



Committee Report

Planning Committee South - 28 May 2024

Application no DC/21/5550/FUL

Location

Land At Park Farm
Loudham Hall Road
Loudham
Woodbridge
Suffolk
IP13 0NW

Expiry date 11 March 2022

Application type Full Application

Applicant BSR Energy

Parish Pettistree

Proposal Erection of a solar photovoltaic (PV) array, with a total export capacity of up to 21 MW. Each of the solar panels will be mounted on a fixed panel system. The panels are covered by high transparency solar glass with an anti-reflective coating which minimises glare and glint, while aiding in the maximum absorption of the available sunlight. The panels are dark grey/blue in colour and are mounted on a frame of anodized aluminium alloy and galvanized steel.

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This application seeks planning permission for a 21-megawatt solar farm comprising ground mounted solar PV panels, vehicular access from Loudham Hall Road with internal access tracks, landscaping and associated infrastructure including security fencing, CCTV cameras, and grid connection infrastructure including inverter and substation buildings on land at Park Farm, Pettistree.
- 1.2 The application is being presented to Planning Committee South for determination at the request of the Head of Planning and Coastal Management given the scale of development and level of local interest. Members of Planning Committee South carried out a site visit on 25 April 2024 in advance of their formal consideration.
- 1.3 The application proposes renewable energy which, in principle, is supported by both national and local policy. The impacts of the proposed development are such that they can be adequately mitigated against and therefore the application is recommended for approval, subject to controlling conditions.

2. Site Description

- 2.1 The application site comprises an area of approximately 37.08 hectares and is situated within the countryside to the south east of Wickham Market and east of Pettistree. It lies within the Parish of Pettistree and shares its western boundary with the A12. The site consists of agricultural land with a tree copse to the centre of the site (which is outside of the red line site boundary). Two sets of electricity pylons run diagonally through the site. The site would be accessed off Loudham Hall Road, immediately to the south.
- 2.2 There is a permissive path from the northern corner of the site along the western boundary with a PRoW running from approximately halfway down the western boundary in a south easterly direction to Loudham Hall Road. This PRoW also crosses the A12 and joins up with Chapel Lane leading into Wickham Market. Further from the site, the wider PRoW network includes a route to the north of the site (approx. 120m away at its closest point) and also to the east (approx. 240m at its closest point).
- 2.3 The surrounding area is mainly rural, consisting of agricultural land separated by boundary hedgerows, areas of woodland located close to the eastern and adjacent to the south western edges of the site, and a number of small farms and isolated houses.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal involves the installation of a 21MW solar farm. Each of the solar panels will be mounted on a fixed panel system.
- 3.2 Also included as part of the layout are:
 - Substation Area
 - Private Switch
 - Distribution Network Operator (DNO)
 - POC

- Transformer Stations
- Transformer Access Track
- DNO Access Track
- Aux Transformer
- Fencing and CCTV Cameras
- Landscaping Works

3.3 In regard to the design of the array, each of the solar panels will be mounted on a fixed panel system. The panels are covered by high transparency solar glass with an anti-reflective coating which minimises glare and glint, while aiding in the maximum absorption of the available sunlight. The panels are dark grey/blue in colour and are mounted on a frame of anodized aluminium alloy and galvanized steel. The DNO, Aux Transformer, Private Switch Gear, Welfare Unit and 2 Spare Containers will be located to the south western corner of the site. These will be accessible off the DNO Access Track to the south of the site off Loudham Hall Road. Transformer Stations will be positioned at intervals throughout the site and an antenna mast will be located along the western flank, towards the south western corner of the site. The proposed Solar PV array will be connected to the Grid via an onsite, 33kV Overhead Line. The Overhead Line travels from north east to south west over the site.

4. Consultees

Parish Council

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Pettistree Parish Council	4 January 2022 19 February 2024	21 January 2022 11 March 2024
<p>21 January 2022 Pettistree Parish Council do not object to this application. Pettistree Parish Councillors have considered the application and do not find it necessary to make any adverse comment. No adverse comments have been made to us by Pettistree residents.</p> <p>11 March 2024 Pettistree Parish Council objects to this development. This overturns the council's previous decision of 2022.</p> <p>Assessment Overall impact on villages, Pettistree and Loudham, as primarily residential, agricultural and countryside: The proposal will have a significant impact on Loudham, its countryside landscape, river valley and the setting of historical assets: Ashe Abbey and Loudham Hall. There are few properties directly affected but the solar park will change a large area of agricultural land and its flora into industrial use. We note that the water meadow has been removed from the revised plan but the impact of the solar park on river valley views remains a concern. The land is not flat in its entirety and despite screening the panels will be seen on the higher parts of the site.</p>		

Neighbouring Parish Councils

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Wickham Market Parish Council	24 January 2024 19 February 2024	14 February 2022 29 February 2024

14 February 2024

Wickham Market Parish Council objects to this application as we believe that the development would contravene Policies SCLP9.1 Low Carbon and Renewable Energy, SCLP10.1 Biodiversity and Geodiversity and SCLP10.4 Landscape Character.

Mitigations do not enhance biodiversity and the application had an adverse impact on badgers and deer.

29 February 2024

This letter of objection was drafted in January 2022 as the Wickham Market Parish Council Planning Committee response to Planning Application DC/21/5550/FUL Erection of a solar photovoltaic (PV) array application. In the event a significantly shorter response was given using the Planning Portal. The Parish Council are aware that this planning application is still awaiting a decision. In addition, it is noted that ADAS Planning, in a letter dated 12 Sep 22 titled "Rebuttal Letter", has attempted to address our objections along with the objections of others. It is our view that the Rebuttal Letter does not fully address the detail of our objections and hence the Parish Council had decided to submit the original objection letter in full. The letter has also been updated to reflect some of the significant additional information that is now available on the Planning Portal.

The Rebuttal Letter indicates that documents that have already been submitted address the issues we have raised. One such document, the LVA, states:

"The Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) has also been submitted which fully assesses the impacts, both individually and cumulatively with other solar developments, of the development on the surrounding landscape character, residential receptors and viewpoints, and views from PRoW running through or adjacent the site,"

However, the LVA is a subjective document which clearly states:

"It is also not within the scope of this report to determine whether the identified effects should be considered acceptable; the latter is a planning balance decision by which the determining planning authority considers all matters relating to the proposed development."

Wickham Market Parish Council object to the Planning Application DC/21/5550/FUL Erection of a solar photovoltaic (PV) array, with a total export capacity of up to 21 MW At Park Farm Loudham Hall Road Loudham Woodbridge Suffolk IP13 ONW

The reason for our objection is that the application is contrary to three policies in the ESC Local Plan.

In addition, Wickham Market PC is concerned about the poor way that this planning application was publicised by ESC and the Applicant. If planning applications are not correctly publicised the possibility of arriving at the wrong decision is increased. The reasons for our concern regarding ESC are:

- a. The application concerns a development that abuts our parish boundary and the development will be clearly visible to a number of houses and all parishioners who walk in the Deben valley, despite this we were not consulted by ESC until we brought this omission to their attention.
- b. Some key documents were not placed on the planning portal initially. Three key documents, which were appendices of the Landscape Visual Appraisal, were not added until we brought this omission to the notice of the ESC Planning department. It took a reminder from us before they were placed on the planning portal on 1 Feb 22. The date shown on the planning portal incorrectly states that they were posted on 26 Jan 22.
- c. The closing date for comments was not extended to allow for consideration of these documents.
- d. We were only able to find one planning notice posted to inform the public. It is felt that these notices should have been more widely distributed.

Regarding the Applicant the Design and Access statement for the application states that the development was widely publicised, but Wickham Market Parish Council were not informed at any stage until we requested to review the application. The Statement of Community involvement is a key document as it shows that Wickham Market was deliberately left off the area where leaflets were distributed.

The proposed development is in the Deben River valley which used to be classed as a Special Landscape Area. This classification protected the Suffolk river valleys from inappropriate development. This designation has now been removed, but the Landscape Appraisal which supports the local plan makes it very clear that the Deben Valley, along with other Suffolk river valleys, should be afforded a degree of special protection.

At the end of the section on the Deben River valley in the Landscape Appraisal, it gives Strategic Objectives to be followed. Of the seven objectives four apply to the area concerned. They are:

- a. Protect the fine grained enclosure patterns and drainage ditch networks and provide sympathetic management for ecological benefits.
- b. Manage land use in the floodplain in favour of traditional management practices such as grazing by cattle or sheep, and resist conversion to equestrianism, intake to domestic curtilage.
- c. Manage the reversion of arable land back to pasture in the lower reaches via agrienvironment schemes.
- d. Plan for any future expansion of Wickham Market or Ufford to be highly sympathetic to landscape character.

These objectives have translated into policies in the Local Plan. Having considered the application we believe that the development would contravene Policies SCLP9.1 Low Carbon and Renewable Energy, SCLP10.1 Biodiversity and Geodiversity and SCLP10.4 Landscape Character.

As there are no Solar Farms planned in the Local Plan SCLP9.1 states:

The Council will support Neighbourhood Plans in identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy development, particularly where they relate to developments that are community-led. In identifying suitable areas, consideration should be given to the criteria listed below:

- a. They can evidence a sustainable and, ideally, local source of fuel;
- b. They can facilitate the necessary infrastructure and power connections required for functional purposes; and
- c. They are complementary to the existing environment without causing any significant adverse impacts, particularly relating to the residential amenity, landscape and visual impact, the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB, transport, flora and fauna, noise and air quality, unless those impacts can be appropriately mitigated.

We believe that this development will cause significant adverse impact in relation to point “c.” above, particularly regarding both Landscape and Visual Impact and flora and fauna. The proposed scheme occupies sloping valley sides which is visible from many vantage points both within and across the valley and only offering hedge screening is totally inadequate. Concerning the second point there is an array of panels shown that are located right next to the river and these panels are planned to be on piled foundations and installed at a raised level to mitigate flooding issues. The height of these solar panels has been increased following the extensive floods of both last and this year. It is worth noting that this field is a superb wetland habitat which would be seriously compromised if the application is approved. The panels will be visually intrusive and damage the flora and fauna adjacent to the river.

Policy SCLP10.1: Biodiversity and Geodiversity states:

Development will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it maintains, restores or enhances the existing green infrastructure network and positively contributes towards biodiversity and/or geodiversity through the creation of new habitats and green infrastructure and improvement to linkages between habitats, such as wildlife corridors and habitat ‘stepping stones’. All development should follow a hierarchy of seeking firstly to avoid impacts, mitigate for impacts so as to make them insignificant for biodiversity, or as a last resort compensate for losses that cannot be avoided or mitigated for. Adherence to the hierarchy should be demonstrated. Proposals that will have a direct or indirect adverse impact (alone or in-combination with other plans or projects) on locally designated sites of biodiversity or geodiversity importance, including County Wildlife Sites, priority habitats and species, will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated with comprehensive evidence that the benefits of the proposal, in its particular location, outweighs the biodiversity loss. New development should provide environmental net gains in terms of both green infrastructure and biodiversity. Proposals should demonstrate how the development would contribute towards new green infrastructure opportunities or enhance the existing green infrastructure network as part of the development. New development must also secure ecological enhancements as part of its design and implementation, and should provide a biodiversity net gain that is proportionate to the scale and nature of the proposal. Where compensatory habitat is created, it should be of equal or greater size and ecological value than the area lost as a result of the development, be well located to positively contribute towards the green infrastructure network, and biodiversity and/or geodiversity and be supported with a management plan. Where there is reason to suspect the presence of protected UK or Suffolk Priority species or habitat, applications should be supported by an ecological survey and assessment of appropriate scope undertaken by a suitably qualified person. If present, the proposal must follow the mitigation hierarchy in order to be considered favourably. Any proposal that adversely affects a European site, or causes significant harm to a Site of Special Scientific Interest, will not normally be granted permission. Any development with the potential to impact on a Special Protection Area, Special Area for Conservation or Ramsar site within or outside of the plan area will need to be supported by information to inform a Habitat Regulations Assessment, in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended (or subsequent revisions).

The Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy has been prepared to provide a mechanism through which impacts from increased recreation can be avoided and mitigated via financial contributions towards the provision of strategic mitigation. Where mitigation is proposed to be provided through alternative mechanisms, applicants will need to provide evidence to demonstrate that all impacts are mitigated for, including in-combination effects. Depending on the size and location of the development, additional measures such as Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) may be required as part of development proposals.

The Biodiversity Net Gain document submitted with the application covers the processes followed in detail but does not take into account the Landscape Appraisal and hence the conclusions drawn are perhaps flawed. It is our view that the proposed development most certainly does not demonstrate that it maintains, restores or enhances the existing green infrastructure network and positively contributes towards biodiversity and/or geodiversity through the creation of new habitats and green infrastructure and improvement to linkages between habitats, such as wildlife corridors and habitat 'stepping stones'. The proposal accepts that development will cause harm and consequently offers a Landscape Mitigation Plan which is described in the Design and Access statement. The measures proposed are set out below:

- a. Retention of existing hedgerows and trees within proposed layout and allow to grow to a height of 3 to 4m. The tree copse to the centre of the site has been excluded from the site for the purposes of this planning application and will be retained in its current form.
- b. Native hedge planting along a proportion of the northern boundary (eastern, western, and central section).
- c. Native hedge planting along the central part of the site along the PRow.
- d. Species rich grassland and winter stubble area managed for foraging opportunities for bird species.
- e. Creation of a wet shrubland habitat adjacent to the ditch along the eastern boundary of the site.
- f. Creation of a scrub with grassland habitat in the central section of the site.
- g. Improve the block of woodland in the central part of the site to increase biodiversity value.
- h. Existing ditches retained and enhanced for biodiversity.
- i. Bird and bat boxes placed on existing mature trees within proposed site.

Whilst these measures do go in some way to mitigate the impact it is felt that they are totally inadequate for a development of some 32Ha in area.

Finally, the aspects of policy Policy SCLP10.4: Landscape Character that apply to this development are:

Proposals for development should be informed by, and sympathetic to, the special qualities and features as described in the Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment (2018), the Settlement Sensitivity Assessment (2018), or successor and updated landscape evidence. Development proposals will be expected to demonstrate their location, scale, form, design and materials will protect and enhance:

- a. The special qualities and features of the area;
 - b. The visual relationship and environment around settlements and their landscape settings;
 - c. Distinctive landscape elements including but not limited to watercourses, commons, woodland trees, hedgerows and field boundaries, and their function as ecological corridors;
 - d. Visually sensitive skylines, seascapes, river valleys and significant views towards key landscapes and cultural features; and
 - e. The growing network of green infrastructure supporting health, wellbeing and social interaction.
- Development will not be permitted where it will have a significant adverse impact on rural river valleys, historic park and gardens, coastal, estuary, heathland and other very sensitive landscapes. Proposals should include measures that enable a scheme to be well integrated into the landscape and enhance connectivity to the surrounding green infrastructure and Public Rights of Way network.

The development most certainly does not protect or enhance the area in any way.

Around the proposed site there are numerous Public Rights of Way which enable the public to enjoy the picturesque Deben Valley. As most of this development is on raised ground it will be very clearly visible from all angles around the site.

Wickham Market Parish Council therefore object to Planning Application DC/21/5550/FUL for the reasons listed above.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Ufford Parish Council	N/A	27 January 2022
	9 August 2022	23 August 2022
	N/A	17 January 2024
	19 February 2024	20 March 2024

Summary of comments:

27 January 2022

Although the above application is outside of the parish boundary of Ufford, Ufford Parish Council wish to raise concerns over the above application, as set out below:

1. Impact on the Landscape

We are greatly concerned at the impact this Array will have on the visual enjoyment of this part of Pettistree. The height of the panels (necessary due to the sloping nature of the land) will result in these panels towering above existing hedge lines and would have the effect of changing a rural landscape to an industrial one. The quite vast array of solar panels and the ancillary service buildings, with surrounding security fences are certainly not of rural character.

The present view of the site from the junction of PROW 8 and Loudham Hall Road is shown below: The array will be visible across 75% of the horizon from this point and there will be a major negative impact on the character of the landscape of the Deben river valley. This is contrary to the policy in the Local Plan SCLP 10.4 concerning Landscape Character, particularly clause:

d) Visually sensitive skylines, seascapes, river valleys and significant views towards key landscapes and cultural features;

Followed by:

Development will not be permitted where it will have a significant adverse impact on rural river valleys,

Undoubtedly the walk along the PROW Pettistree 7, which crosses the fields of the application site, and other well-used linking footpaths such as PROW 8, would lose all the beauty of views of surrounding countryside and landscape.

2. Agricultural Land

Although the Design and Access Statement claims the land as being ‘part Grade 3b and Grade 4’ (moderate/poor quality), we can find no mention of this in the Ecological Appraisal. This land is in present day use, producing arable crops such as sugar beet and maize in recent years. Our own review of the Natural England criteria for assessment of agricultural land suggests that the land is either Grade 3a or 3b; using the definition below:-

Grade 3 – good to moderate quality agricultural land:

Land with moderate limitations that affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield. Where more demanding crops are grown yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in grades 1 and 2.

Subgrade 3a – good quality agricultural land:

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and less demanding horticultural crops

Subgrade 3b – moderate quality agricultural land:

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally cereals and grass, lower yields of a wider range of crops and high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year.

Source:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-land-assess-proposals-fordevelopment/guide-to-assessing-development-proposals-on-agricultural-land>

We are concerned that the installation of these solar panels will take away this valuable land at a time when the country is trying to become more sustainable rather than reliant on importing food for our population or animal feedstuffs. Whilst the UK seeks to develop green energy sources, this should not be at the expense of agricultural production.

3. Public Right of Way: Pettistree Footpath 7

We would support the comments submitted by the PROW Team at SCC Highways in that PROW 7 Pettistree be kept fully open and as accessible as it is presently. It must also be protected from any glint or glare from the solar panels.

4. Archaeological Survey

We would strongly support the following statement from Rachael Abraham of the SCC Conservation Team:

“...the applicant should be required to provide for an archaeological evaluation of the site prior to the determination of any planning application submitted for this site, to allow for preservation in situ of any sites of national importance that might be defined (and which are still currently unknown).”

23 August 2022

Ufford Parish Council would like to reiterate its previous comments on this proposed development. Especially our concern for the impact on the visual enjoyment of this part of Pettistree and the major negative impact on the character of the landscape of the Deben River valley. We are also still concerned about the impact on Footpath Pettistree 7 and the glint/glare from the solar panels.

17 January 2024

The above application was discussed for a third time by Ufford Parish Council at their meeting on 16th January 2024. In addition to our previous two letters (available on the Portal), we would like to raise the following additional concerns:

1. Effect on the Landscape Character

The proposed solar farm is to be situated in the River Deben valley and the siting of the array of panels will have a devastating effect on the landscape character of the area. The sheer scale of the development would dominate the rural valley views from both the Campsea Ashe and Loudham sides of valley. The proposed application will be a contradiction of Policy SCLP10.4 of the current Local Plan; this specifically states that "development will not be permitted where it will have a significant effect on rural river valleys...". This is a particularly pretty area of the Deben Valley and these solar panels and their associated hardware will completely dominate and spoil the area.

20 March 2024

With reference to the above proposed development, Ufford Parish Council would firstly like to support the comments made recently by both Wickham Market and Pettistree Parish Councils in very comprehensive letters to you. We note that the site appears to have been reduced in one are, but altered in another, so as to retain the enormous scale

We would also like to re-iterate our previous correspondence (logged on the Portal) that we object to this proposal on the grounds of:

1. Impact on the Landscape
2. Loss of Agricultural Land
3. Effect on the Public Right of Way through the site and
4. The need for a full Archaeological Survey

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Campsea Ashe Parish Council	N/A	16 February 2022
	9 August 2022	31 August 2022
	19 February 2024	N/A

16 February 2022

We refer to above application, to which we would like you to register our objection.

Campsea Ashe PC in principle totally supports the effort to increase the generation of renewable energy.

We like to express our grave concern, that Campsea Ashe, as a parish immediately affected by this development has not been officially consulted nor even informed by your department on a proposal that affects our residents.

With regards to the application, we totally support the effort to increase the generation of renewable energy.

1 However, we do feel that ESC Planning are missing many opportunities to establish that goal, especially by not encouraging the use of brown field sites (i.e. such as Nottcutts site in Ufford, Bentwaters, ..) or more importantly, by not compelling new build to include (compulsory inclusion) of solar technology, and thus avoiding major environmental impacts and loss of habitats and agricultural land, projects like this inherit. If both of these low impact policies would be enshrined in a truly strategic approach to Net Zero, the need for such projects would reduce immensely, creating a long term benefit to our area.

2 The Deben Valley is a highly valued landscape, having - somehow - lost its SLA status in the last Local Plan. It forms a highly valued and beautiful setting, being used constantly as an amenity by our residents. The proposed solar park will have a huge impact on the valley.

3 The lower parts of the fields in the proposal, sloping down towards the valley will have the largest visual impact for walkers, especially with those panels requiring to be lifted higher off the ground. There could be an argument for only the upper field to be developed in such a way, already to a degree shielded by hedges and trees from the south and north / east.

4 As the Suffolk Preservation Society points out, the in part very high elevation of the panels implies, that the land is not appropriate for the purpose. In general, our concerns are mirrored in the letter of objection sent to you by the Suffolk Preservation Society.

31 August 2022

Campsea Ashe PC wishes to re-iterate their original concerns and objection. Whilst noting that changes have been made with regards to planting and widening of the footpath along the proposed site, we remain concerned about the major visual impact this development will have on the Deben river valley landscape. We wish to state again, that such development and it's inherent loss of environmental assets as well as agricultural land would be unnecessary, if a more co-ordinated and joined-up planning approach to renewables would be in place.

Statutory consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC Rights Of Way	4 January 2022	10 January 2022
	9 August 2022	No reply
	19 February 2024	No reply
Summary of comments: The proposed development has been accepted subject to the PROW Position Statement.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC Highways Department	4 January 2022	24 February 2022
	N/A	8 August 2022
	6 October 2022	20 October 2022
	N/A	5 December 2022
	N/A	8 February 2023

24 February 2022

Comments regarding access, details of ducting and their routes to be addressed prior to an approval.

8 August 2022

Comments regarding access, details of ducting and their routes to be addressed prior to an approval.

20 October 2022

The previous comments dated 24th February 2022 have not been fully addressed and therefore still apply.

5 December 2022

No objections. A number of controlling conditions are recommended.

8 February 2023

No objections. A number of controlling conditions are recommended.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Natural England	4 January 2022	24 January 2022
	9 August 2022	27 August 2022
	19 February 2024	27 February 2024
24 January 2022 NO OBJECTION		

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites or landscapes.

27 August 2022

NO OBJECTION

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites.

27 February 2024

Natural England is not able to provide specific advice on this application and therefore has no comment to make on its details.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC Flooding Authority	24 February 2022	28 February 2022
	9 August 2022	25 August 2022
	4 April 2023	25 April 2023
	13 June 2023	4 July 2023
	19 February 2024	12 March 2024

28 February 2022

Holding Objection.

A holding objection is necessary because whilst it is acknowledged that the impacts of solar farms on natural hydrology are limited, the impacts do still require some more detailed consideration. Attached is an report on the topic. SCC LLFA are also aware of local guidance issued by Essex County Council for such work and are in the process of developing our own guidance. In the absence of this guidance being published, SCC LLFA encourage applicants for solar array applications to actively engage with us to agree a suitable way forward.

25 August 2022

The following submitted document has been reviewed and we recommend a holding objection at this time:

- RSK, Flood Risk Assessment, 882198-R1(02)-FRA, 06/12/2021

A holding objection is necessary because whilst it is acknowledged that the impacts of solar farms on natural hydrology are limited, the impacts do still require some more detailed consideration.

25 April 2023

The following submitted documents have been reviewed and the LLFA recommends a holding objection at this time:

- Figure 7: Landscape Masterplan 1051074-BSR9001-TOW-L-007
- Flood Risk Assessment 882198-R1(02)-FRA Rev.02 (06-12-21)

A holding objection is necessary because the applicant should provide further technical details.

4 July 2023

We have reviewed the following submitted documents and we recommend approval of this application subject to conditions.

12 March 2024

We have reviewed the following submitted documents and we recommend approval of this application subject to conditions.

1. Flood Risk Assessment 680695-R1(0)-FRA(15-02-2024)
2. 680695 L03(01) LLFA (12-06-2023)

3. 680695 L02(00) LLFA (16-03-2023)

4. Landscape Masterplan 1051074-BSR9001-TOW-L-007 Rev.04 (25-05-2023)

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Environment Agency - Drainage	4 January 2022	3 February 2022
	9 August 2022	7 September 2022
	19 February 2024	27 February 2024

3 February 2022
Thank you for your consultation dated 4 January 2022. We have inspected the application as submitted and have no objection, providing that you have taken into account the flood risk considerations which are your responsibility.

7 September 2022
The comments provided in our letter dated 3 February 2022 remain valid.

27 February 2024
Thank you for your re-consultation dated 19 February 2024 for the above application. We have reviewed the submitted documents and have no objection to this planning application. We have also provided additional comments on Flood risk

Non statutory consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC County Archaeological Unit	24 January 2022	6 January 2022
	22 February 2022	1 March 2022
	22 December 2023	15 January 2024

6 January 2022
In order to establish the archaeological potential of the site, a geophysical survey will be required in the first instance. The geophysical survey results will be used to make a decision on the timing and extent of trial trenched evaluation which is required at this site.

The results of the evaluation should be presented as part of any planning application for this site, along with a detailed strategy for further investigation and appropriate mitigation. The results should inform the development to ensure preservation in situ of any previously unknown nationally important heritage assets within the development area.

1 March 2022
Requested the submission of a geophysical survey due to the scale of the development.

15 January 2024
There are no grounds to consider refusal of permission in order to achieve preservation in situ of any important heritage assets. However, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraph 211), any permission granted should be the subject of a planning condition to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage asset before it is damaged or destroyed.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Ecology	4 January 2022	25 January 2022
	9 August 2022	No reply
	19 February 2024	11 March 2024

25 January 2022

I have read the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) (ADAS, June 2021); Wintering Bird Survey (ADAS, July 2021); Breeding Bird Survey (ADAS, July 2021); Badger Non-Licensed Method Statement (ADAS, June 2021); Reptile Non-Licensed Method Statement (ADAS, June 2021); Great Crested Newt File Note (ADAS, April 2021); Information to Inform Habitats Regulations Assessment report (ADAS, August 2021) and the Biodiversity Net Gain report (ADAS, November 2021) and am satisfied with the conclusions of the consultant. The layout of the solar panels avoids the areas of greatest ecological importance on the site (particularly the areas of woodland, hedgerows and scrub) and the development offers the opportunity to secure long term habitat improvements as part of the landscaping scheme. These enhancements and their long term management should be identified and implemented via a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP), secured by conditions.

11 March 2024

Updated ecological assessment of the proposed development is required as field surveys are now outdated. An ecologist should undertake an updated site visit to ascertain if there have been significant changes in habitats present, and usage by protected/notable species. If there has been a significant change, a new Preliminary Ecological Appraisal should be undertaken, and further surveys completed (as required).

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Landscape Team	4 January 2022	21 February 2022
	8 August 2022	26 August 2022
	13 June 2023	28 June 2023
	19 February 2024	28 February 2024

4 January 2022

I have reviewed the submitted documents in relation to landscape and tree matters in respect of this proposal to create a solar array at Park Farm, Loudham, and I can advise you as follows.

At the Pre-Application stage of the planning of this development, I advised as follows:

I suggest that the enquirer's attention is drawn to the following statement included in Local Plan Policy SCLP10.4 Landscape Character which states 'Development will not be permitted where it will have a significant adverse impact on rural river valleys'. The NW sector of the described array would seem to be included in river meadows, and indeed the rest of the array will be set on valley sides, so impacts on these sensitive landscape character areas and types will come under close scrutiny, as will visual impacts from PROWs adjacent to, and running through the site. Where any assessment identifies the need for mitigation measures, these will need to be included with submitted documents and they will need to be shown to be appropriate to the local landscape

character, and effective for the purpose of mitigation of identified impacts.

This current response will consider whether these issues have been addressed amongst other considerations. The submitted LVIA notes the relevance of Suffolk Coastal Local Plan Policy SCLP10.4 Landscape Character and goes on to identify that the application site falls within Suffolk Coastal Landscape

Character Assessment' (2018) B7 Deben Valley Landscape Character Area (LCA) with a small southern section of the site falling within N1 Boulge Park and Bredfield Rolling Farmland LCA. The submitted assessment concludes, having considered a range of factors, that the value of the site and its immediate surroundings is Medium in LVIA terms. I agree that it is also not a valued landscape in terms of Para 170 of the NPPF.

The rest of the comments are in the report.

26 August 2022

I note that a revised Landscape Masterplan (Rev E) has been submitted in respect of this application for a new solar farm at Loudham. This latest revision covers an increase to the width of the central footpath corridor to 10 metres before new hedge planting will be planted to screen the solar arrays (which are consequently also set back) for users of the footpath. This revision addresses my previous concern that the mitigation planted as formerly shown could be regarded as adverse in visual impact terms because it would have blocked views over the surrounding landscape that would have previously been freely available. I can advise that this current revised layout is an acceptable solution to resolve this particular issue.

28 June 2023

I have reviewed the latest submitted landscape masterplan in respect of this application for a solar photovoltaic array and which now includes an indicative planting palette in comparison to previous versions. The given plant list is generally acceptable although I would wish to see some additional species in the hedge planting mix (such as *Acer campestre*, *Ilex aquifolium*). This needn't be a bar to further progress of the application and can be addressed at discharge of Condition stage should planning permission be granted. Otherwise I'm happy to proceed on the basis of the most recently submitted information.

28 February 2024

An updated arboricultural report has been submitted with the aim of providing further information and clarification on tree management and tree protection measures as required by the proposed development. The document and accompanying plans are intended to be supplementary to the previously submitted tree survey and impact assessment report. There is no change to the previously advised levels of required tree removal (it remains at none apart from a section of a group of trees that needs to be removed to achieve access off Loudham Hall Road). The contents of this report and its accompanying plans are acceptable and should be added to the schedule of approved plans should planning permission be granted. Specifically they are:

Arboricultural Planning Statement dated February 2024 and accompanying Appendices 1-14.

In respect of landscape related matters, the change to the red line boundary is noted and previously submitted comments remain valid.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
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East Suffolk Economic Development	4 January 2022 8 February 2022 19 February 2024	24 January 2022 None received None received
Summary of comments: The East Suffolk Economic Development Teams supports the planning application.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Ward Councillor	22 February 2022	7 February 2022

Summary of comments:

What concerns me here is that because solar farm applications should follow normal local planning guidelines, this application falls foul of Local Plan Policy SCLP 10.4 which has a presumption against development which will have a 'significant adverse impact on rural river valleys' and this of course is in the Deben river valley. Knowing the area well, I know many of the residents of Wickham Market in particular feel somewhat under siege and understandably so, with the new Hopkins Homes developments including in neighbouring Pettistree and the 'Park and Ride' at the northern end of the village should Sizewell C get the go ahead. This is entirely relevant because a holistic view is needed - a view which the privatisation of energy originating in the 1980's has made extremely difficult because there is very little joined up thinking of energy infrastructure and loss of control of the overall picture both at local and central government levels.

As a Green, I am pro-solar of course but these decisions should not be binary choices in isolation of the other proposed energy projects in the area. It is also especially galling to see new build housing STILL going up with no solar PV on roofs as standard when that should absolutely be happening and on our municipal buildings roofs also FIRST. To damage (which despite anti-glare measures this would) such a special greenbelt landscape is lamentable.

In summary, while not an outright objection, for me, there remain too many unresolved issues at this stage for me to form an outright for or against position. Whilst absolutely pro-Solar, serious thought needs to be given to the above concerns, especially as the same company have also submitted plans to build a similar development just up the road at Kelsale.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Suffolk Preservation Society	22 February 2022 9 August 2022	14 February 2022 6 September 2022

14 February 2022
Objection.

Accordingly, notwithstanding the fact that the site is impacted by large scale infrastructure we object to this application on the grounds of: harm to landscape character and visual impact on the Deben Valley, and loss of amenity for all users of the network of footpaths and bridleway, looking west across the valley at approximately 25m AOD, through, and adjoining the site.

6 September 2022
Objection.

The objection still stands as set out in detail in the previous letter dated 14 February 2022.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Water Management Alliance	N/A 19 February 2024	4 October 2022 No reply

Summary of comments:

The Board's Officers have reviewed the documents submitted in support of the above planning application. Officers have noted works which may require Land Drainage Consent from the Board as outlined in the table below and detailed overleaf. Please be aware of the potential for conflict between the planning process and the Board's regulatory regime.

Where consents are required, the Board strongly recommends that these are sought from the Board prior to determination of this planning application.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Environmental Protection	26 September 2022 N/A N/A 21 July 2023 19 February 2024	3 October 2022 6 October 2022 14 October 2022 25 August 2023 21 March 2024

3 October 2022

Thank you for your consultation regarding the proposed development above. The Environmental Protection department has no comments in relation to this application.

6 October 2022

Further to my response of 3rd October, it has come to my attention that noise assessment was carried out in 2021. I propose to view the report and will then provide further comments where necessary.

14 October 2022

I do not currently accept the noise impact assessment and conclusions made. The receptor 'The Lodge' must be investigated with a view to inclusion within a revised assessment report.

The Environmental Protection Team are prepared to consider a noise rating level of 30 dBA at noise sensitive receptors and therefore at this stage we request that a mitigation scheme be considered and submitted for consideration whether that be through relocation of inverter stations, or by attenuation/mitigation of the noise sources contributing to predicted levels at Sand Pit House and 1-2 Mill Lane.

25 August 2023

No Objection.

I am satisfied with the revised and updated noise impact assessment and the outcomes presented. I am satisfied that with full implementation of the noise mitigation measures in

accordance with the RSK Acoustics Noise Assessment Report (Ref. 2060448-RSK-RP-001-(01)) dated 11 July 2023, then the scheme would result in a low impact from noise only at noise sensitive receptors.

If there are any changes to the proposed noise mitigation, site layout, positioning of the inverter stations, or changes to the inverter and transformer station plant items/specification then the noise assessment would need to be further updated to ensure the assessment outcomes remain satisfactory.

21 March 2024

In conclusion, I have no objections to the proposed development.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Suffolk Wildlife Trust	4 January 2022	No reply
	9 August 2022	No reply
	19 February 2024	29 February 2024
<p>Summary of comments: We welcome the proposed species-specific enhancement; it would be beneficial to see these clearly marked on a landscape plan or similar post-develop map. Detail of specification, installation, purpose, and maintenance should also be included alongside relevant responsibility for installation and maintenance.</p>		

Consultees who have not responded:

Cadent Gas
 East Suffolk Council Design and Heritage

Publicity

The application has been the subject of the following press advertisement:

Publication	Published date	Expiry date	Reason
East Anglian Daily Times	6 January 2022	27 January 2022	Public Right of Way Affected Major Application

Site notices

Site Notice Type	Date Posted	Expiry date	Reason
General Site Notice	14 January 2022	4 February 2022	In the Vicinity of Public Right of Way Major Application

6. Third Party Representations

- 6.1 The main reasons for objection are summarised as follows:
- Impact on Deben River Valley.

- Contrary to SCLP9.1 as the proposal is of very large scale in attractive landscape and special qualities of the upper Deben Valley visible from a number of PROW which will adversely affect the experience for those walking in the area.
- The mitigation proposals are nowhere near sufficient to reduce visual impact - even more so in winter.
- The proposal is not temporary – 40 years is permanent.
- Loudham Hall Road is becoming increasingly busy with agricultural, commercial and private traffic becoming a "rat run".
- Valley floor is subject to flooding and visited by animals, such as deer and by wading birds.
- Agricultural land should be reserved for the production of food.
- Solar should be provided on brownfield sites or existing buildings. Demonstrates failure in local/national planning policy - if the compulsory inclusion of solar panel for new builds was in place, the demand on green field sites and the subsequent loss of habitat and/or agricultural productive land would be much less.
- Impact of noise on residential amenity of Sandpit House.
- Would result in the industrialisation of a valued landscape, profoundly diminishing the character and beauty of countryside of high environmental and historic value.
- Views would be possible from far afield.
- Rainfall causes run off of water/sand/silt from the site onto Loudham Hall Road and Sandpit House.
- Would not protect the natural beauty and biodiversity of the Suffolk landscape.
- Would open the floodgates to similar planning applications for the Deben Valley.
- No information on how the site will be connected to the National Grid.
- Flood risk could easily change due to climate change.
- Will result in cumulative visual impacts with other developments impacting landscape character.
- Permissive path should become formalised.
- The juxtaposition of Sandpit House to the site and cumulative impact of power lines and pylons with the solar farm is a concern in terms of health implications.
- Needs to be a district or county wide approach to the siting of solar energy installations i.e. a plan led approach.

6.2 Those supporting, or not raising objection to the proposal make the following points:

- Nothing will outweigh the good of the renewable energy development.
- While the views from the rights of way are indeed beautiful, due to trees and hedges, it seems unlikely that they will be interfered with. The view from PROW 7 would be affected but is not particularly appealing at present, passing under a large powerline and the expressway segment of the A12.
- The solar farm would be built on farmland outside of the natural area around the river Deben. While it is good to protect the woodland and other high-quality environments along the river, this farmland does not count as such.
- As the hedgerows and the copse are to be kept, the change of use will be beneficial to local wildlife.
- It would massively reduce the dependence on the National Grid.
- Solar panels emit no emissions.

- The investment in solar is to be applauded but it is also important to retain the existing landscape as much as possible.

7. Planning policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

SCLP3.1 - Strategy for Growth (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP3.3 - Settlement Boundaries (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP7.1 - Sustainable Transport (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP9.1 - Low Carbon & Renewable Energy (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP9.5 - Flood Risk (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP9.6 - Sustainable Drainage Systems (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP10.1 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP10.3 - Environmental Quality (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP10.4 - Landscape Character (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP11.1 - Design Quality (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP11.2 - Residential Amenity (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP11.7 - Archaeology (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP12.34 – Economic Development in the Rural Areas (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

8. Planning Considerations

Principle of development

- 8.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Council's Development Plan in the context of this application consists of the East Suffolk Council – Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (Local Plan), adopted September 2020.
- 8.2 Other material considerations to the determination of the application include the National Planning Policy Framework (2023), from herein referred to as the NPPF; the National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG); and the Climate Change Act 2008, which commits the UK government by law to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% against the 1990 baseline by 2050.
- 8.3 It is also material that the Council declared a climate emergency at the Full Council meeting on Wednesday 24 July 2019. In doing so, the Council made the following pledges:
- To set up a Cross Party Task Group, to investigate ways to cut the Council's carbon and harmful emissions, with an ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030;
 - To work with Suffolk County Council and other partners across the county and region towards the aspiration of making the county of Suffolk carbon neutral by 2030; and
 - To work with Government to deliver its 25 year Environmental Plan, and increase the powers and resources available to local authorities in order to make the 2030 target easier to achieve.
- 8.4 Turning to the proposed development specifically, the application site is located outside of any settlement boundary, meaning that it is located within the Countryside for the purposes of Policies SCLP3.2 (Settlement Hierarchy) and SCLP3.3 (Settlement Boundaries). Policy SCLP3.3 does not reference developments in the Countryside outside employment, town centre, or residential uses.
- 8.5 Policy SCLP9.1 (Low Carbon and Renewable Energy) states that the Council will support low carbon and renewable energy developments where the following criteria can be met:
- a) They can evidence a sustainable and, ideally, local source of fuel;
 - b) They can facilitate the necessary power connections required for functional purposes; and
 - c) They are complementary to the existing environment without cause any significant adverse impacts, particularly relate to the residential amenity, landscape and visual impact, the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB, transport, flora, fauna, noise and air quality, unless those impacts can be appropriately mitigated.
- 8.6 Policy SCLP9.1 concludes by stating that when renewable energy developments are no longer operational, there is a requirement for the development to be decommissioned and removed, with the site completely restored to its original condition.
- 8.7 Paragraph 9.2 of the supporting text of SCLP9.1 in the adopted Local Plan says that the former Suffolk Coastal area (within which this site is located) can contribute towards the generation of renewable energy including through solar power schemes. Paragraph 9.7 goes on to state that "Solar panel schemes will generally be supported, particularly in new

development. Careful consideration will be given to the visual impact in sensitive locations including through design, siting and, where possible, natural screening."

- 8.8 Like the above legislative and policy objectives, paragraph 157 of the NPPF highlights that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate by, amongst other matters, supporting renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 8.9 Paragraph 158 of the NPPF sets out the national policy that supports the provision of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. Furthermore, paragraph 163 of the NPPF explains 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 or low carbon energy and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. It goes on to explicitly state that local planning authorities should approve an application for such development if its impacts are, or can be made, acceptable.
- 8.10 The proposal involves the provision of renewable energy and would produce enough renewable electricity to power just over 5000 homes per year. With regards to the principal requirements of Policy SCLP9.1, the proposed development would convert readily available solar energy to electricity, thereby satisfying criterion a) referenced above.
- 8.11 Regarding criterion b), the applicant has stated the connection to the grid is via an overhead line on site. There is sufficient certainty that the necessary connection from the proposed development to the grid can be satisfactorily achieved, fulfilling criterion b).
- 8.12 The remaining requirements set out under criterion c) of Policy SCLP9.1 relate to the environmental impacts of the proposed development which are discussed under the subsequent headings of this report.
- 8.13 The principle of low carbon and renewable energy development is well established within both national and local planning policy and guidance. Applications for renewable energy schemes within East Suffolk must therefore be supported in line with planning policy requirements and local commitments. Appropriate weight has therefore been given to the positive contribution that this development would make towards meeting national and local carbon reduction targets.
- 8.14 It is proposed that the solar farm would have an operational lifespan of 40 years, after which point the development would be decommissioned, removed, and the site completely restored to its original condition in accordance with Policy SCLP9.1. A condition is recommended to secure this requirement.
- 8.15 To summarise, the principle of the proposed development is considered to be acceptable under the provision of Policy SCLP9.1. Likewise, the principle of the proposed development would be consistent with the relevant objectives contained within the NPPF, whilst also contributing towards the achievement of local and national climate change targets.
- 8.16 The Planning Statement notes that grid connectivity is one of the main restrictions when reviewing and assessing a suitable site for solar development, with areas being limited due to available grid infrastructure and capacity, as well as the potential to secure a viable

connection. The Statement concludes that the site is in a suitable location in respect of access to grid connections.

- 8.17 The site for this proposed development is greenfield land. The Statement notes that whilst a development of this type on brownfield land would be preferable, there were no brownfield sites considered to be suitable in this area. The Statement also notes an alternative brownfield site would need to be available for the operational life of 40 years which is commercially difficult given competing land uses for residential and commercial development. The Statement concludes that as a result of the above considerations and restrictions, that the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area.
- 8.18 Further consideration in relation to the suitability of sites is in relation to levels of sunshine. The Planning Statement sets out that the site's open, rural location, and the fact that it is not shaded by any nearby features in the landscape, make it highly suitable for this type of development, being able to generate more electricity than at some other locations.
- 8.19 Notwithstanding the above, whilst the principle of the proposed development is considered to be acceptable, the overall acceptability of the proposed development is dependent on an assessment of the proposed development against the remaining, relevant policies of the Development Plan, which will be discussed further under the respective headings below.

Agricultural Land

- 8.20 Policy SCLP10.3 states that development proposals will be expected to protect the quality of the environment by, amongst other matters, giving consideration to the impacts upon soil and the loss of agricultural land.
- 8.21 Paragraph 180 of the NPPF explains that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other matters, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Footnote 62 to paragraph 181 of the NPPF advises that, where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. Annex 2 of the NPPF defines best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land as land within grades 1, 2, and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.
- 8.22 The application is accompanied by an Agricultural Land Classification report, prepared by ADAS and dated July 2021, which identifies that the land comprises Grade 3b and Grade 4 agricultural land. Grade 3b land is moderate quality agricultural land, with Grade 4 land comprising poor quality agricultural land. Neither of these classifications fall within the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land classifications.
- 8.23 The submitted Planning Statement notes that once decommissioned, the site can be quickly reverted to agricultural use.

- 8.24 Natural England made no objection to the planning application, and did not make detailed comments on BMV agricultural land as the proposed development would not lead to the loss of over 20 hectares of BMV agricultural land.
- 8.25 The proposed development would not result in the loss of any BMV agricultural land. After the 40-year operational period has passed, the site would be returned to its full agricultural use. The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy SCP10.3 which requires consideration to be given to the impacts of development on soil quality and the loss of agricultural land. Likewise, the proposed development would accord with the relevant objectives contained in the NPPF.

Design

- 8.26 Policy SCLP11.1 (Design) establishes a general requirement for all new development to reflect local distinctiveness and incorporate high-quality design principles with regards to appearance, scale, layout, and landscaping. Similarly, Paragraph 135 of the NPPF details that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area.
- 8.27 From a purely design and appearance perspective, as opposed to the landscape and visual impacts which will be discussed further below, the proposed development would involve the installation of a large number of solar panels in a series of rows, oriented east to west. The panels themselves have a scale, design, and appearance typical for a solar farm which is not objectionable.
- 8.28 In regard to the design of the arrays, each of the solar panels will be mounted on a fixed panel system. The panels are covered by high transparency solar glass with an anti-reflective coating which minimises glare and glint, while aiding in the maximum absorption of the available sunlight. The panels are dark grey/blue in colour and are mounted on a frame of anodized aluminium alloy and galvanized steel.
- 8.29 The DNO, Aux Transformer, Private Switch Gear, Welfare Unit and 2 Spare Containers will be located to the south western corner of the site. These will be accessible off the DNO Access Track to the south of the site off Loudham Hall Road. Transformer Stations will be positioned at intervals throughout the site and an antenna mast will be located along the western flank, towards the south western corner of the site. These elements would also have a design that is considered to be acceptable in the context of a solar development. They would not be overly large in scale or dominant in appearance.
- 8.30 New landscaping is proposed as part of the development to mitigate landscape impacts. Therefore, in terms of design, the proposed development would accord with Policy SCLP11.1, as well as the relevant objectives contained within the NPPF. It is however recognised that the proposed development would result in landscape and visual impacts which are discussed in the section below.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- 8.31 Policy SCLP10.4 Landscape Character - notes that development proposals will be expected to demonstrate their location, scale, form, design and materials will protect and enhance the special qualities and features of the area; the visual relationship and environment

around settlements and their landscape settings; distinctive landscape elements; visually sensitive skylines, seascapes, river valleys and significant views towards key landscapes and cultural features; and the growing network of green infrastructure. It goes on to note that proposals should include measures that enable a scheme to be well integrated into the landscape and enable connectivity to the surrounding green infrastructure and Public Rights of Way network.

- 8.32 Policy SCLP10.4 also specifies that development will not be permitted where it would have a significant adverse impact on the natural beauty and special qualities of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (now Essex and Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscape), that cannot be mitigated.
- 8.33 These policy objectives are reflected within the NPPF, including the requirement to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- 8.34 The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal, prepared by RSK ADAS Ltd, dated November 2021. The LVIA assesses the baseline landscape and visual characteristics of the site and its surroundings; identifies and assess the potential impacts of the proposed development upon the established baseline; and identifies, where possible, suitable mitigation measures to reduce the adverse impacts of the proposed development to an acceptable level.
- 8.35 At pre-application advice stage, the Council's Principal Landscape and Arboriculture Officer fed into the advice given and set out that Local Plan Policy SCLP10.4 Landscape Character states 'Development will not be permitted where it will have a significant adverse impact on rural river valleys'. The NW sector of the described array at that time seemed to include river meadows, with the rest of the array set on valley sides. It was therefore advised that impacts on these sensitive landscape character areas and types would come under close scrutiny, as will visual impacts from PROWs adjacent to, and running through the site if a formal application were made. The advice went on to note that where any assessment identifies the need for mitigation measures, these will need to be included with submitted documents and they will need to be shown to be appropriate to the local landscape character, and effective for the purpose of mitigation of identified impacts.
- 8.36 The submitted LVIA within the formal application notes the relevance of Suffolk Coastal Local Plan Policy SCLP10.4 Landscape Character and goes on to identify that the application site falls within Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment (2018) B7 Deben Valley Landscape Character Area (LCA) with a small southern section of the site falling within N1 Boulge Park and Bredfield Rolling Farmland LCA. The submitted assessment concludes, having considered a range of factors, that the value of the site and its immediate surroundings is Medium in LVIA terms. It is agreed that, in NPPF terms, it is not a 'valued landscape'. There is no clear published guidance as to how to assess if a landscape is 'valued' in the way that is meant in Paragraph 180a of the NPPF and it is a subject that has been keenly debated under Appeal conditions and in some cases, subsequent legal challenges to Inspector's conclusions on the matter. Many areas of countryside are understandably valued by local residents, but to be considered 'valued' in the context of the NPPF, there needs to be something 'special' or out of the ordinary that can be defined.

- 8.37 The LVIA goes on to assess the degree of Susceptibility of the site i.e. the ability of the landscape to accommodate the development without undue consequences for the maintenance of its existing qualities. This is judged to be Medium because there will be little direct impact on the physical features of the site and the site will ultimately be decommissioned and returned to its existing state, albeit over a fairly substantial time period. In LVIA terms, 40 years should be regarded as permanent. There will however be a clear perceived change in the character of the landscape although it is stated that this is contained visually by the prevailing landform. This position is not challenged on the whole with the exception of for the users of the PROW that runs through the centre of the site. In terms of overall sensitivity (combining value and susceptibility), the LVIA considers this to be Medium with landscapes of local or regional recognition of importance able to accommodate some change, which is considered to be a realistic conclusion.
- 8.38 The anticipated construction phase is relatively short (3 to 6 months) and it will bring some additional impacts over the operational phase but these will be minor (adverse) but slight in effect given their short term and low scale. Considering the operational phase, the proposed development will have very little impact on existing landscape features. The submitted arboricultural survey report states that no existing trees need to be removed to achieve the proposed development. Where access routes need to cross root zones of existing trees, this can be done using approved ground protection methods to minimise any damage to roots. A short section of hedge does need to be removed, but the proposed programme of new planting will lead to increased overall hedgerow length on the site which is regarded as beneficial to landscape character. The fundamental surface use of the site when reverted to pasture, will remain essentially agricultural.
- 8.39 The report correctly acknowledges that the presence of the solar farm will nonetheless fundamentally alter the character of the landscape of the site and its immediate surrounds, and this is rightly recorded as a Major Adverse change giving rise to a Large level of effect both on completion and after 15 years. This conclusion refers to the local context of the site. In respect of wider published landscape character area/types, these effects are negligible for the national classification, and slight for the District level assessment.
- 8.40 The biggest area of concern in this respect originally concerned the area of solar array that falls on the valley floor, which is regarded as a particularly sensitive landscape and which is addressed in Local Plan policy. However, this particular section of the Deben valley is to a degree compromised in its sensitivity by the presence of the overhead power lines and pylons, and by the water treatment site. However, the revised proposal, which is that which is now being considered for determination, omits the array within the valley floor.
- 8.41 Turning now to issues of potential visual impact, the visual receptors with greatest sensitivity will be users of the local PROW network especially the footpath that crosses the site. A number of viewpoints around and within the site, all on points of public access, have been selected. (Note: in the photomontage section of the LVIA, the montages for VP8 are incorrectly labelled as VP7). In respect of users of the footpath that runs through the site, (VPs 4, & 5 plus 2 as users join off the road), the solar array will cause a major adverse magnitude of change to the view with Major effects in the early years after installation. These effects will only moderate as the new hedge planting either side of the footpath matures. Initially, concern was raised that as hedging matures, outward views of the wider landscape as currently enjoyed would be limited. A revised plan includes an increase to the

width of the central footpath corridor to 10 metres before new hedge planting will be planted to screen the solar arrays for users of the footpath. This revision addresses the previous concern that the mitigation planting as formerly shown could be regarded as adverse in visual impact terms because it would have blocked views over the surrounding landscape that would have previously been freely available.

- 8.42 Views of the southern portion of the site from the land to the south of the site (VPs 1 and 2) will also have major effects on them which cannot be wholly mitigated by new planting, and which only reduce to moderate effects after 15 years. Views from the north (VPs 7 and 8) are more interrupted by intervening vegetation which will be supplemented by new hedgerow planting to reduce moderate effects to minor, although these are views from within the valley floor. VP7 is also representative of views from the residential property called 1 and 2 Fowls Watering. It is anticipated that views from the principal room would suffer moderate adverse effects initially, reducing to minor over time as new planting matures. Other properties are not anticipated to be affected in any meaningful way.
- 8.43 In respect of road users in cars, slight effects will be experienced by those on Loudham Hall Road with only glimpsed views as planting matures. Other road users are unlikely to experience any meaningful effects.
- 8.44 A landscape masterplan is submitted with the overall package of material and in general this covers enhanced site boundary planting and management of existing hedges to enhance their screening ability. New planting is also included either side of the PROW that runs through the site. Other measures to enhance ecological value are also included. Their effectiveness in delivering the anticipated mitigation will of course depend in the quality of delivery and careful scrutiny of planting specifications will be required.
- 8.45 Overall, this proposed solar array will have a major impact (as recognised in the LVIA) on the character and visual qualities of this section of the Deben Valley which cannot initially be mitigated. However, the extent of these impacts is largely limited to the site itself and its immediate surrounds, and if the new planting is as successful as predicted, they should be temporally limited.

Arboriculture – Trees and Hedges

- 8.46 Policy SCLP10.4 states that, amongst other matters, development proposals will be expected to demonstrate that their location, scale, form, design and materials will protect and enhance distinctive landscape elements including trees, hedgerows, and field boundaries, and their function as ecological corridors. Likewise, Policy SCLP10.1 requires developments to maintain, restore, or enhance the existing green infrastructure network and positive contribute towards biodiversity and/or geodiversity through the creation of new habitats and green infrastructure and improvement to linkages between habitats. Paragraph 136 of the NPPF highlights the importance of trees for helping to mitigate against and adapt to climate change and requires existing trees to be 'retained wherever possible'.
- 8.47 An updated Arboricultural Planning Statement has been submitted (RSK ADAS, February 2024) following revisions to the site boundary and layout. The Statement provides reference and clarification on aspects of tree protection and any necessary tree

management works for the proposed development and sets out a methodology for all proposed works that may affect trees which are to be retained on and adjacent to the site.

- 8.48 The report notes a total of 71 tree features consisting of 46 individual trees, 20 groups of trees and five hedgerows on the site. Of the 71 tree features on site at the time of the survey, none will need to be fully removed to facilitate the proposed development. However, a circa 12.5m section of one category B tree group (G17) will require removal to facilitate construction of the new access off Loudham Hall Road. Some facilitation pruning, tree protection and special construction measures, described within the report, will be required to ensure the safe retention of the trees.
- 8.49 G18 comprises a copse located near the centre of the site. Whilst this group was included in the survey because it is located within 15m of the development boundary, it is located outside the Planning Application boundary, shown on the Arboricultural Impact Assessment Plan in Appendix 5 and the Tree Protection Plan in Appendix 7, and is excluded from the development. Likewise, following an amendment to the site red line boundary, features T1–T35, G1–G7, G9, H5 and G20 are located outside of the proposed development area. Providing the recommendations contained within this report are followed, the proposed development of the site can be successfully achieved without causing undue harm to the retained trees.
- 8.50 The proposed development would accord with Policies SCLP10.1 and SCLP10.4, in addition to the relevant objectives contained within the NPPF.

Archaeology

- 8.51 Policy SCLP11.7 (Archaeology) states that an archaeological assessment proportionate to the potential and significance of remains must be included with any planning application affecting areas of known or suspected archaeological importance to ensure that provision is made for the preservation of important archaeological remains. Where proposals affect archaeological sites, preference will be given to preservation in situ unless it can be shown that recording of remains, assessment, analysis report and/or deposition of the archive is more appropriate. Archaeological conditions or planning obligations will be imposed on consents as appropriate. Measures to disseminate and promote information about archaeological assets to the public will be supported.
- 8.52 The application is accompanied by an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment, prepared by ADAS and dated September 2021. The objective of the assessment was to identify the nature and extent of the recorded archaeological resource along the proposed development and its immediate environs, and to undertake an assessment of the effect the proposed development may have.
- 8.53 SCC Archaeology Service (SCCAS) was consulted on the application and provided initial comments noting that the large site has very high archaeological potential as recorded on the County Historic Environment record, as is situated in a topographically favourable location for archaeological activity close to a watercourse. Surrounding the site, large numbers of multi-period find scatters have been recorded (PTR 001, 004, 013, 032, 041, 052, 054, WKM 018). To the west, a site where human remains were historically discovered is recorded (PTR 050) and during archaeological investigations at Featherbroom Gardens to the north, prehistoric and Roman archaeology was recorded (WKM 037).

However, this site has never been the subject of systematic archaeological investigation and there is high potential for previously unidentified archaeological remains to be present. The proposed development would cause significant ground disturbance that has potential to damage or destroy any below ground heritage assets that exist. Given the high potential, lack of previous investigation and large size of the proposed development area and the fact that a full application has been submitted which restricts design flexibility, it was recommended that, in order to establish the full archaeological implications of this area and the suitability of the site for the development, the applicant should be required to provide for an archaeological evaluation of the site prior to the determination of any planning application.

- 8.54 In order to establish the archaeological potential of the site, a geophysical survey was required in the first instance with these results being used to make a decision on the timing and extent of trial trenched evaluation required.
- 8.55 Following Geophysical Survey of the whole site (Headland Archaeology 2022) Area A of this site has received trenched archaeological investigation, which did not reveal archaeological remains that require further mitigation (although features and finds of Iron Age date suggest that there may be further remains in the vicinity). Area B as defined in the report (Headland Archaeology 2023) is situated in a topographically favourable location for archaeological activity close to a watercourse.
- 8.56 There are no grounds to consider refusal of permission in order to achieve preservation in situ of any important heritage assets. However, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraph 211), any permission granted should be the subject of a planning condition to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage asset before it is damaged or destroyed.
- 8.57 With the appropriate conditions provided to safeguard archaeological assets within the proposed development area, it is considered the application is acceptable. In summary, the proposal meets the requirements set out in both national and local planning policy, including Local Plan Policy SCLP11.7.

Highways

- 8.58 Policy SCLP7.1 (Sustainable Transport) states that development will be supported where, amongst other matters, any significant impacts on the highways network are mitigated; it is well integrated into, protects and enhances the existing pedestrian routes and the public rights of way network; it reduces conflict between users of the transport network including pedestrians, cyclists, users of mobility vehicles and drives and does not reduce road safety; and the cumulative impact of new development will not create severe impacts on the existing transport network.
- 8.59 The above policy objectives are reflected within Chapter 9 of the NPPF. Paragraph 115 of the NPPF is explicit that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.
- 8.60 It is proposed that the development would utilise an existing singular point of vehicular access to the site directly from Loudham Hall Lane, where there is an existing farm access.

It should be noted that the access track serving Sandpit Cottage and the Water Treatment Plant is not within the ownership or control of the applicant and it is understood that no access rights using this have been, or are likely to be, granted.

- 8.61 Following initial objections from Suffolk County Council as Local Highways Authority, a revised Transport Statement (RSK, 18 February 2022) and additional Technical Note (RSK, 4 July 2022) were received from the applicant. Following consideration of these documents, the Highways Authority removed their objections to the application.
- 8.62 The Transport Statement sets out that construction traffic associated with the development will comprise HGVs delivering construction materials and installation components associated with the solar array and other vehicles associated with staff and visitors. It is envisaged that the construction works will take 6 months, with 22 working days per month. It is anticipated that traffic volumes will be higher between the second and fourth month of the programme where the majority of the construction takes place. The first and last months of the programme are associated with site mobilisation and demobilisation of the site and will generate lower volumes of traffic. The construction process is relatively simple and repetitive with off-site pre-fabrication and assembly, allowing large volumes of modules to be installed on a daily basis. This minimises the number of deliveries to site and maximises control over vehicles travelling to and from site.
- 8.63 In respect of mobilisation and demobilisation, the site will initially require delivery of plant, equipment, construction materials and welfare units, in preparation to build the site compound. It is envisaged that this will generate around 30 HGV movements (two-way) in the first month. Upon completion of works the site will be demobilised generating another 30 two-way vehicle movements during the last month of the programme.
- 8.64 The access will be used to serve the construction compound, where adequate space will be available for car parking, storage of materials, welfare/offices and unloading. A hardstanding area will be constructed within the site, around the site access, to be used during the construction phase and for maintenance and monitoring activities once operational. In addition, access tracks would be constructed within the site to provide vehicular access for the panel installation and future maintenance. A total estimated volume of type 1 aggregate required for the compound and access tracks within the site is 3,182m³. This will be transported to the site in tipper trucks with capacity for 15m³ equating to a total of 213 deliveries spread out across the first three months of the programme, or around 142 two-way vehicle movements each month.
- 8.65 DNO buildings will be constructed once the construction works associated with access track and site compound are completed. This is estimated to be in the second and third months of the programme. A total of 8 HGV deliveries will be required for the transportation of concrete, plant and electrical equipment. In addition, 5 HGVs deliveries associated with the cabling will be required. Therefore, a total of 26 HGV movements (two-way) will be required for the site during this stage.
- 8.66 Prior to the installation of the solar panels, frames and transformer inverters would need to be installed. This will take place across two months and each month will require a total of 21 HGV deliveries. This equates to 42 two-way HGV movements per month or a total of 84 HGV movements (two-way) across the two months.

- 8.67 The dominant type of material arriving at site will be the solar panel modules, which will arrive via a single transport provider and at a rate that matches the rate of installation to avoid stockpiling on site. This will result in a 'drip feed' of HGVs to and from the site, evenly spaced and with adequate time between deliveries to avoid two-way construction along the approach roads. The transport and installation of solar panels will require two months. The proposals will require around 39,508 solar panels. Assuming each HGV has capacity to transport 620 solar panels, a total of 64 HGVs deliveries will be required, spread across two months. This equates to 64 HGV two-way movements in each month or a total 128 HGV two-way movements across the two months.
- 8.68 The number of staff and visitors will change throughout the programme with more staff being required during the peak of the construction. It is estimated that around 10 workers will be required on site during the mobilisation/demobilisation stages which will generate a total of 20 two-way vehicle movements per day, travelling in cars or vans. The remainder of the programme is anticipated to require 20 workers which equates to 40 two-way vehicle movements per day.
- 8.69 Overall, it is anticipated that the programme will generate a maximum of 178 HGV vehicle movements during the third month of the programme. This equates to an average of 9 daily movements in that month. The peak of the construction traffic will take place between the first and the fourth months of the programme and will result in an average of 158 vehicle movements (two-way) per month or 8 movements per day.
- 8.70 An average of 764 two-way HGV movements is anticipated over the first six-month period peaking at approx. nine per day in month three.
- 8.71 After construction, the site will encounter low levels of traffic, equivalent to around one van per week, for regular maintenance purposes only. Therefore, there will be no long-term operational changes occurring as a result of the development. Although there is no discernible effect on the strategic network traffic flow as a result of the construction stage, a construction traffic management plan (CTMP) will be developed to ensure that HGVs only use appropriate routes to access the site and are managed appropriately on those routes. After construction, the site will encounter low levels of traffic for regular operational/maintenance purposes only. Operational traffic will be in the form of a single van visiting around once a week and therefore will not need to be subject to route restrictions.
- 8.72 The Technical note demonstrates that the site access can accommodate the predicted vehicles within the proposed geometry and traffic management measures, including the use of temporary traffic signals at the site access during construction hours. This will ensure that safe movement of these vehicles can occur without detriment to other highway users.
- 8.73 SCC Highways Authority has reviewed the application and ultimately responded raising no objection to the proposed development on highway grounds subject to recommended conditions which are included below.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- 8.74 Policy SCLP10.1 Biodiversity and Geodiversity states that development will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it maintains, restores, or enhances the existing green infrastructure network and positively contributes towards biodiversity and/or geodiversity through the creation of new habitats and green infrastructure and improvement to linkages between habitats. New development should provide environmental net gains for both green infrastructure and biodiversity as well as ecological enhancements and should provide a biodiversity net gain that is proportionate to the scale and nature of the proposal.
- 8.75 Paragraph 15 of the NPPF is also clear that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the local environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.
- 8.76 The site is not located within an area which is subject to any statutory ecological designations but does fall within a SSSI Impact Zone. The nearest statutory designated sites are as follows:
- Suffolk and Essex Coast and Heaths National Landscape – 2.6km to the south east.
 - Sandlings Forest (SSSI & SPA) – 3.5km to the south east.
 - Deben Estuary (Ramsar, SSSI, SPA) – 4.5km to the south.
 - Grimston Warren Pit (SSSI) – 4.56km to the east.
- 8.77 The layout of the solar panels avoids the areas of greatest ecological importance on the site (particularly the areas of woodland, hedgerows, and scrub) and the development offers the opportunity to secure long term habitat improvements as part of the landscaping scheme.
- 8.78 The ecological reports submitted with the application note that the site has suitable habitat for badgers, breeding birds, wintering birds, foraging, and commuting bats, reptiles, hedgehog, water vole, otter, and amphibians (including great crested newts). The ecological reports describe adequate avoidance and mitigation measures to address the impacts on the species identified above. The measures identified must be implemented as part of the development. However, all field surveys were completed in winter 2020/2021 and are therefore >3 years old. As per CIEEM guidance, these reports (and their findings) are now unlikely to be valid. An updated site visit was undertaken to ascertain if there have been significant changes in habitats present, and usage by protected/notable species.
- 8.79 The Ecology Update Survey undertaken in 2024 notes that although habitats on site remain largely consistent with the original habitat survey undertaken in 2021, some habitats on site have degraded in quality due to scrub encroachment. It is therefore recommended that an updated condition assessment is undertaken on existing habitats.
- 8.80 The biodiversity metric submitted is Version 3.0. This has now been superseded. It is recommended that biodiversity calculations are upgraded to the Statutory Biodiversity Metric however BNG is not mandatory for this application and the scheme proposes acceptable biodiversity enhancement in accordance with Local Plan policy, and so is considered acceptable.
- 8.81 With regard to the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), the consultation response from Natural England (their letter of 24th January 2022) is noted. The conclusions presented in

the Information to Inform Habitats Regulations Assessment report (ADAS, August 2021) can therefore be accepted and adopted as the LPA's HRA conclusion.

- 8.82 Based on the plans submitted, Natural England has confirmed that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites or landscapes. Natural England has also confirmed that they consider the proposed development will not have likely significant effects on statutorily protected sites and has no objection to the proposed development.

Public Rights of Way

- 8.83 A Public Right of Way (PROW), Pettistree Public Footpath 7, transects the south western corner of the application site. It is not proposed to divert the existing arrangements for this PROW however the width of the route available would increase to 10 metres within a hedge-lined corridor. There are a number of other PROWs within the local area but these are outside of the site.
- 8.84 SCC Public Rights of Way team accepts this proposal subject to the applicant meeting the requirements of the PROW Position Statement on solar farms. Specific to this development, the developer needed to extend the glint and glare assessment to include users of Pettistree Public Footpath 7 which has been done. Also, ensure all sections of the solar farm are screened from the public right of way as detailed in the PROW Position Statement and ensure that Pettistree Public Footpath 7 remains in a wide, open green corridor as detailed in the PROW Position Statement. Since these comments we made, a 10m wide, hedged opening has been created for the PROW which addresses these comments as well as those in relation to landscape impact. Compliance with the PROW Position Statement will be secured by condition.
- 8.85 An informative on PROW from the SCC Public Rights of Way Team will be appended to the decision notice for the applicant's reference.
- 8.86 In terms of the adjacent PROW network, the proposed development would result in no obstructions to it, as the routes are situated outside of the development site boundary. There would be an impact upon the experience of the users of the PROW network, in terms of the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development, but this has already been discussed above in relation to landscape character.

Economic Development

- 8.87 The site is within the parish of Pettistree, identified as a settlement within the Countryside in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan.
- 8.88 Policy SCLP4.5: Economic Development in Rural Areas supports development proposals that grow and diversify the rural economy, particularly where this will secure employment locally, enable agricultural growth and diversification and other land based rural businesses.
- 8.89 The East Suffolk Economic Development Team supports the planning application and provided the below comments on the application in context of the East Suffolk Economic Growth Plan, 2018 - 2023. The Plan directly influences East Suffolk Council's Strategic Plan

2020 - 2024. The Economic Development team seeks to support planning applications where the application clearly supports the economic growth and regeneration of the economy within East Suffolk.

- 8.90 This application would result in a loss of agricultural land until such time that the proposed photovoltaic array is decommissioned. The determination of our support is dependent on which use results in greater benefits for the East Suffolk economy and aligns with the priorities set out in the Economic Growth plan. Clean Energy is recognised a key sector in the East Suffolk Growth Plan and is seeing significant opportunities emerging now and in the future. The proposal aligns with the East Suffolk Growth Plan as it would provide additional energy infrastructure to support the growing energy supply chain. The applicant is encouraged to engage with local supply chain companies for the construction, operation, maintenance of the photovoltaic array to support the economic prosperity of East Suffolk.
- 8.91 Attracting investment to East Suffolk, focused around existing and emerging sectors and supply chains, is seen as a key priority for the district. The development of the solar array may also provide an opportunity to support the development of the hydrogen economy in East Suffolk. There are a number of potential electrolyser developments scheduled to be delivered in the District over the next 2-4 years and the provision of zero/ low carbon electricity to power these facilities is critical.
- 8.92 It is also recognised that agriculture, food and drink are also key sectors in East Suffolk. The current land use is agricultural, and it has been stated that currently no jobs are supported on this site. The proposed development will result in the creation of one job across a 37- hectare site. This means the land continues to provide significantly low job density, but the proposed development in this location has no detrimental impact on the availability of direct employment and local employment opportunities. This planning application is supported as it does further the objectives of the East Suffolk Growth plan.

Residential Amenity – Noise, Environmental Protection

- 8.93 Policy SCLP10.3 Environmental Quality states that development proposals will be expected to protect the quality of the environment and to minimise and, where possible, reduce all forms of pollution and contamination. Development proposals will be considered in relation to impacts on: a) Air quality, and the impact on receptors in Air Quality Management Areas; b) Soils and the loss of agricultural land; c) Land contamination and its effects on sensitive land uses; d) Water quality and the achievement of Water Framework Directive objectives; e) Light pollution; and f) Noise pollution. Proposals should seek to secure improvements in relation to the above where possible. The cumulative effect of development, in this regard, will be considered.
- 8.94 Policies SCLP11.1 and Policy SCLP11.2 both emphasise the requirement for new developments to achieve an acceptable standard of residential amenity. This objective is reflected in the NPPF.
- 8.95 Residential amenity is being considered alongside environmental protection as the primary impacts for consideration on amenity grounds are noise and dust associated with construction and operation of the solar farm.

- 8.96 The site is located in a rural area with only one immediately neighbouring residential property; Sandpit Cottage. Loudham Hall Lodge is located on the opposite (southern) side of Loudham Hall Road with Loudham Hall itself located 250m further to the south.
- 8.97 The Council's Environmental Protection Team has been consulted on the application and provided their final comments on the proposal following submission of the RSK Acoustics Noise Assessment report (Ref. 2060448-RSK-RP-001-(03)) dated 16th February 2024. The proposals have been refined in part due to discussion between the Environmental Protection Team and the Acoustic Consultants for the applicant. Key changes from the original proposals and resulting in noise mitigation include the reduction in inverter stations from 21 down to 10. Inverter units are proposed to be located further from noise sensitive receptors, and in accordance with Appendix 5 some of these inverter stations will be installed with acoustic barriers around them on three sides.
- 8.98 In response to concerns about one of the noise sensitive receptors, the Environmental Protection Team have further liaised with RSK Acoustics about background survey data, measurement locations, and local topography impacts on the noise assessment to Sandpit House. Detailed responses have been provided to the final queries raised and the Environmental Protection Team are satisfied that background surveys and associated data were representative and therefore that the overall noise assessment is sound. The final comments and recommendations are based on the solar farm not being operational at night (23:00 to 07:00 hours), and not having any associated battery storage facilities and associated mechanical services plant. The exception to this may be during a relatively short summer period when there is enough sunlight in the period 05:00 to 07:00 for the system to be operational. The noise assessment notes that in addition to general daytime periods, this early morning period has been considered and this period has been assessed in a very worst case scenario of all inverters operational simultaneously. In both daytime and 05:00 to 07:00 operational periods, the operational rating noise level from the solar farm is predicted to be more than 10dB below the existing ambient sounds levels, and at most receptors considerably more. This is indicative of a low impact from noise.
- 8.99 The noise assessment is based on noise predictions, and therefore although noise has been minimised, there will be some uncertainty in the predictions to receptor locations. There are a number of noise mitigation measures recommended that should be controlled by planning condition including a validation noise survey post construction. This validation survey is important both in terms of operational noise levels, but also noise characteristics should they be detectable at receptors and change rating noise levels.
- 8.100 With the suggested conditions in place, the proposed development is considered acceptable and complies with Policies SCLP10.3, SCLP11.1, and SCLP11.2.

Residential Amenity – Glint and Glare

- 8.101 The PPG cites that local planning authorities will need to consider the effect of glint and glare on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety. Glint and glare are considered here.
- 8.102 The application is accompanied by a Glint and Glare Study prepared by Pager Power, the updated version dated August 2022. The Study provides an assessment of the possible impact of glint and glare upon surrounding road users and dwellings. The Study notes that there is no formal guidance with regard to the maximum distance at which glint and glare

should be assessed. From a technical perspective, there is no maximum distance for potential reflections. The significance of a reflection however decreases with distance because the proportion of an observer's field of vision that is taken up by the reflecting area diminishes as the separation distance increases. Terrain and shielding by vegetation are also more likely to obstruct an observer's view at longer distances.

- 8.103 Reflections from the proposed development are geometrically possible towards 13 out of the 14 identified receptors along the A12 (equivalent to circa 1.85 km of road). For two receptors, marginal views of the reflecting panel areas may be possible despite partial screening in the form of existing vegetation under the baseline scenario. However, it is expected that for drivers travelling towards the south, the reflective area will be outside of their field of view. Therefore, a maximum low impact is expected for which no mitigation is required.
- 8.104 Reflections from the proposed development will also be geometrically possible towards 10 out of the 11 identified road receptors along the B1438 (equivalent to circa 1.35 km of road). However, no impact is expected, and no mitigation is therefore required in this case.
- 8.105 The results of the analysis have shown that reflections from the proposed development are geometrically possible towards 21 out of the 27 identified dwelling receptors. For all dwellings where reflections are geometrically possible, significant screening in the form of existing vegetation and/or buildings has been identified. Therefore, no impact is predicted and no mitigation is required.
- 8.106 The results of the analysis have shown that reflections from the proposed development are geometrically possible towards eight out of the 18 identified PROW receptors, for the remaining 10 receptors geometric reflections are not possible. Of these eight PROW receptors only five will also have visibility of the reflective area and experience reflections in practice. In Pager Power's experience, significant impacts upon pedestrians/observers along PROWs from glint and glare are not possible. This is because the sensitivity of the receptors (in terms of amenity and safety) and the magnitude of effects are predicted to be low since: effects would likely coincide with direct sunlight, reflections are of similar intensity to common outdoor sources including still water, and there is no safety hazard associated with reflections towards an observer on a footpath. Therefore, no significant impacts are predicted, and no further mitigation is required.
- 8.107 A condition will be applied to secure the submission and agreement of a landscape scheme which will include site-wide hedgerow reinforcement planting, including, if necessary, specific mitigation to address the potential glint and glare impacts identified in the Glint and Glare Study. The proposal is therefore in line with Local Plan Policies SCLP11.1 and SCLP11.2.

Residential Amenity – Visual Amenity

- 8.108 Policies SCLP11.1 and Policy SCLP11.2 both emphasise the requirement for new developments to achieve an acceptable standard of residential amenity. This objective is reflected in the NPPF.
- 8.109 The solar panels are acceptable in scale and are separated from all but two residential dwellings. The nearest residential property, Sandpit Cottage, is located immediately

adjacent to the site however at a significantly lower level than the application site. The visual impact from inside this property is considered to be dominated by the existing slope of the land, particularly at ground floor level, but also at first floor. While the perimeter fencing (2m high post and rail) and panels would be visible, their position or scale is not considered to be significantly overbearing. A CCTV system would be installed; however, the submission indicates that all cameras would face along the perimeter of the solar farm rather than point outwards out of the site, thereby preventing any unacceptable loss of privacy.

- 8.110 The PPG on renewable and low carbon energy notes that the development of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly undulating landscapes. Nonetheless, it considers that the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.
- 8.111 The proposed panels will have visual effects, but these are considered under the resulting landscape and visual impacts of the development, rather than in relation to residential amenity because the loss of a view is not a material planning consideration, whereas the impact of a proposed development on landscape character is a material planning consideration.
- 8.112 Solar farms are therefore considered to be a relatively passive form of development with the majority of the amenity considerations arising from the construction and decommissioning phases, in addition to the noise generated by the operation of the development, namely from the transformer stations and substation.
- 8.113 The proposed development is considered to comply with Local Plan policy in regard to visual amenity impacts.

Flooding and Drainage

- 8.114 Policy SCLP9.5 Flood Risk notes that proposals for new development will not be permitted in areas at high risk of flooding (Flood Zones 2 and 3) unless the applicant satisfies the safety requirements set out in the Flood Risk National Planning Policy Guidance, these include the 'sequential test'; where needed the 'exception test' and also a site specific flood risk assessment that addresses the characteristics of flooding and has tested an appropriate range of flood event scenarios (taking climate change into consideration). Developments should exhibit the three main principles of flood risk, in that, they should be safe, resilient and should not increase flood risk elsewhere.
- 8.115 Policy SCLP9.6 states that developments should use sustainable drainage systems to drain surface water, and that developments on sites of one hectare or more will be required to utilise sustainable drainage systems (SuDs), unless demonstrated to be inappropriate.
- 8.116 The NPPF sets out the criteria for development and flood risk by stating that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere. Paragraph 175 of the NPPF reaffirms the above policy objectives and establishes that, when considering the SuDs used, regard should be given to the advice received from the Lead Local Flood Authority.

- 8.117 The site lies mainly within flood zone 1, having been amended to exclude development on the valley floor areas which are at a higher risk of flooding. The solar panels will be erected on posts with the soil beneath still available for the infiltration of rainwater.
- 8.118 The application was accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) prepared by RSK and dated December 2021 which has since been updated, the most recent version being dated February 2024. The FRA seeks to establish the flood risk associated with the proposed development and to propose suitable mitigation, if required, to reduce the risk to a more acceptable level. A site-specific FRA must demonstrate that the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall. The FRA states the site lies in an area designated by the Environment Agency (EA) as Flood Zone 1, outlined to have a chance of flooding of 1 in 1000 or less ($\leq 0.1\%$) in any year.
- 8.119 In relation to actual risk, the FRA notes that all new development at the site including solar panel units, access tracks and welfare unit have been sited within Flood Zone 1, being land with a low probability of flooding as defined by the PPG. A small area to the east of the site falls within Flood Zone 3, but all development has been sequentially sited away from this land. The area proposed for new development will remain in future Flood Zone 1 when climate change is considered and the access/egress route for the site also falls within Flood Zone 1.
- 8.120 SCC as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) responded to early consultations with a holding objection as the full proposed drainage strategy had not been evidenced at full planning application stage, and provided detail on the information required to overcome their objection.
- 8.121 Subsequently, further information was submitted by the applicant such that the LLFA are content with the information submitted, subject to controlling conditions. The proposed development would accord with Policy SCLP 9.5 and SCLP9.6, in addition to the relevant objectives contained within the NPPF, and is considered acceptable.
- 8.122 The Water Management Alliance note the site is partly within the Internal Drainage District (IDD) of the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board (IDB) and therefore the Board's Byelaws apply. Whilst the Board's regulatory process (as set out under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and the Board's Byelaws) is separate from planning, the ability to implement a planning permission may be dependent on the granting of any required Land Drainage Consents. The Board's Officers have reviewed the documents submitted in support of the above planning application and have noted works which may require Land Drainage Consent.

Sequential Test

- 8.123 The sequential test assesses whether or not there is potentially preferable land on which to develop this solar farm proposal when considered against the requirements of the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The Sequential Test ensures that a sequential approach is followed to steer new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding. It goes on to say that development should not be permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower probability of flooding.

- 8.124 The aim is to steer new development to Flood Zone 1 (areas with a low probability of river or sea flooding). Where there are no reasonably available sites in Flood Zone 1, local planning authorities in their decision making should take into account the flood risk vulnerability of land uses and consider reasonably available sites in Flood Zone 2 (areas with a medium probability of river or sea flooding), applying the Exception Test if required. Only where there are no reasonably available sites in Flood Zones 1 or 2 should the suitability of sites in Flood Zone 3 (areas with a high probability of river or sea flooding) be considered, taking into account the flood risk vulnerability of land uses and applying the Exception Test if required.
- 8.125 According to the information available, other forms of flooding should be treated consistently with river flooding in mapping probability and assessing vulnerability to apply the sequential approach across all flood zones.
- 8.126 The local planning authority needs to be satisfied in all cases that the proposed development would be safe and not lead to increased flood risk elsewhere.
- 8.127 Whilst the site is in mainly in Flood Zone 1, the Sequential Test is applicable to all sources of current and future flood risk, including surface water (pluvial) flood risk. There are two small pockets of the site at a higher risk of surface water flooding however, development has been kept away from these areas. Similarly, a small proportion of the eastern site boundary lies within flood zone 3a however development has also been kept away from this area.
- 8.128 It is considered that as the proposal is for a solar (PV) array it is considered to be a flood compatible development, with safety or loss of life in the event of a flood considered not to be an issue due to no onsite personnel being located at the completed solar array other than for timely maintenance.
- 8.129 The FRA provided by the applicant identifies solar farms as Essential Infrastructure, as per NPPF Annex 3, being an appropriate type of development for Flood Zone 1 as per Table 3 of the PPG. The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and therefore passes the sequential test, thus the exception test will not be required.
- 8.130 In summary, the proposal accords with the requirements set out within Suffolk Coastal Local Plan Policy SCLP9.5 on Flood Risk, i.e., developments should exhibit the three main principles of flood risk, in that, they should be safe, resilient, and should not increase flood risk elsewhere. The assessments submitted, reviewed, and discussed to date together with the agreed planning conditions, demonstrate that the site is safe from all types of flooding. The applicant has worked with SCC LLFA in order to understand and overcome the initial concerns raised, resulting in their initial holding objection being lifted, and their final position being one of recommending approval subject to conditions.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The principle of the proposed development would be acceptable with regards to the provision of Policy SCLP9.1 (Low Carbon & Renewable Energy), subject to there being no unacceptable impacts arising from the proposed development. No conflict has been identified with policies contained in the Council's Development Plan insofar as they relate to agricultural land (SCLP10.3), design (SCLP11.1), archaeology (SCLP11.7), highway

matters (SCLP7.1), residential amenity and noise (SCLP11.1 and SCLP11.2), trees and hedges (SCLP10.1 and SCLP10.4), flood risk (SCLP9.5 and SCLP9.6) and ecology (SCLP10.1). Some harm has been identified in relation to the landscape impact of the proposed development and while this is 'major', it would be largely limited to the site itself and its immediate surrounds and, in time would be mitigated by planting.

- 9.2 The proposal accords with the relevant policies contained in both National and Local Planning Policy and Guidance and would deliver significant benefits, with any potential impacts having been avoided through careful site design, and/or will be assessed and mitigated through agreed planning conditions post-determination.
- 9.3 It is also considered that the identified harms (mainly landscape and visual impact) that would arise from the proposed development would be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the resulting environmental benefits of the scheme. In particular, the proposed development would have the capacity to generate sufficient renewable electricity to power approximately 5,000 homes, whilst also providing for noticeable biodiversity gains. These benefits are afforded substantial weight and would make a very valuable contribution towards the local and national objectives for a carbon neutral and climate change resilient future.

10. Recommendation

- 10.1 Approve, subject to controlling conditions.

Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun within a period of three years beginning with the date of this permission.
Reason: In accordance with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended.
2. The development hereby permitted shall be completed in all respects in accordance with the submitted drawings
 - Solar Park Layout, 1664-0201-01
 - Site Plan Location, 1664-0200-05
 - DNO Switchgear, Revision 1 April 2021
 - 33kV Private Switchgear, Rev 2 October 2021
 - Access Road Sections, Rev 1 April 2021
 - Welfare and Comms Container Detail, Rev 2 October 2021
 - Spares Container Detail, Rev 1 April 2021
 - Aux Transformer Detail, Rev 1 April 2021
 - Transformer Substation Detail, Rev 1 April 2021
 - CCTV Detail Rev. 1 April 2021
 - Mounting System, Rev 1 April 2021
 - Fence detail Rev 1 April 2021
 - Arboricultural Planning Statement, February 2024
 - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (ADAS, February 2024)
 - Badger non-license method statement (ADAS, February 2024)
 - Biodiversity net gain (ADAS, February 2024)

- Breeding bird survey (ADAS, February 2024)
- Information to inform habitats regulations assessment (ADAS, February 2024)
- Reptile non-license method statement (ADAS, February 2024)
- Wintering bird survey report (ADAS, February 2024)
- Ecology Update Survey (The Landmark Practice, May 2024)
- Transport Statement, February 2024
- Noise Assessment Report, February 2024
- Flood Risk Assessment, February 2024
- Archaeological Trial Trenching report, January 2024
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal, February 2024
- Landscape Masterplan, Rev 5 February 2024
- Glint and Glare Study August 2022

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to what has been considered and approved.

3. The planning permission is for a period from the date of this permission until the date occurring 40 years after the date of operational commissioning of the development. Written confirmation of the date of operational commissioning of the development shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than 1 calendar month after that event.

Reason: To ensure this permission is a temporary development on the landscape, having an operational life of 40 years.

4. If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to operate for a continuous period of 6 months, then unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the panels and any other ancillary equipment, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Planning Authority within 3 months of the end of the cessation period. The scheme shall include details for the restoration of the site. The scheme shall be completed within 12 months of the date of its agreement by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To remove the non-operational development from the landscape.

5. At the end of the operational lifespan (40 years), the solar panels and other infrastructure will be removed, and the site restored back to full agricultural use.

Reason: The decommissioning and restoration process intends to restore the land to the same quality as it was prior to the development taking place.

6. The strategy for the disposal of surface water (680695 L02(00) LLFA 16-03-2023)/(680695 L03(01) LLFA 12-06-2023) and the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) (680695- R1(0)-FRA(15-02-2024)) shall be implemented as approved in writing by the local planning authority (LPA). The strategy shall thereafter be managed and maintained in accordance with the approved strategy.

Reason: To ensure that the principles of sustainable drainage are incorporated into this proposal, to ensure that the proposed development can be adequately drained.

7. No development shall commence until details of a Construction Surface Water Management Plan (CSWMP) detailing how surface water and storm water will be managed on the site during construction (including demolition and site clearance operations) is submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA. The CSWMP shall be implemented and thereafter managed and maintained in accordance with the approved plan for the duration of construction. The

approved CSWMP shall include: Method statements, scaled and dimensioned plans and drawings detailing surface water management proposals to include:-

- i) Temporary drainage systems,
- ii) Measures for managing pollution / water quality and protecting controlled waters and watercourses,
- iii) Measures for managing any on or offsite flood risk associated with construction.

Reason: To ensure the development does not cause increased flood risk, or pollution of watercourses or groundwater <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-andtransport/flooding-and-drainage/guidance-on-development-and-flood-risk/construction-surface-water-management-plan/>

8. Within 28 days of practical completion of the last dwelling or unit, surface water drainage verification report shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority, detailing and verifying that the surface water drainage system has been inspected and has been built and functions in accordance with the approved designs and drawings. The report shall include details of all SuDS components and piped networks in an agreed form, for inclusion on the Lead Local Flood Authority's Flood Risk Asset Register.

Reason: To ensure that the surface water drainage system has been built in accordance with the approved drawings and is fit to be put into operation and to ensure that the Sustainable Drainage System has been implemented as permitted and that all flood risk assets and their owners are recorded onto the LLFA's statutory flood risk asset register as required under s21 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 in order to enable the proper management of flood risk with the county of Suffolk.

9. No development shall take place within the area indicated [the whole site] until the implementation of a programme of archaeological work has been secured, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The scheme of investigation shall include an assessment of significance and research questions; and:

- a. The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording
- b. The programme for post investigation assessment
- c. Provision to be made for analysis of the site investigation and recording
- d. Provision to be made for publication and dissemination of the analysis and records of the site investigation
- e. Provision to be made for archive deposition of the analysis and records of the site investigation
- f. Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the Written Scheme of Investigation.
- g. The site investigation shall be completed prior to development, or in such other phased arrangement, as agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard archaeological assets within the approved development boundary from impacts relating to any groundworks associated with the development scheme and to ensure the proper and timely investigation, recording, reporting and presentation of archaeological assets affected by this development, in accordance with Policy SCLP11.7 of Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (2020) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

10. The solar farm shall not be brought into operation until the site investigation and post investigation assessment for both Areas has been completed, submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, in accordance with the programme set out in the

Written Scheme of Investigation approved under part 1 and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition.

Reason: To safeguard archaeological assets within the approved development boundary from impacts relating to any groundworks associated with the development scheme and to ensure the proper and timely investigation, recording, reporting and presentation of archaeological assets affected by this development, in accordance with Policy SCLP11.7 of Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (2020) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

11. Should no dig construction methods be used as an alternative to archaeological excavation for areas of archaeology which are defined in subsequent trenching works, no development shall take place the area indicated [the whole site] until a management plan for any archaeological areas to be preserved in situ has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, setting out the methodology to secure the ongoing protection of these areas both during construction, operation and decommissioning of the solar farm. A detailed site plan showing Archaeological Exclusion Zones must be included, defining areas within which development will be excluded or provide sufficient design mitigation to avoid any impact to below ground archaeological deposits. Full details of the final construction methods to be implemented for any works in these areas must also be provided for approval. The development must be carried out in accordance with the approved management plan.

Reason: To safeguard archaeological assets within the approved development boundary from impacts relating to any groundworks associated with the development scheme and to ensure the proper and timely investigation, recording, reporting and presentation of archaeological assets affected by this development, in accordance with Policy SCLP11.7 of Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (2020) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).

12. Development must be undertaken in accordance with the ecological avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures identified within the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (ADAS, February 2024), Badger non-license method statement (ADAS, February 2024), Breeding bird survey (ADAS, February 2024), Reptile non-license method statement (ADAS, February 2024), Wintering bird survey report (ADAS, February 2024) and Ecology Update Survey (The Landmark Practice, May 2024) as submitted with the planning application and agreed in principle with the local planning authority prior to determination.

Reason: To ensure that ecological receptors are adequately protected and enhanced as part of the development.

13. No development shall take place (including demolition, ground works, vegetation clearance) until a construction environmental management plan (CEMP: Biodiversity) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The CEMP (Biodiversity) shall include the following:
- a) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities.
 - b) Identification of "biodiversity protection zones".
 - c) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction (may be provided as a set of method statements).
 - d) The location and timing of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features.
 - e) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.
 - f) Responsible persons and lines of communication.

g)The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) or similarly competent person.

h)Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs. The approved CEMP shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that ecological receptors are adequately protected as part of the development.

14. A landscape and ecological management plan (LEMP) shall be submitted to, and be approved in writing by, the local planning authority prior to first operation of the site. The content of the LEMP shall include the following:

a)Description and evaluation of features to be managed.

b)Ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management.

c)Aims and objectives of management.

d)Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives.

e)Prescriptions for management actions.

f)Preparation of a work schedule (including an annual work plan capable of being rolled forward over a five-year period).

g)Details of the body or organisation responsible for implementation of the plan.

h)Ongoing monitoring and remedial measures, including a report to be submitted every third year to the local planning authority to demonstrate the management of the site and how management is meeting the objectives or where appropriate changes in management has been advised. The LEMP shall also include details of the legal and funding mechanism(s) by which the long-term implementation of the plan will be secured by the developer with the management body(ies) responsible for its delivery. The plan shall also set out (where the results from monitoring show that conservation aims and objectives of the LEMP are not being met) how contingencies and/or remedial action will be identified, agreed and implemented so that the development still delivers the fully functioning biodiversity objectives of the originally approved scheme. The approved plan will be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the long-term ecological value of the site is maintained and enhanced.

15. No lighting at the site shall be installed unless a "lighting design strategy for biodiversity" has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Any such strategy shall:

a) identify those areas/features on site that are particularly sensitive for biodiversity likely to be impacted by lighting and that are likely to cause disturbance in or around their breeding sites and resting places or along important routes used to access key areas of their territory, for example, for foraging; and

b) show how and where external lighting will be installed (through the provision of appropriate lighting contour plans and technical specifications) so that it can be clearly demonstrated that areas to be lit will not disturb or prevent the above species using their territory or having access to their breeding sites and resting places.

All external lighting shall be installed in accordance with the specifications and locations set out in the strategy, and these shall be maintained thereafter in accordance with the strategy. Under no circumstances should any other external lighting be installed without prior consent from the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that impacts on ecological receptors from external lighting are prevented.

16. Prior to commencement an Ecological Enhancement Strategy, addressing how ecological enhancements will be achieved on site, will be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Ecological enhancement measures will be delivered and retained in accordance with the approved Strategy.

Reason: To ensure that the development delivers ecological enhancements.

17. Prior to commencement, a Skylark Mitigation and Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The strategy shall provide details of practical measures to avoid and reduce impacts to skylark during construction, and how post-development habitats will be managed to provide long-term suitable habitat for skylark.

Reason: To ensure that skylarks are protected, and the site is enhanced for protected and priority species.

18. As close as practicable and no earlier than three months prior to commencement of development, an additional badger survey report shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Should the position, in so far as it relates to badgers, have changed from that originally reported when the application was submitted, the new survey report should incorporate a revised badger mitigation plan.

Reason: To ensure that badgers are protected.

19. No part of the development shall be commenced until details of the proposed access (including the position of any gates to be erected and visibility splays to be provided) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved access shall be laid out and constructed in its entirety prior to any other part of the development taking place. Thereafter the access shall be retained in its approved form.

Reason: To ensure that the access is designed and constructed to an appropriate and acceptably safe specification and made available for use at an appropriate time.

20. Before the access is first used visibility splays shall be provided as shown on Drawing No. 663311-10-01 Rev. A with an X dimension of 2.4 metres and a Y dimension of 175 & 90 metres [tangential to the nearside edge of the carriageway] and thereafter retained in the specified form. Notwithstanding the provisions of Part 2 Class A of the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (or any Order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification) no obstruction to visibility shall be erected, constructed, planted or permitted to grow over 0.6 metres high within the areas of the visibility splays.

Reason: To ensure drivers of vehicles entering the highway have sufficient visibility to manoeuvre safely including giving way to approaching users of the highway without them having to take avoiding action and to ensure drivers of vehicles on the public highway have sufficient warning of a vehicle emerging in order to take avoiding action, if necessary.

21. No part of the development shall be commenced until a photographic condition survey of the highway fronting and near to the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety, to ensure that damage to the highway as a result of the development is repaired at the developer's cost and satisfactory access is maintained for the safety of residents and the public.

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

Reason: In the interests of amenity and the protection of the local environment. To ensure that receptors are adequately protected as part of the development.

23. Within three months of operation, a validation noise survey shall be conducted to check compliance with the predicted operational noise rating levels and submitted to the Local Planning Authority. If the validation noise survey identifies non-compliance with the predicted noise rating levels, a scheme identifying appropriate mitigation to secure compliance with the assessment noise rating levels shall also be submitted with the validation noise survey, and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The mitigation scheme shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: For the protection of residential amenity and the environment.

24. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the Transport Statement dated February 2022.

Reason: In order that the development does not have an adverse impact on users of the local highway network.

25. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in complete accordance with the recommendations contained within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity to protect existing trees on and near the site.

26. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out and maintained in accordance with Suffolk County Council's Public Rights of Way and Solar Farms - Position Statement for the duration of construction and operation.

Reason: In order that there is no adverse impact on users of the public right of way as a result of the development.

27. Within 3 months of commencement of development, satisfactory precise details of a landscaping scheme to include tree, hedge and other planting as appropriate (which shall include species, size and numbers of plants to be planted) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure the submission and implementation of a well-laid out scheme of landscaping in the interest of visual amenity.

28. The approved landscaping scheme shall be implemented not later than the first planting season following commencement of the development (or within such extended period as the local planning authority may allow) and shall thereafter be retained and maintained for a period of 5 years. Any plant material removed, dying or becoming seriously damaged or diseased within five years of planting shall be replaced within the first available planting season and shall be retained and maintained.

Reason: To ensure the submission and implementation of a well-laid out scheme of landscaping in the interest of visual amenity.

29. None of the trees or hedges shown to be retained on the approved plan shall be lopped, topped, pruned, uprooted, felled, wilfully damaged or in any other way destroyed or removed without the prior written consent of the local planning authority. Any trees or hedges removed, dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within five years of the completion of the development shall be replaced during the first available planting season, with trees or hedges of a size and species, which shall previously have been agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
Reason: To safeguard the contribution to the character of the locality provided by the trees and hedgerow.
30. Within six months of commencement of development, a management plan for the continued management and maintenance of the approved landscaping scheme shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The maintenance plan should include, long term design objectives, management responsibilities and a scheme of maintenance for a period of 40 years. The schedule should include details of the arrangements for its implementation. The development shall be carried out and maintained in accordance with the approved management plan.
Reason: To landscaping is properly maintained in the interest of visual amenity.

Informatives:

1. The Local Planning Authority has assessed the proposal against all material considerations including planning policies and any comments that may have been received. The planning application has been approved in accordance with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and local plan to promote the delivery of sustainable development and to approach decision taking in a positive way.
2. Any works to a watercourse may require consent under section 23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991
Any discharge to a watercourse or groundwater needs to comply with the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017
Any discharge of surface water to a watercourse that drains into an Internal Drainage Board district catchment is subject to payment of a surface water developer contribution.
3. The submitted scheme of archaeological investigation shall be in accordance with a brief procured beforehand by the developer from Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Team.
4. It is an OFFENCE to carry out works within the public highway, which includes a Public Right of Way, without the permission of the Highway Authority. The works within the public highway will be required to be designed and constructed in accordance with the County Council's specification. The applicant will also be required to enter into a legal agreement under the provisions of Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 relating to the construction and subsequent adoption of the highway improvements. Amongst other things the Agreement will cover the specification of the highway works, safety audit procedures, construction and supervision and inspection of the works, bonding arrangements, indemnity of the County Council regarding noise insulation and land compensation claims, commuted sums, and changes to the existing street lighting and signing. For further information please visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste->

and-environment/planning-and-development-advice/application-for-works-licence/"

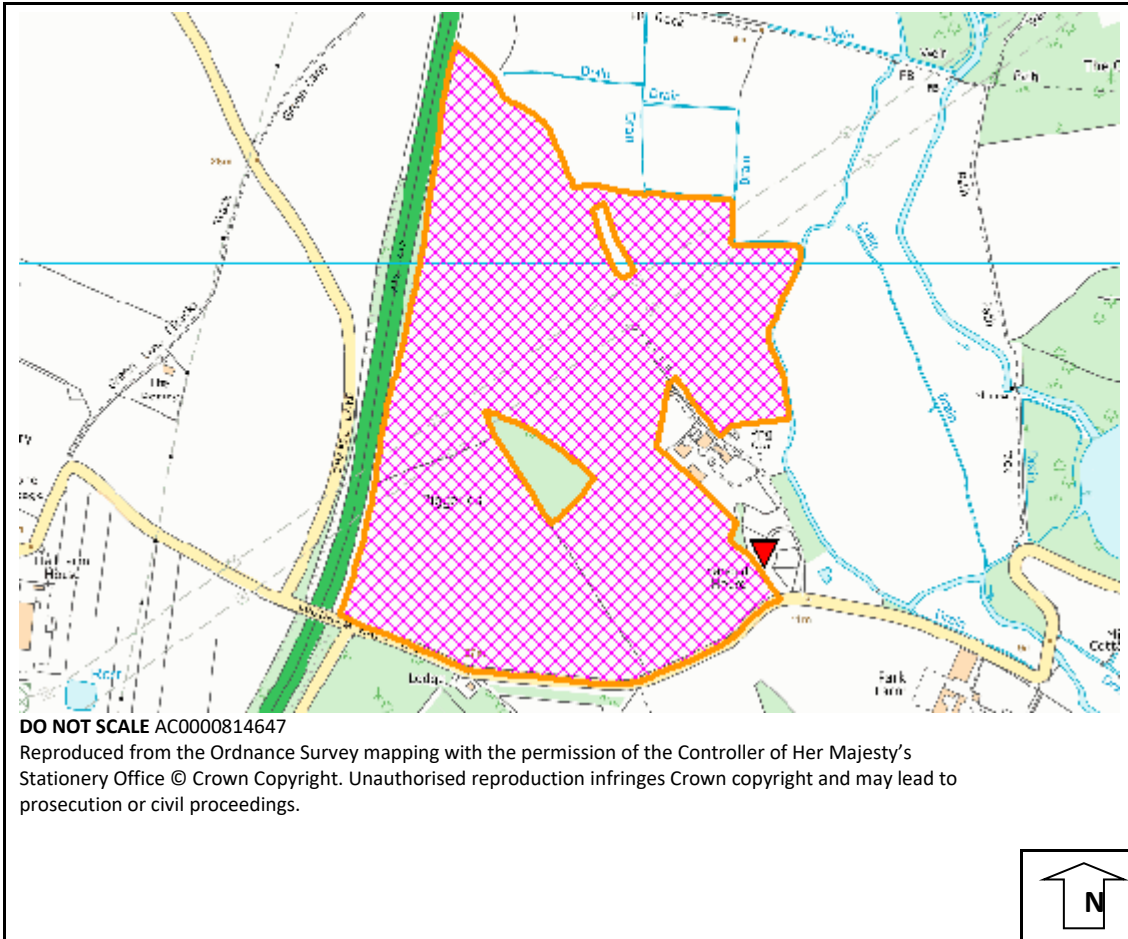
Note: Public Utility apparatus may be affected by this proposal. The appropriate utility service should be contacted to reach agreement on any necessary alterations which have to be carried out at the expense of the developer.

5. No removal of hedgerows, trees or shrubs shall take place between 1st March and 31st August inclusive, unless a competent ecologist has undertaken a careful, detailed check of vegetation for active birds' nests immediately before the vegetation is cleared and provided written confirmation that no birds will be harmed and/or that there are appropriate measures in place to protect nesting bird interest on site. Any such written confirmation should be submitted to the local planning authority.
6. The applicant's attention is drawn to the comments from Suffolk County Council Public Rights of Way team with regards to their requirements.
7. It is noted that some application documents have referred to the access track to Sandpit House and the Water Pumping Station being used. This permission does grant rights of access for this track and its use in relation to the development should ONLY be with permission of the landowner.

Background information

See application reference DC/21/5550/FUL on [Public Access](#)

Map



Key



Notified, no comments received



Objection



Representation



Support