscape. The applicant’s Planning, Design and Access Statement Addendum states that the grid remains constrained and that no locations outside of the National Landscape were viable due to the small scale of the scheme and the distance cabling would need to be installed from the proposed POC to outside the National Landscape.

- 15.60 In the absence of further information from the applicant, officers have considered SSEN's Network Maps⁵; which were reviewed by the Inspector to assess the appeal scheme. At the time of writing this report, SSEN's Network Maps do not show any 'unconstrained' Grid Supply Points (GSPs), Bulk Supply Points (BSPs) or Substations within the administrative boundary of Dorset Council. This indicates a highly constrained grid across Dorset. The only 'partially constrained' supply point and/or substation is the Chickerell substation. The Maiden Newton substation is shown as being 'constrained' (with a 'constrained' up-stream status and 'unconstrained' downstream status). This indicates that whilst the distribution network may have capacity to accept new connections, the transmission network is limited and poses a constraint. SSEN's Network Maps show that all other substations across the administrative area of Dorset Council share the same status as the Maiden Newton substation (i.e. 'constrained' with a constrained up-stream status and 'unconstrained' downstream status). There are a number of substations located both within and outside of National Landscape designations, including substations at Cerne Abbas, Piddletrenthide, Yetminster, Charminster, Dorchester, Redlands, Weymouth and Portland. On this basis the status of the grid in Maiden Newton is typical of the rest of Dorset and is not unique.
- 15.61 Based on the above there is considered to be reasonable scope to develop a solar farm outside of the National Landscape if an alternative POC were to be used. Nevertheless, officers recognise that in the absence of a confirmed connection, timescales for securing a connection could be significant. The presence of a POC is afforded **limited positive weight** in decision making given it would enable the proposed solar farm to be rapidly deployed.
- 15.62 The cost of developing outside the designated area is unclear and has not been assessed by the applicant or officers. Nevertheless, the submission of solar applications outside of the national landscape tends to suggest that there are viable alternatives.

Cost of, and scope for, meeting the need for it in some other way

- 15.63 The NPPF (Para. 168) states that Council's should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy. Nevertheless, the need for the proposed development is necessary in respect of assessing whether exceptional circumstances exist.
- 15.64 Section 14 of this report provides context to the drive to tackle the climate crisis and work towards energy security. At a national level, the Government is aiming to achieve clean power by 2030. To achieve this an increase in solar provision from 15GW to between 45-47GW of solar is targeted. A fivefold increase in solar is targeted by 2035. At a local level, the Council has supportive policies to seek to deliver renewable energy and has established targets to become carbon neutral.
- 15.65 The Inspector for the dismissed appeal considered the Dorset Low Carbon Energy Route Map and Evidence Base 2021 (the Regen report) within his report. He inferred that it gave a general idea of the scale of renewable energy provision and what is required to achieve net zero in Dorset by 2050 (Para. 145). However, as the Regen report covers the administrative areas of both Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP), officers are unclear how these conclusions were reached for the administrative area of Dorset Council, or the Local Plan area of West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland.
- 15.66 The Inspector identified (Para. 149) a 300MW shortfall between installed/planned capacity and the target of 1500MW by 2050 outlined within the Regen report. In recommending that the appeal be allowed to the Secretary of State, the Inspector concluded that "...the need

⁵ <https://network-maps.ssen.co.uk/> accessed 15 September 2025

for renewable energy generation could not be met in other ways, that the appeal proposal would make an essential contribution both to the accepted national need for renewable energy and to Dorset's need and that the cost of, and scope for meeting the need for it in some other way would be prohibitive in the short to medium term" (Para. 155). The applicant contends that this conclusion remains valid.

- 15.67 During the assessment of this application officers invited the applicant to provide further information on the scope and feasibility to site the solar farm within less sensitive parts of the National Landscape and outside of the National Landscape. Officers suggested that the applicant approach this in a similar way to how the submitted Suitable Alternative Sites Assessment looks at best and most versatile agricultural land given the Planning for Climate Change: Interim Guidance and Position Statement (2023) requires clear reasoning to justify the siting of proposals within the National Landscape (Para. 3.2.23). The applicant's Planning, Design and Access Statement Addendum does not consider any alternative POCs outside of the National Landscape and the applicant has not identified whether other, less sensitive sites exist within a viable proximity of the proposed POC.
- 15.68 Whilst at a very early stage of consultation, the emerging Dorset Local Plan identifies proposed areas of opportunity for onshore wind turbines, ground mounted solar and battery energy storage systems. The consultation document (Appendix D: Opportunity areas for renewable energy) confirms the Council has undertaken a strategic assessment of the potential for these three types of development, including technical considerations such as wind speed and grid connection. The proposed opportunity areas are informed by assessment of landscape sensitivity, including sites within Dorset's two National Landscapes. Whilst the assessments within the emerging draft Dorset Local Plan is high-level, and individual applications would need to be assessed on a site-by-site basis, it identifies a range of potentially suitable opportunity areas for:
- Medium (5-15MW) and small scale (1-4MW) solar farms
 - Small, medium and large wind turbines - ranging from 25 to 150m blade tip height
 - Larger (500MW to 1GW) and smaller scale (100MW to 500MW) BESS sites
- 15.69 Extensive opportunity areas are identified both within and outside the Dorset National Landscape. Apart from some land to the west of Beaminster (which is identified as being potentially suitable for medium scale solar development), land designated as National Landscape is not identified as being potentially suitable for medium scale solar farms or large scale wind turbines. Whilst this indicates there may be scope for meeting renewable energy needs in other ways, limited weight can currently be afforded to the emerging Local Plan given its early stage of preparation.
- 15.70 In assessing the extent to which the need to provide renewable energy could be met in other ways, it is also relevant to note the Labour Government's changes to the NPPF of July 2024⁶. The changes removed the restriction that onshore wind could only be considered acceptable in areas either allocated in a development plan or through Local Development Orders, Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders. As no such allocations or orders existed at the time of the appeal, the policy change substantially increases the ability to meet renewable energy needs in other ways through provision of onshore wind. Such opportunities were not possible at the time of the previous appeal given onshore wind development was restricted by the NPPF.

⁶ Policy Statement on onshore wind (8 July 2024)

- 15.71 Ongoing reform of the grid connections queue from a ‘first-come, first-served’ system to a ‘first-ready, first-served’ approach seeks to further increase opportunities to meet renewable energy demands in other ways with less significant delays. The reforms approved by Ofgem in April 2025 aim to remove so-called ‘zombie’ projects which hold up the queue for connection to the electricity grid in place of viable renewable energy projects. It involves reorganisation of the grid connections queue to prioritise those projects which are ready to deliver and most critical to the success of the Clean Power 2030 goals. Indeed, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband has confirmed “we have enough energy projects in the grid connection queue to deliver clean power by 2030, but many are stuck behind speculative schemes, leading to delays of up to 10 years. These reforms are critical to deliver clean power by 2030, which will bring forward an estimated £200 billion of private investment.”⁷ This indicates there is scope to meet, at least 2030 needs, in other ways.
- 15.72 The cost of meeting renewable energy demands in other ways is unclear and has not been assessed by the applicant or officers. Nevertheless, the submission of applications for renewable and low carbon energy developments outside of the national landscape tends to indicate that there are viable alternatives.
- 15.73 Overall, it is concluded that there is scope to meet the need for renewable energy in some other ways and the scope to do this has increased since the time of the appeal.

Would the development be in the public interest?

- 15.74 National Landscapes are an important resource, and their protection is in the public interest. Similarly, provision of additional renewable energy generation capacity and associated contributions towards tackling climate change, reaching net zero and working towards energy security are also in the public interest. On balance, the proposal is not considered to be in the public interest and exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated.

Para. 190 Part c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated

- 15.75 As assessed above, the proposals are considered to result in significant harm to landscape character, visual amenity and the special qualities of the National Landscape. The harm is capable of being moderated to some degree through the proposed mitigation measures, notably hedge and tree planting which would mature over time and to reduce landscape and visual effects. Owing to the sloping topography of the site and presence of PRoW and OAL within the vicinity, significant landscape and visual effects are considered to remain over the lifetime of the development. The impacts are considered to be disproportionate to the scale of the solar farm.
- 15.76 The proposed permissive route to the west of the site would provide some compensation for the loss of recreational amenity on the site due to the reduced attractiveness of existing routes. The Secretary of State concluded in respect of the dismissed appeal that: “the harm to the recreational benefit of the Macmillan Way would not be adequately mitigated as the alternative permissive route would not provide a view of equivalent panoramic value to that which would be lost”. To enhance the recreational benefits, the applicant has proposed a publicly accessible picnic area in the northern field, widened route along the adjacent

⁷ Ofgem, February 2025 (<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/press-release/clean-power-2030-one-step-closer-proposed-new-fast-track-grid-connections-system-unveiled>)

PRoW and reduced the extent of the solar farm. Whilst these further measures make a meaningful contribution towards seeking to mitigate recreational impacts, they are not considered to wholly compensate for the adverse recreational impacts given the degradation of the existing route, absence of equivalent panoramic views and limited benefit of the proposed picnic area. Despite the extensive landownership of the landlord, no further improvements have been proposed. As a result, the proposal is considered to conflict with Local Plan policy COM7 part v) which states developments should not result in the degradation of existing routes and, where development degrades from the attractiveness of a route, compensatory enhancements will be sought such that there is a net improvement to the PRoW network. The harm is attributed **moderate weight**.

- 15.77 Further, for the reasons set out above, Officers do not consider that the National Landscapes duty in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act is met.

Heritage

- 15.78 The proposed development falls within the setting of a number of heritage assets including the grade II* West Cruxton Farmhouse, grade II listed Manor Farmhouse, grade II listed Dairy Cottage, and Grade II Listed No.s 1 and 2 Cruxton Cottages. The application site also falls within the setting of two bowl barrows, Grimstone down and Field System W of Fore Hill.
- 15.79 The applicant has submitted the Heritage Desk-Based Assessment (2021) undertaken for the previously refused planning application. It adequately describes the significance of the heritage assets. For the nearby listed buildings the significance of heritage assets relates to the special architectural interest and the historic interest and built form and fabric. The immediate setting of the listed buildings makes a positive contribution to the assets. For Notton Bridge, the functional relationship with the River Frome and the Dorchester Road are important.
- 15.80 The significance of the Scheduled Monuments is predominantly derived from the archaeological and historic interest of their earthwork and buried remains.
- 15.81 The Council's Senior Conservation Officer concludes the proposals would not harm the special architectural/historical significance of heritage assets. In respect of the nearby listed buildings, the application site is situated 600m from the closest of the group and has no intervisibility with any of the assets owing to distance and topography. There are no established connections between the site and Cruxton Manor. There is a historical connection in landholding between Dairy Cottage and the site however this connection would not be materially changed by the proposals to the extent that setting is affected. The proposals are not considered to adversely affect the significance of any listed buildings.
- 15.82 Owing to the topography of the land and limited visibility, the site is not considered to contribute to the setting of the bowl barrows to the south east and south west of the site, nor the Frampton Roman Villa or Later Iron Age or Romano-British settlement. The proposed development would be visible in distant views from Grimstone Down and the Field System west of Fore Hill (see LVIA Viewpoints 16 and 29). The Council's Senior Conservation Officer, in consultation with the Council's Senior Archaeologist, recommended consultation with Historic England in respect of impacts on scheduled ancient monuments. In the absence of any substantive comments from Historic England, it is the planning officer's view the proposals would not adversely affect the setting of any scheduled ancient monuments, due to the distance of the site from these assets and due to the setting of the assets being more locally defined by the immediate landscape setting.

15.83 Given all of the above, the proposal is considered to result in no harm to the significance of designated heritage assets and so neither paragraph 214 nor 215 of the NPPF is considered to be engaged. As such the proposals also accord with policy ENV 4 of the Local Plan.

Residential amenity

- 15.84 Local Plan policy COM11 sets out that permission should only be granted for renewable energy development if the proposal minimises harm to residential amenity by virtue of noise, vibration, overshadowing, flicker, or other detrimental emissions, during construction, its operation and decommissioning.
- 15.85 The site lies in a predominantly agricultural landscape, the nearest properties to the site are situated in Cruxton (circa 550m north-east), dispersed dwellings in Notton including Notton Hill Barn Cottages (circa 300m south) and Greenford Farm (circa 700m west). Owing to the separation distances to these nearest neighbouring properties there would be no adverse impacts in terms of overbearing or loss of outlook. Noise and dust nuisances may arise during the construction phase of the development, these impacts however would be short term, temporary and able to be mitigated through the implementation of best practice construction methods, such that significant impacts on residential amenity would not be of a harmful degree.
- 15.86 The submitted Glint and Glare Study is based on the previously refused development (P/FUL2021/01920). As this occupied a larger site area with a similar arrangement of solar panels, it is considered to represent a robust assessment for the purposes of this application. It confirms that five dwellings would experience more than 3 months of glare per year (but less than one hour per day). However, views of the proposed development would be limited by intervening screening in the form of existing and proposed vegetation and terrain. Therefore, the overall impact is predicted to be low.
- 15.87 As noted in the landscape section above, noise is not considered to materially affect users of the adjacent right of way. It would not therefore have an adverse effect on residential amenity.
- 15.88 Subject to appropriately worded conditions, impacts of construction could be appropriately managed.
- 15.89 Given all of the above the impact on neighbouring amenity is not considered to be significant and the proposal is considered to accord with policy ENV 16 of the Local Plan and the residential amenity test within policy COM11. Appropriate conditions would be required in respect of construction management.

Highways

- 15.90 Highway impacts would predominantly be at the construction stage. There would be limited associated vehicle movements during the operation of the solar farm.
- 15.91 The primary construction access would be from an existing farm access off Greenford Lane to the west of the site, and a minority of construction traffic would be routed along Cruxton Lane to the north of the site. The Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) shows the majority of construction traffic using the existing farm access on Greenford Lane and therefore access the site from the south.
- 15.92 Dorset Highways raise no objection and note the proposal does not present a material harm to the transport network or to highway safety. National Highways note the CTMP reflects

what was previously agreed under the refused application. Subject to securing the implementation of the CTMP through a suitably worded planning condition National Highways have no objection and are of the view the proposals would minimise the risk to trunk road traffic during construction to an acceptable degree. National Highways also recommend an informative for the requirement of advance warning signs to be placed within the A35 highway boundary for which the applicant would need to apply. This condition and informative would need to be placed on any approval if planning permission is granted.

- 15.93 Furthermore, given the application is for the temporary 40-year use of the site as a solar farm following which it would be decommissioned and restored to agricultural use, it is reasonable and necessary to secure a Decommissioning Traffic Management Plan (DTMP) as part of the necessary Decommissioning Method Statement. A condition is also reasonable in respect of the surfacing of the temporary construction access. Subject to conditions, the proposals are therefore considered acceptable in respect of vehicle highway impacts and highway safety in compliance with parts i) to iv) of Local Plan policy COM7 and the NPPF.

Biodiversity

- 15.94 An Ecological Assessment Report was submitted and agreed with the Natural Environment Team and a certificate of approval issued. The measures include reinforcement infill planting along the boundaries and hedgerows within the internal field patterns to fill the gaps, proposed tree belt planting to the north of the solar farm and the planting of new hedgerows to the south and west of the solar farm enclosure. An area of proposed grassland located within the south-west corner of the site and an area of wildflower meadow is proposed to the north of the solar farm alongside the proposed picnic area. Further grassland is proposed outside of the solar enclosure and the grassland within the solar enclosure around the panels and solar infrastructure proposed to be subject to conservation grazing. Five bird boxes would be erected on trees and additional bat roost provision would be made through the inclusion of five bat roost boxes on trees.
- 15.95 The Dorset National Landscape Team note in their consultation response that 'wildlife of national and international significance' is listed amongst the special qualities of the National Landscapes and should biodiversity consultees identify gains that are likely to be beneficial for designated sites and protected species, in particular, these could be linked to this special quality. In this regard, the proposals would have a beneficial effect through the biodiversity net gains, tree planting and hedgerows which would support wildlife.
- 15.96 The agreed LEMP includes a biodiversity net gain assessment which shows clear net gains of +41.71% habitat units and +20.95% hedgerow units, substantially above the statutory requirement of 10% BNG. As explained within the LEMP, this is largely down to low value agricultural habitats being replaced with higher value modified or neutral grassland that can readily be managed to achieve at least moderate condition. For linear units, the gains are due to native species rich hedgerow planting and infilling.
- 15.97 The gains are significantly lower than those considered by the Planning Inspector and SOS in relation to the dismissed appeal (+71.05% habitat units and +26.76% hedgerow units); which were attributed moderate weight. In the context of the declared ecological and nature emergencies, and strengthened biodiversity duty, the BNGs are afforded **moderate weight**.
- 15.98 Planning conditions would be placed on any approval granted for the development to be carried out in accordance with the LEMP and Ecological Assessment Report. Statutory BNG would be secured by the standard BNG condition and habitat management and

monitoring would likely need to be secured through a post-determination legal agreement. A condition in respect of any external lighting is also reasonable in the interest of ecology and dark skies.

- 15.99 Given all of the above the proposal is considered to comply with Local Plan policy ENV 2, wildlife and habitats.

Trees

- 15.100 A number of trees and hedgerows are present across the site, including a copse of native woodland in the northeast corner of the site. Adjoining the southwestern corner of the site lies a beech and sycamore woodland. Hedgerows, including trees, form the field boundaries of the site and a hedgerow divides the northern and southern field.
- 15.101 The submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement identifies 28 trees, groups of trees, woodland and hedgerows which have been surveyed. They comprise one Category A (high quality) Tree Group, 17 Category B (moderate quality) trees, groups of trees, woodlands and hedgerows, and ten Category C (low quality) trees and groups of trees. The assessment notes that the progression of Ash Dieback disease has meant that most of the groups of trees previously identified as high quality in the 2021 Tree Survey have been downgraded. The latest assessment notes that once infected, the majority of Ash trees will die, although a few trees may survive the infection because of genetic factors which give them tolerance to the disease.
- 15.102 Limited arboricultural impacts would arise due to the running of underground cabling along the access track between the POC and solar farm. Some hedgerow removals would be required to widen existing field accesses to facilitate construction access and a short section of the hedgerow between the two fields (ref. H5) is proposed to be removed to enable installation of fencing. No trees are proposed to be removed. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement establishes how existing trees would be protected over the course of construction.
- 15.103 The proposed Landscape Strategy plans show that significant landscaping would be provided across the site, including 53 new standard sized trees and extensive new hedgerows.
- 15.104 The Council's Tree Officer has no objection subject to the works being carried out in accordance with the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement. Subject to this condition, and conditions in respect of the provision and maintenance of proposed landscaping, the works are acceptable in respect of trees.
- 15.105 The impact on trees is considered to be neutral in the planning balance.

Flood risk and drainage

- 15.106 The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 – defined as land with the lowest risk of flooding. The site is not affected by medium or high risks of surface water flooding.
- 15.107 A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) which includes surface water management was submitted as part of the application. The Solar panels are not considered to introduce impermeable area as they would be raised above ground and allow retention of greenfield conditions. Whilst some limited areas of hard standing would be created, the extent is negligible given the scale of the site and not considered to materially increase surface water run off.
- 15.108 The Environment Agency were consulted on the application and raise no objection to the proposal subject to a planning condition securing a Construction Environment Management

Plan (CEMP) related to pollution control measures. The Council's Flood Risk Management Team consider that the submitted FRA adequately details the potential risks posed by solar farms from a drainage and flood risk perspective. The Flood Risk Management Team note the proposals have potential to reduce runoff by slowing water runoff and promoting infiltration. This is reliant on maintaining a permanent ground cover across the site. Conditions in respect of the detailed surface water management scheme and a Soil Management Plan are recommended. The latter condition is recommended to seek to prevent the over compaction of soil which could increase risks of flooding through increased run off. With these conditions in place, the proposals are considered to be acceptable in accordance with Local Plan policy ENV5 and the NPPF.

Other Matters

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 15.109 The Environmental Impact Assessment Officer has reviewed the submitted documents, including revised information submitted, and has confirmed the Environmental Statement contains all the required information for the submitted planning application.

Decommissioning

- 15.110 A suitably worded planning condition to secure appropriate decommissioning of the site would ensure that infrastructure is removed at the end of the 40-year period or within 6 months of the cessation of electricity storage and distribution by the facility (whichever is the sooner).

16. Summary of issues and the planning balance

- 16.1 Local Plan policy COM11 states that proposals for renewable energy generation will be allowed wherever possible providing that the benefits of the development, such as the contribution towards renewable energy targets, outweigh any harm. In addition, it states that permission will only be granted where aspects related to landscape, residential amenity and ecology can be satisfactorily addressed.
- 16.2 The NPPF (Para 190) states that planning permission for major development within National landscapes should be refused other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.
- 16.3 The following table sets out the planning considerations both in favour and against the development, and the weight afforded to these in the planning balance.
- 16.4 In the interests of clarity, in ascribing weight to the planning considerations in favour and against Planning Officers have used the following scale: **none, very limited, limited, moderate, significant.**

Table 16.1 – Planning balance

Consideration	Weight	Reasons
Positive weight in favour		
Contributing towards the provision of renewable energy,	Significant	10MW solar farm will produce a moderate contribution to renewable energy production and achieving climate targets.

tackling climate change and energy security		Would serve the equivalent annual electricity needs of an estimated 5,142 households.
Ecology, BNG and trees	Moderate	Limited loss of hedgerows and no loss of trees. Substantial tree and hedgerow planting. BNG of +41.71% habitat units and +20.95% hedgerow units (in excess of 10% requirement). Responding to declared ecological and nature emergencies.
Grid connection	Limited	Confirmed grid connection enables rapid energisation of the solar farm and early delivery of renewable energy benefits.
Economic benefits and the effect of approving the development on the local economy	Limited	Construction jobs during construction phase of up to 6-months (77 gross / 61 net person years of which 55 gross / 23 net could take place in Dorset) Operational and maintenance jobs during 40-year lifetime of development (6.6 FTE gross / 5.2 FTE net of which 5.9 FTE gross / 3.9 FTE net could take place in Dorset) Decommissioning jobs during the 6-month decommissioning (3.7 gross / 2.9 net person years of which 3.7 gross and 1.6 net could take place in Dorset) Wages a proportion of which would be spent locally (£7.7m gross / £6.1m net of which £5.8m gross / £2.6m net could take place in Dorset) Gross value added (£12.5m gross / £10m net of which £9.7m gross and £4.1m net could take place in Dorset).
Farm diversification	Limited	Diversifying an existing farm through providing a reliable income stream estimated to be approximately £50,000 per year to the farmer.
Temporary use of land	Very limited	Lifetime of development would be up to 40 years excluding construction and decommissioning periods.
Neutral (no weight)		
Heritage assets	None	No adverse effects on designated or non-designated heritage assets.
Flood risk	None	Acceptable subject to conditions.
Residential amenity	None	Limited to glare. No significant adverse effects.
Highways	None	Acceptable subject to conditions.
Business rates	None	In line with ratable value. Not a material consideration.
Community benefit fund	None	£20,000 to Parish Council. Not a material consideration.
Adverse weight against		
Landscape and visual impact and harm to the Dorset National Landscape	Significant	Significant adverse landscape and visual effects over a large area. Many adverse effects would persist for the lifetime of the development due to the limited ability of landscaping to mitigate the effects.

		Harm to special qualities of the National Landscape. The ability to develop a solar farm outside of the National Landscape or meet the needs for renewable energy development in some other way have not been demonstrated. There appears to be reasonable scope to develop a solar farm outside of the National Landscape. The constrained nature of local grid is typical in Dorset. Exceptional circumstances not demonstrated. Great weight applied to the significant harm. Development would not be in the public interest.
Harm to public rights of way, including Macmillan Way	Moderate	Alternative permissive route to the west of the site and proposed rest/picnic area would not adequately mitigate impacts on public rights of way.
Agricultural	Limited	Limited loss of the potential to use best and most versatile agricultural land for more productive arable uses over the lifetime of the development vs. improved soil quality due to sheep farming and resting of soil from intensive.

- 16.5 The assessment the planning application concludes exceptional circumstances do not exist and the approval of the development would not be in the public interest. On balance, the benefits of the development are not considered to outweigh the harm. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

17. Recommendation

- 17.1 Refuse planning permission for the following reasons:

1. The proposed development by reason of its appearance, scale and positioning would have a detrimental impact upon the character, landscape and visual quality of the Dorset National Landscape and existing public rights of way. The impacts would not be sufficiently mitigated contrary to policies ENV1, COM7 and COM11 of the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan (2015). The proposal constitutes major development in the Dorset National Landscape and exceptional circumstances to justify the development have not been demonstrated, and, owing to the impacts on the National Landscape, granting of the proposals is not considered to be in the public interest, in conflict with Para. 190 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). The benefits of the proposal are not considered to outweigh the harm of the development, failing to comply with Local Plan policy COM11 and the Dorset AONB Management Plan 2019-2024.

Informatives:

1. Informative: Plans

The plans that were considered by the Council in making this decision are:

P007005-12-SiteLocation Rev B Site Location Plan

P007005-02-PlanningLayout Rev H Planning Layout

P007005-04-ArraySections Rev A Array Section Views

P007005-13-CustSubSections Rev B Customer Substation Section Views

P007005-14-DNOSSubSections Rev A DNO Substation Section Views

P007005-15-FenceSections Rev A Fence Section Views

P007005-16-TXStationSections Rev B Transformer Station Section Views

P007005-17-CCTVSections Rev A CCTV Section Views

E206/01 Rev C Preliminary Drainage Arrangements

P24-2775_12-1 Rev B Landscape Strategy (Sheet 1 of 4)

P24-2775_12-2 Rev B Landscape Strategy (Sheet 2 of 4)

P24-2775_12-3 Rev B Landscape Strategy (Sheet 3 of 4)

P24-2775_12-4 Rev B Landscape Strategy (Sheet 4 of 4)

2. Informative: National Planning Policy Framework

In accordance with paragraph 39 of the NPPF the council, as Local Planning Authority, takes a positive approach to development proposals and is focused on providing sustainable development. The council works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by:

- offering a pre-application advice service, and –
- as appropriate updating applications/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application and where possible suggesting solutions.

In this case:

- Pre-application advice was provided.
- The applicant was advised that the proposal did not accord with the development plan and that there were no material planning considerations to outweigh these concerns.
- The applicant and council have worked together to minimise the reasons for refusal.