



Planning Committee
5th December 2023

Application No	:	23/00532/FUL Full Application
Location	:	Land South Of Southlands Cottages Runwell Road Runwell Wickford Essex
Proposal	:	Installation of a solar farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure
Applicant	:	Enso Green Holdings J Limited
Agent	:	Mr Richard Moore
Date Valid	:	6th April 2023

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This planning application seeks consent for the installation of a large solar farm, with associated development, on an area of land measuring 66.1 hectares in the Green Belt.
- 1.2. The proposal has capacity to generate up to 49.9 MW of renewable energy. The applicant states that this equates to power generation for 6,098 homes and would displace about 5,130 tonnes of CO2 per annum.
- 1.3. The proposed solar farm seeks a form of development within the Green Belt which is not an exception listed in the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposal is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt in principle and the harm that arises must be considered in the context of 'very special circumstances' which must clearly outweigh inappropriateness and any other harm resulting from the proposal. The proposed solar farm would have a substantial impact on the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt, as well as represent physical and visual encroachment in the countryside.
- 1.4. As assessed, the proposed solar farm would have a substantial adverse landscape and visual impact, harming the rural character and thus visual amenity of the area. This must also be weighed in the consideration of very special circumstances as it is a harm arising from the proposal.

- 1.5. Very special circumstances have been advanced by the applicant, including that the proposal meets a need for renewable energy, lack of alternative sites, biodiversity net gain, farm diversification and improvements to green infrastructure (amongst others). Whilst the importance of renewable energy schemes is acknowledged and does form a very special circumstance, and there are other aspects of the proposal which contribute towards very special circumstances, it is the officer conclusion that the benefits associated with the development do not outweigh the harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt and the harm caused to landscape character and visual amenity.
- 1.6. Officers conclude that the proposed solar farm, on balance, is contrary to both local and national planning policy and it is recommended that the application be refused.

2. Description of site

- 2.1. The solar farm site comprises land totalling 66.1 hectares. It would be connected through an underground cable route to the point of connection at National Grid Rayleigh Substation, which means the application crosses into the neighbouring Rochford District.
- 2.2. The site and surrounding area consist of open fields interspersed with marginal vegetation with a sloping topography towards the River Crouch to the south, with river estuary to the east. The landscape is predominantly composed of rural character elements with localised man-made influences and features. These include the 132kV overhead transmission lines and pylons that cross the site; the A130 and associated interchange with the A132; the railway line to the south-east of the site; agricultural buildings with access tracks; and residential dwellings. The site is currently accessed via an existing access road from Runwell Road (A132). Development along this part of the A132 is mostly a mix of sporadic to linear residential, commercial and agricultural development fronting onto the roadside.
- 2.3. The site is located on the western side of the A130. The A130 is the main route between Chelmsford to the north and Basildon/Southend on Sea to the south.
- 2.4. The field network within the site is characterised by irregularly shaped fields with well-established hedgerows and significant tree presence within and surrounding the site. The site boundaries, in the most part, contain mature trees and hedgerows. Tree and hedgerow planting can also be found within the site defining field boundaries. A Public Right of Way (PROW 231-8) intersects the site in an east-west orientation and connects with PROW 229-23 within the site, which provides a link between Runwell Road and the village of Battlesbridge.
- 2.5. The site is primarily Flood Zone 1. Minor areas of the site are within Flood Zones 2 and 3. These are along the southern site boundary close to the River Crouch and following a drainage channel which is connected to balancing ponds to the north of the A132.
- 2.6. There is a Tree Preservation Order TPO/2001/078 in the northeast corner of the site covering the road interchange area.
- 2.7. There are no designated heritage assets within the site. The closest listed buildings are sited over 500 km away and include Bear Hall (grade II), St Marys Church (grade I) and the Old Rectory (Grade II) to the west and within Battlesbridge village to the East. There are also listed buildings to the south of the site at Shot Farm within Basildon District.

- 2.8. Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) for the site is classed as subgrade 3a and 3b (moderate agricultural quality).
- 2.9. The district boundary with Basildon District Council extends along the southern boundary of the site.
- 2.10. The application site is wholly located within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

3. Details of the proposal

- 3.1. The application seeks full planning permission for the construction of a solar farm with export capacity of up to 49.9 megawatts.
- 3.2. Temporary timeframe of 40 years.
- 3.3. Panels would be laid out in straight arrays north-south. The panels would be mounted onto a metal stand fixed into the ground. The solar panels would have a maximum height of about 3 metres and utilise a tracker system, meaning that the panels would tilt to track the movement of the sun.
- 3.4. Inverter/transformer stations would be located at several positions across the solar farm within containers finished in green. These have the appearance of shipping containers with a height of 2.9 metres.
- 3.5. 24no. battery storage containers finished in green with associated equipment would be located towards the north-east corner of the site. These have the appearance of shipping containers with a height of 2.9 metres, surrounded by welded steel wire mesh fencing with a height of 2.4 metres.
- 3.6. An on-site substation and switchgear compound would be co-located with the battery plant. This would consist of two buildings with a height of 3.9 metres, surrounded by welded steel wire mesh fencing of up to 2.4 metres. Also located in this compound would be 2no. spare parts containers, having the appearance of shipping containers with a height of 2.9 metres.
- 3.7. Underground cabling would connect the panels and inverter/transformer stations to the proposed on-site substation and control rooms. An underground cable would link from the proposed solar substation to the National Grid Rayleigh substation.
- 3.8. 2 metre high perimeter fencing (loose metal mesh between wooden posts) with CCTV cameras mounted on poles of between 2.5 – 3 metres would be installed to maintain security. There would also be at least one 3 metre high pole-mounted weather station.
- 3.9. Landscape planting, biodiversity enhancements and surface water attenuation measures would form part of the proposal.

4. Other relevant applications

Applications of note include other solar farm and housing development approvals/allowed appeals in the local area, as follows:

- 4.1. 21/00394/FUL – Land east and west of A130 and north and south of Canon Barns Road, East Hanningfield – Appeal Allowed 6th December 2022

Installation of a solar photovoltaic (pv) park generating up to 49.9 Mw of electricity spread over three sites (sited either side of the A130/Canon Barns Road), comprising of ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, battery-based electricity storage containers, and one point of connection (POC) mast of up to 35m in height on Church Road (junction with Link House Farm), together with inverters/transformer stations, distribution network operator (DNO) substation, access and cable connection to POC mast to connect to 132 kV power line, customer substation/switchgear and meter kiosk, batteries, internal buried cabling and grid connection cables, internal access tracks, security fencing and gates and CCTV cameras, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

- 4.2. 21/00555/FUL – Land west of Hill Farm, Pan Lane, East Hanningfield – Approved 7th July 2022

Installation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) park generating up to 8 MW of electricity, comprising of ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, substation, internal access tracks, transformers/inverters, fencing and gates, CCTV cameras, temporary construction compound, underground cable and connection to end user and other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

- 4.3. 21/00502/FUL – Land east of A130 south of Canon Barns Road, East Hanningfield – Approved 31st January 2022

Installation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) park generating up to 41.8 MW of electricity to the land West of Hill Farm Pan Lane, comprising of ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, battery-based electricity storage containers, together with inverters/transformer stations, Distribution Network Operator (DNO) Substation, customer substation/switchgear and meter kiosk, internal buried cabling and grid connection cables, internal access tracks, security fencing and gates and CCTV cameras, upgraded existing site access, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

- 4.4. 12/01480/OUT – Former Runwell Hospital Site, Runwell Chase – Approved 2nd January 2013

Currently nearing completion, this is a housing scheme of circa 600 new homes within the site of a former hospital. This application was considered on grounds of previously developed land.

5. Summary of consultations

Basildon District Council: Objection. Concerns raised include:

- Impact on the Green Belt.
- Highly visible from Runwell Road.
- Impact view from PROW network.
- Introduce man-made features into the rural landscape, detrimental to landscape character.

Runwell Parish Council: Objection. Raised the following comments:

- Object to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- Glint and glare issues.
- Safety of PROW users.

- Devaluation of material assets.
- Health implications of living nearby solar farm.
- Loss of visual amenity.
- Loss of agricultural land.

Essex County Council Highways: The proposal is acceptable to the Highway Authority subject to conditions.

South Essex Parking Partnership: No response.

Public Health & Protection Services: No comments provided the recommended mitigation is employed as outlined in the acoustic report.

Environment Agency: No objection.

ECC Minerals & Waste: No objection, and no requirement for a Minerals Resource Assessment, provided the land is returned to its former state after 40 years.

Ramblers Association: No objection but request that the PROW shall remain open throughout lifetime of development, and this should be conditioned.

ECC Historic Environment Branch: the proposed development site is in an area with a high potential to contain archaeological remains. Two important archaeological excavations have previously been undertaken in close proximity to the proposed development. Recommend that conditions are attached to any consent.

Natural England: No objection.

UK Power Networks (Network Planner): No response.

H.S.E East Anglia Area: No objection.

Economic Development & Implementation: No response.

Anglian Water Services Ltd: No objection.

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service: Comments.

- More detailed observations on access and facilities for Fire Services will be considered at Building Regulation stage.
- Reference to compliance with Building Regulations.
- Notes additional water supplies for firefighting may be necessary for the development.
- Preference for sprinkler systems.

Essex and Suffolk Water: No response.

Police - Designing Out Crime: Comments.

- Other parts of the country have seen an exponential rise in crime in relation to solar farms with everything from solar panels to cabling, batteries and ancillary equipment being targeted.
- Would like to see greater consideration given to the security of the site.

Rochford District Council: Substantive response given cross-boundary application and devolution of powers given to CCC. Comments raised:

- Impact to Green Belt.

- Landscape and visual impact.
- Built heritage, including nearby listed buildings.
- Agricultural land classification.
- Highway safety.
- Flooding.
- Residential amenity.

Rettendon Parish Council: No response.

Network Rail: No objection but raise precautionary comments regarding proximity to train line.

Historic England: Not offering advice.

Local residents: 15 letters of objection received. Concerns raised:

- Significant harm to PROW.
- Impact on local wildlife.
- Not environmentally friendly.
- Views from residential properties will be impacted.
- Traffic, light and noise pollution.
- Potential health implications.
- Health and safety risks.
- Safety and security issues – rise in crime.
- Detrimental impact to local horses.
- Loss of agricultural land.
- Inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- Benefits of renewable energy should not be at expense of beautiful countryside.
- Devaluation of local properties.
- Potential fire hazards.

6. Planning considerations

Main Issues

6.1. The main issues for this proposal are:

- The Principle of Development
- Landscape Character and Visual Amenity
- Natural Environment
- Residential Living Environment
- Traffic and Highway Safety
- Flooding and Drainage
- Very Special Circumstances

Planning Policy

6.2. Renewables now account for over one third of all UK electricity generation, driven by the deployment of wind, solar and biomass. Electricity demand is predicted to double in the UK by 2050, driven in part by the electrification of vehicles and increased use of clean electricity replacing gas for heating. The Government has set a target to cut greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels in the UK by 100% by 2050.

- 6.3. The Government expects future low cost, net zero consistent electricity to be made up of on shore and offshore wind and solar, complemented by technologies which provide power or reduce demand when the wind is not blowing, or the sun does not shine.
- 6.4. The principle of solar development is supported in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which states that planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 6.5. The UK is committed to meeting a target of net-zero by or before 2050. This means that across the UK, emissions of greenhouse gas for all sources will have to reduce from the current figure of 4352 million tonnes. The UK Government industrial and green growth strategies have made further pledges to invest in green growth low carbon infrastructure and investment in efficiency.
- 6.6. On 16th July 2019, Chelmsford City Council declared a Climate and Ecological emergency. The declaration represented a commitment to take appropriate action to make the Council's activities carbon net-zero by 2030.
- 6.7. Proposals for development of solar farms are assessed against national and local planning policies including National Policy Statements (NPS), National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) and the statutory Development Plan for Chelmsford City Council area.

National Planning Policy

- 6.8. The overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (NPS EN-1) and National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (NPS EN-3) set out national policy for the delivery of nationally significant energy infrastructure, including renewable energy, although neither explicitly covers solar powered electricity generation or battery storage. The NPS' set out assessment principles for judging impacts of energy projects and are material considerations when considering development proposals.
- 6.9. The Environment Bill has put the 25-year Environment Plan into law and has created a statutory framework for environment principles. The Bill includes ambitious legislative measures to take direct action to address environmental policy including biodiversity net gain, restoration and enhancement of nature, improvement of air quality, tackling climate change, waste and resource efficiently and water resource management to enable the Government to reach its commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050.
- 6.10. The NPPF talks generally about renewables within the context of planning for climate change and makes no specific reference to solar farms. It favours sustainable energy systems as long as any impacts are (or can be) made acceptable, and that local planning authorities should approach these as part of a positive strategy for tackling climate change.
- 6.11. Paragraph 158 of the NPPF states that when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:

- a) 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; and
- b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.
- 6.12. The application site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt (Green Belt). Paragraph 137 of the NPPF states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
- 6.13. Paragraph 147 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 6.14. Paragraph 148 states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 6.15. Paragraph 151 states that when located within the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases, developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.
- 6.16. All planning proposals and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The NPPF paragraphs 174a and 174b require proposals to:
- a) protect and enhance the valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognise 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, and of trees and woodland.
- 6.17. The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG): Renewable and low carbon energy paragraph 007 states criteria for considering proposals for renewable energy technologies, stating that it is important to be clear that:
- the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections;
 - cumulative impacts require particular attention, especially the increasing impact that wind turbines and large scale solar farms can have on landscape and local amenity as the number of turbines and solar arrays in an area increases;
 - local topography is an important factor in assessing whether wind turbines and large scale solar farms could have a damaging effect on landscape and recognise that the impact can be as great in predominately flat landscapes as in hilly or mountainous areas;

- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting;
- proposals in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and in areas close to them where there could be an adverse impact on the protected area, will need careful consideration;
- protecting local amenity is an important consideration which should be given proper weight in planning decisions.

6.18. The NPPG: Renewable and low carbon energy paragraph 013 outlines guidance on the specific planning considerations that relate to large scale ground-mounted solar PV farms. These particular factors include:

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

Local Planning Policies

6.19. Strategic Policy S2 - Addressing climate change and flood risk, sets out the Council's strategic policy requirements for mitigating and adapting to climate change. In addressing the move to a lower carbon future for Chelmsford, it states that the Council will, amongst other considerations, encourage new development that provides opportunities for renewable and low carbon energy technologies and schemes and provides opportunities for green infrastructure including city greening, and new habitat creation.

- 6.20. Policy DM19 - Renewable and low carbon energy sets out the criterion that renewable and low carbon planning application proposals will be considered against. It states that planning permission will be granted for renewable and low carbon development provided they:
- i. Do not cause demonstratable harm to residential living environment; and
 - ii. Avoid or minimise impacts on the historic environment; and
 - iii. Can demonstrate no adverse effect on the natural environment including designated sites; and
 - iv. Do not have an unacceptable visual impact which would be harmful to the character of the area; and
 - v. will not have a detrimental impact on highway safety.
- 6.21. Several other local plan policies are relevant to the consideration of proposals including:
- Strategic Priority 5 - Delivering New and Improved Strategic Infrastructure
 - Strategic Policy S1 - Spatial Principles.
 - Strategic Policy S3 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment,
 - Strategic Policy S4 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment,
 - Strategic Policy S11 - The role of the countryside,
 - Policy DM6 - New buildings and structures in the Green Belt,
 - Policy DM10 - Change of use (Land and buildings) and Engineering operations.
 - Policy DM13 - Designated heritage assets,
 - Policy DM14 - Non designated heritage assets,
 - Policy DM15 - Archaeology,
 - Policy DM16 - Ecology and biodiversity,
 - Policy DM17 - Trees, Woodland and landscape features,
 - Policy DM18 - Flooding / SUDs
 - Policy DM23 - High quality and inclusive design,
 - Policy DM27 - Parking standards,
 - Policy DM29 - Protecting living and working conditions,
 - Policy DM30 - Contamination and pollution.
- 6.22. In May 2021, the Council published its draft Solar Farm Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Consultation Document. The SPD was Adopted by the Council's Cabinet on 16th November 2021. The SPD contains local guidance on preparing and submitting proposals for solar farms. It gives guidance on how planning applications should be considered in light of national and local requirements, and inter alia stresses the importance of adequate Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- 6.23. There are a number of other studies, policies and publications relating to renewable energy proposals and climate change that have been published by other Government departments, bodies and interested stakeholders. Discussions were held during the COP26 summit which concluded with nearly 200 countries agreeing the Glasgow Climate Pact to aim to manage global temperature rise to 1.5 C. Other outcomes included the ratification of outstanding elements of the 'Paris Agreement'.
- 6.24. For the purposes of this planning application, consideration is based upon those documents that form part of National Planning Guidance and the Local Plan. This is in accordance with planning law that requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Principle of Development

- 6.25. The starting point for consideration is whether the proposal is acceptable within the Green Belt. The NPPF and local planning policies set out that solar farms do not fall within any of the exceptions for development in the Green Belt and therefore is inappropriate development.
- 6.26. The NPPF and local planning policies confirm that when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development and, in such cases, the developer will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if proposals in those locations are to proceed.
- 6.27. The applicant states that the key environmental benefit is that the proposal has capacity to generate up to 49.9 MW of renewable energy. Such a contribution is significant in the face of meeting national and local targets to reduce CO2 emissions. The applicant argues that this amounts to very special circumstances.
- 6.28. Further, the applicant maintains that the proposed development would also provide tree and species rich hedgerow planting, including 'gapping up' (reinforcement) of existing hedging and the introduction of new planting bands and hedgerows. Wild green grassland and planting corridors would be provided around the margins of the proposed perimeter fence. The scheme proposes to enhance the landscape qualities of the area, and together with bird and bat boxes, the applicant is seeking to provide new and improved wildlife habitats.
- 6.29. The key environmental benefit (renewable energy production), alongside other very special circumstances so far as they exist, must be weighed against the inappropriate nature of the development. This takes place in a balancing exercise, but substantial weight must be given to any harm to the Green Belt. The balancing exercise is a matter of planning judgement.

Openness

- 6.30. Openness is not defined in the NPPF but is commonly understood to refer to an absence of development. The Court of Appeal has confirmed that Green Belt openness can have a spatial as well as a visual impact.
- 6.31. The site is currently in agricultural use and consists of open fields interspersed with mature field-edge planting giving the site in general a well-vegetated character. Trees and hedgerows border the site boundaries, in large part, and would be all retained.
- 6.32. The development would be located across a series of agricultural fields with a gently sloping gradient. The fields within the site are delineated and divided by existing hedgerows and trees. The site itself is open, but the wider area contains a varied pattern of undulating landform, creating areas of low-lying land and elevated ridges. Despite the existing vegetation bounding the site, areas of the land are clearly visible from local visual receptors. Due to the landform and topography, exposed, uninterrupted views of the site are easily achieved from sections of the A130, the A132, Rettendon Turnpike and properties along Runwell Road. This heightens the prominence of the site within the wider rural, arable landscape and the impact of the proposals is greater due to the sites elevated position.
- 6.33. The site is located within the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area (Natural England National Character Area Profile No. 111 refers). Locally, the Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford,

Maldon, and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment (CBA 2006) locates it within LCA F11 - South Hanningfield Wooded Farmland (LCA). Key characteristics of the land include:

- Undulating mature wooded farmland
- Vast expanse of Hanningfield reservoir
- Mixed woodland and a patchwork of diverse habitats surrounding the reservoir.
- Small scale linear settlement pattern,
- Medium to large scale arable fields with hedged and treed field boundaries.
- Views to wooded horizons both within the character area and within adjacent character areas
- Network of quiet, narrow rural lanes traverse the area.

6.34. The indicative site layout is shown on drawing RC3-02-P02 Revision 04. This shows that the proposal would retain the original field pattern in situ. Between the arrays would be a series of internal access tracks. Mitigation, in the form of additional planting, primarily along the site boundaries, is proposed. The existing hedgerows would be augmented and retained.

Spatial impact

6.35. The site itself is large, measuring around 59 hectares in main site area, 66.1 overall which includes the connection to National Grid Rayleigh substation. The extensive solar farm and associated features such as the plant containers and buildings, site access and access tracks, and fencing would all serve to diminish the degree to which, in terms of spatial extent, the site remains free and open, i.e undeveloped.

6.36. The immediate contextual area is agricultural in nature and contains only a sporadic array of smaller scale buildings including dwellings and farmsteads. The features would have a large physical mass and footprint, with development spread across a substantial area.

6.37. The surrounding existing pylons and adjacent highway (A130, A132 and Rettendon Turnpike) detract from the rurality of the area, but they do not diminish it. They are typical features commonly found across all types of landscapes, including Green Belt.

6.38. The geographical extent of the solar arrays and associated infrastructure are new features that are not present within the existing landscape. Due to their mass, scale and geographical area, the resulting change of use and urbanisation of the land arising from the proposal would result in a significant change of spatial character that would result in a loss of openness to the Green Belt. The change in spatial character would harm the principle of Green Belt protections as the land would no longer be open nor of rural character. How this landscape is thereafter appreciated and understood by the public would be fundamentally changed and this runs contrary to the planning policies put in place to protect the Green Belt for its own sake. This harm is unacceptable and significant.

6.39. The consideration of very special circumstances is undertaken on wider balance, see 'Very Special Circumstances' section of report.

Visual Impact

6.40. This visual loss to the character and appearance of the area, and the effects on the character and appearance of the surrounding area more generally, are addressed in the applicant's Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA).

- 6.41. The LVA identifies several locations (visual receptor viewpoints) from which the site can be viewed. It also identifies steps that would be taken to mitigate against harm that would be likely to arise from the implementation of the development. Proposed areas of additional vegetation are shown on the indicative landscape design layout, Drawing No. P22-1918-EN-003 (E).
- 6.42. The LVA has been reviewed by the Council's external landscaping consultants, Essex County Council's Place Services (Place Services) who raise concerns with both the methodology employed by the LVA and the significant impacts to landscape character and visual amenity that would result from the solar farm proposals. Further comment on the LVA is made under Landscape Character and Visual Amenity section of this report.
- 6.43. Given the topography of the site and the patchwork of woodland, hedgerows and trees, the proposal would be prominent along PROW-231-8 and PROW 229-23. It is common understanding that PROW receptors have high sensitivity to change. Users of the PROWs would experience a significant change in experience with views of rows of man-made solar arrays and associated infrastructure highly visible, which would replace the current undeveloped agricultural fields that are notable for their absence of development.
- 6.44. The sensitivity to change of users of neighbouring highways A130, Rettendon Turnpike and the A132 would be lesser. However, due to the exposed and elevated position of the landform, uninterrupted views of the site would be achieved from sections along the local highway network, even considering the proposed mitigation planting. These views are material.
- 6.45. For key visual receptors from the PROWs as well as occupants of residential properties in the locality, and users of the local highway network, there would be an impact to views which despite the proposed landscaping and mitigation, would not diminish over time. The proposal would thereby lead to a significant loss of visual openness of the Green Belt.
- 6.46. Although most Planning Inspectors consider 40 years to be "temporary" in the context of solar farms, it would have a 'generational' impact on the landscape for nearly half a century. Considering that the proposal would lead to a significant loss of visual openness, the 40-year lifetime of the development would not be inconsequential for regular users or anyone coming into contact with the landscape and the identified harm to openness would persist throughout this period.
- 6.47. Whilst the visual loss of openness would be localised, this would still have a wide-felt impact on the local area and would represent a significant adverse physical and visual encroachment into the Green Belt reducing its openness in both visual and spatial terms. This harm is unacceptable and significant. The consideration of very special circumstances is undertaken on wider balance, see 'Very Special Circumstances' section of report.

Conclusion – Principle of Development

- 6.48. By reason of the sheer physical mass, scale and geographical extent of the proposal, it would lead to significant spatial and visual harm to the Green Belt. The impact of visual and spatial harm would result in a significant adverse impact upon openness of the Green Belt. This must be afforded substantial weight in the planning assessment.
- 6.49. Whilst for a temporary period, the operational period of the development, at 40 years, still represents a significant period of time during which the proposal would have a harmful

presence within the Green Belt and for the area in general for everyone experiencing that harmful presence for any part of that 40 year period or for the entirety of that term. The harm at point of exposure would amount to the same harmful experience.

- 6.50. The development is concluded to be unacceptable unless very special circumstance, on balance, clearly outweigh those impacts. The consideration of very special circumstances is undertaken on wider balance, see 'Very Special Circumstances' section of report.

Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

- 6.51. The proposed solar farm would consist of fenced arrays and other facilities set within the respective fields. Landscape features such as hedgerows and trees will predominately remain and/or are being enhanced through the proposals. This approach, whilst reducing harm to existing landscape features, does not mean that the development will not have an adverse impact on the landscape character of the site. The impact on landscape character must also consider the potential cumulative landscape and visual impacts created by this and other solar energy farm schemes in the local area.
- 6.52. The application has been submitted with a Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) undertaken by Pegasus Group. Generally, the LVA has been carried out in accordance with the principles set out within the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' Third Edition (GLVIA3) prepared by the Landscape Institute (LI) and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA).
- 6.53. The LVA (Para 2.10), confirms the fieldwork and photography used to inform the assessment were undertaken in August (late-Summer) during full leaf cover. For a development of this scale and in such a prominent location, the site visits and photography would also need to have been undertaken over December-February (Winter) to ensure that a 'worst-case scenario' (i.e. when leaf cover is at its minimum) is being appraised. This is the only way to appreciate fully the impact of development across all seasons to enable adequate assessment.
- 6.54. The assessment includes a desktop study, a review of the landscape and visual baseline, an assessment of landscape and visual receptors, and a summary and conclusion. The sites characteristics are reasonably described and the range of views that are available have been appropriately summarized. However, the LVA itself underestimates the likely effects of the proposed development on landscape character and visual amenity.
- 6.55. From the point of view of landscape and visual assessment, there are two aspects of the proposal that have potential to cause an effect on visual amenity and landscape character. Considered below under Landscape Character, these are the activities and elements of the proposal that would affect the fabric of the site landscape, and the activities and visual characteristics of the elements that would be visible from the surrounding locality.

Landscape Character

- 6.56. The site is located within South Hanningfield Wooded Farmland (F11) in LCA (LCA). This documents forms part of the evidence base for the Chelmsford Local Plan. This has been identified as having high sensitivity to change, with key characteristics such as undulating farmland, medium to large-scale-arable fields, with hedged field boundaries and views to a wooded horizon both within the character area and adjacent character areas.

- 6.57. The site sits on the southern edge of the LCA across a large expanse of medium to large fields with hedgerows and trees lining the boundaries. The pattern and landform vary, creating areas of low-lying land and elevated ridges. Views of the wooded skyline are present, along with views of the rising land. The varying topography of this landscape relating to this site means the proposals would be a prominent feature of the wider landscape character.
- 6.58. There would be no significant adverse effects on landscape fabric during the construction phase as there would be limited removal of hedgerows at key entrance points and crossings, with no other loss of landscape components such as trees. As arable fields, there would also be minimal loss of ground vegetation as a result of the solar arrays, new tracks, medium voltage power stations, substations and cable trenches. Close to the end of the construction phase, the proposed mitigation proposals would be commenced.
- 6.59. The main effects on the landscape character of the site would occur during the operational phase because of the presence of solar panels and related works.
- 6.60. The local landscape character areas in which the site is located are deemed to be of medium landscape value and medium landscape sensitivity within the LVA. It is not clear however, within the LVA how the judgement of susceptibility has been reached nor what the judgement values mean. Similarly, to judgements of susceptibility, the LVA also fails to provide definitions for the judgements of value. The assessments made are not clearly defined in the LVA and are therefore baseless. Due to this, the conclusion reached is that the assessment provided underestimates the likely effects of the proposal on landscape character and visual amenity.
- 6.61. The proposal would replace arable land with an urban-characterised landscape which would have a significant adverse effect on existing landscape character. As a result, the proposal would bring about a significant change to the character of the local landscape and would have an impact on the appearance of the environment within which it would be situated.
- 6.62. During the operational phase, the solar arrays, site tracks, fencing, CCTV, and the associated single storey containers and buildings would contrast starkly with the existing agricultural character. The nature of these features, together with the overall size and large geographical extent of the site mean that the proposal would lead to a material change in the character of the landscape from natural and agricultural character to a man-made urbanised landscape. This would result in a significant adverse effect on the landscape character.
- 6.63. Although the nature of the development means that landscape features such as trees and hedgerows would remain on site, this does not mean that the siting of a solar farm would not have an adverse impact upon the character of the area and sense of place. The solar farm would still be highly visible and prominent, which would detract from identified landscape character. Due to landscape topography, there is no amount of screening that could be introduced to adequately mitigate the harms to landscape character which would arise.
- 6.64. A key characteristic of the area is its rurality. The LCA guidelines consider that this is a feature that should be conserved. This is a very rural and agricultural landscape where natural features such as agricultural fields, the presence of hedgerows and trees and other perceptual elements of the landscape contribute to a wider appreciation of the character of the area.
- 6.65. The LVA has judged that the significance of effect would be minor adverse after 5 years. This position is not accepted. It stands to reason that over time the proposed landscaping will reach maturity and provide some screening function, but as explained, the topography of the site

would mean it is not possible to meaningfully screen the proposals to the wider area and even with mitigation, where it is effective, the proposals would still amount to a significant change in landscape character bearing in mind the nature of those receptors which would experience the site more closely, which includes local residential properties and PROWs.

- 6.66. The change in appearance would lead to the erosion of the open and undeveloped character of the site, which is notable for its absence of physical features and man-made structures. This would result in a high magnitude of change and in turn a significant adverse effect. This is the conclusion of assessment, which stands in contrast to the applicant's LVA assessment.
- 6.67. The development would appear a stark contrast within the rural, agricultural landscape, where it would result in the substantial loss of the rurality of the area, a key characteristic of landscape character. The proposal would be visible in parts across the rural landscape and due to its size, scale and mass of contrasting character, would undermine and disrupt the wider rural landscape mosaic which is unacceptable in the context of arising harm to landscape character.
- 6.68. Once operational, it is accepted that the development would involve very little associated activity that could risk disrupting the tranquillity of the landscape. This does not overcome the harm identified above.

Visual Amenity

- 6.69. The proposal has been supported by Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping as part of the LVA, which show that the solar farm has potential to be visible from the north, northwest, south and west. In addition, the effect of the development from 23 viewpoints has been considered.
- 6.70. As part of the planning assessment the submitted information has been reviewed and conclusion reached that the LVA fails to provide a sufficient evaluation of the visual effects in terms of their size or scale, geographic extent and duration and reversibility as required for judging the magnitude of visual effects. The LVA assesses impacts on a three-point scale: short term (under 5 years), medium term (between 1 and 5 years) and long term (over 5 years). This methodology is not considered sufficient as the judgements as to the magnitude of change do not currently reflect the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the proposed development over its lifetime (i.e. 40 years).
- 6.71. From a landscape and visual perspective, the site is set across a large expanse of medium to large fields with hedgerows and trees lining the boundaries. The pattern and landform vary, creating areas of low-lying land and elevated ridges. Views of the wooded skyline are present, along with views across the rising land.
- 6.72. During the operational phase, aspects that are likely to give significant effects on landscape character and amenity are the solar arrays, site tracks, fencing, CCTV, and the associated single storey containers and buildings, the highest of which would not exceed 4 metres.
- 6.73. In general terms, the visibility of the proposed solar farm would be confined to an area relatively local to the proposed site. This is due to the single storey height of the development itself, the nature of local topography and levels of existing vegetation. Boundary screening is proposed and the mitigation proposes additional planting along the site boundaries to screen the development. However, due to the sloping gradient and topography, the mitigation planting would not completely screen the solar farm; as views would still be achievable from local visual receptors.

- 6.74. The panels would be seen within the existing field pattern and enclosing vegetation. Given the topography of the site and patchwork of woodland hedgerows and trees, the visual impact of the proposed development is primarily limited to high sensitivity visual receptors (local residents and PROW users) – but that does not mean that wider local impact is not present or harmful as described already in this report. From close quarters, the proposal would result in a significant change.
- 6.75. In relation to the effect that the proposal would have upon local residents' amenity; as the panels are single storey, the presence of intervening boundary treatment and vegetation would screen them from ground floor views. In cases where boundary treatment is limited/open, the arrays are sited an acceptable distance from residential boundaries so to not be overbearing. At first floor level, it would be possible to see the arrays across an expansive viewpoint. It is acknowledged there would be expansive views of the panels but given their single storey nature and level of separation from neighbouring properties, the effect would not be harmful nor overbearing such that it would warrant a specific reason for refusal on residential amenity grounds. Further consideration to this matter is given in the section on Residential Living Environment below.
- 6.76. The views available on the PROW network would be more extensive, especially as they are used recreationally by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Given the purpose of their journey and the slower speed at which they would pass through the landscape, PROW users would be more sensitive to the visual impact of the development.
- 6.77. From PROW visual receptors (PROW-231-8 and PROW 229-23), the proposed solar farm would lead to a marked adverse impact that, despite the proposed landscaping, would not diminish over time.
- 6.78. Although the site is not visible in its entirety as one entity, given the intervening hedgerows and tree belts, users of the PROWs would experience a significant change as they would experience sequential adverse visual impacts, with views of man-made solar arrays rather than the agricultural countryside and given the scale of development area this impact would not be fleeting but sustained over a significant distance/length of the PROW. From viewpoints along the PROW network, the harm arising from this change would be substantial.
- 6.79. Whilst receptors using the A130 and A132 may be moving more quickly, with drivers in particular having their attention focused ahead, owing to the proximity of Rettendon Turnpike there is greater likelihood of motorists frequenting the area more often and slowing or stopping at the turnpike itself, thus having a stronger familiarity with the local surroundings. Motorists on fast-moving roads are not typically regarded as sensitive to landscape impact as the view they would gain would be short lived, but the existence and proximity of the turnpike does introduce a material consideration in terms of receptor viewpaths for this proposal. For people commonly or frequently experiencing this landscape, whether by foot, cycle, car, etc., the sensitivity to impact on visual amenity of the landscape would be higher and so this impact is material. As described above, the impact on the visual amenity of landscape is substantial.

Cumulative Impacts

- 6.80. The LVA has not conducted any assessment of the cumulative impacts of the proposed solar farm development in combination with other allocations/planning applications within proximity

of the site. Applications for solar farms and other major developments within the local area include [but not limited to]:

- Land West of Hill Farm (Ref. 21/00555/FUL);
- Land East And West Of A130, North And South Of Canon Barns (Ref. 21/00394/FUL);
- Land East Of A130 South Of Canon Barns Road (Ref. 21/00502/FUL);
- Land At Former Runwell Hospital (Ref. 12/01480/OUT).

- 6.81. Owing to the relationship, nature and close proximity of these proposals all within the A130 corridor, the proposals could have additional effects or increase the magnitude of change and therefore should have been included within a cumulative assessment.
- 6.82. In the absence of a detailed assessment, significant effects on the South Hanningfield Wooded Farmland LCA (Chelmsford Landscape Character Assessment) which are likely to occur if the subject solar farm proposal in combination with other developments were to be constructed, has not been appropriately assessed. There will also be adverse sequential cumulative effects on the local network of PROWs should the above developments be constructed together.
- 6.83. In the absence of a detailed assessment of the cumulative impact of the now numerous schemes in this area a precautionary approach should be taken.

Conclusion

- 6.84. The applicant considers the impact of the solar farm on the landscape character and visual amenity would result in localised landscape and visual affects but would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt in landscape and visual terms. The Council's assessment does not accept this conclusion.
- 6.85. The application fails to recognise the adverse effect the development would have on landscape character, with many of the receptors being judged by the applicant's LVA as having minimal adverse effect. The adverse effects arising from this proposal are assessed to be greater and the proposed mitigation would be insufficient to moderate, to any reasonable extent, the level of ill effect.
- 6.86. The proposal would result in a large-scale, man-made, urban-characterised development that would have a significant adverse impact on both landscape character and visual amenity. The proposed development would be significantly detrimental to the landscape character of the area, and it is concluded that the proposal would have an unacceptable, substantial adverse impact on the surrounding landscape. The predicted landscape affects arising from the proposed development are not able to be overcome by the proposed mitigation.
- 6.87. In consideration of very special circumstances, the wider adverse impact of the proposals must also be factored in where appropriate.

Natural Environment

Biodiversity

- 6.88. The likely effects of the proposed development on nature conservation and biodiversity have been fully assessed by the application. The baseline for the Ecological Assessment Report (EAR) has been established through a combination of desk study and field surveys.

- 6.89. There are no statutory or non-statutory nature conservation sites within the site. There are four nationally designated statutory sites within a 5km radius of the site, consisting of two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and two Local Nature Reserves (LNR). There are six internationally designated sites consisting of three Special Protection Areas (SPA), two Ramsar sites and one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within a 10km radius of the Site. The closest of these sites are the Essex Estuaries SAC and the Crouch and Roach Estuaries (Mid-Essex Coast Phase 3) SPA and Ramsar Site, which are all approximately 1.51 km to the east.
- 6.90. A number of ecological studies have been undertaken and accompany the application. The studies include an Ecological Assessment Report (EAR), Breeding Bird Survey, Great Crested Newt eDNA Survey, Biodiversity Management Plan and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment. Natural England has been consulted as part of the application process with there being no objections given to the proposal on ecological grounds.
- 6.91. In relation to wintering birds, the site is known to be used by skylarks. A skylark mitigation strategy has been submitted by the applicants. This confirms that the scheme has been designed to minimise the direct impact on skylarks.
- 6.92. Significant biodiversity enhancements would be created through planting and appropriate management of wildlife friendly habitats including the provision of large planting belts. The enhancement forms part of a suite of proposed ecological improvements that could be secured by a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) which would control the development for the duration of the project.
- 6.93. The enhancement includes the conversion of the arable fields into a neutral grassland and modified grasslands. Native species rich hedgerows would be both created and enhanced. A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment has been completed in accordance with the DEFRA 3.0 metric. The metric has been prepared by the applicant's ecologists to assess the pre and post development units on habitats. This shows that the proposal would deliver 138% gain in habitat units and 85% in hedgerows.
- 6.94. Had the application been recommended for approval, the ecological mitigation arrangements would be acceptable subject to conditions relating to the submission of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, the submission of details relating to hard and soft landscaping, boundary treatment and CCTV and lighting, wintering and breeding birds, including skylarks.

Trees

- 6.95. The trees and hedgerows bordering each field within the site contribute to the character and appearance of the area. There are no protected trees within the site and the site is not within a conservation area. That said, they are important natural landscape features.
- 6.96. The proposed development does not seek to remove any trees and only 3 small sections of hedgerows would be removed, with the remainder of trees and hedgerows to be retained. There are two sections of category B2 hedges and one section of a C2 hedge, therefore the impact to the amenity value would be limited.
- 6.97. The proposed works follow the guidelines set out BS 5837: 2012 trees in relation design, demolition and construction – recommendations, by implementing protective fencing where needed. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment recommends the submission of an Arboricultural

Method Statement and suggests 'heads of terms' for the method statement. It is considered a control mechanism, such as arboricultural method statement to be agreed by condition, would ensure protection of retained trees during construction.

- 6.98. Had the application been recommended for approval, the impact on trees would be acceptable subject to agreement of an Arboricultural Method Statement and other conditions to define the scope of works which may have an impact on trees such as surfacing, service runs, etc.

Loss of Agricultural Land

- 6.99. The NPPF at paragraph 174(b) states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by 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.
- 6.100. Annex 2: Glossary of the NPPF defines Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land as land in Grade's 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.
- 6.101. The need to protect BMV land is reiterated within the Council's Solar Farm Development SPD which states that land of such quality is an important area for food protection and reducing the agricultural land available increases the reliance on the importation of food, with subsequent impacts such as increased carbon emissions. The SPD advises that developments in the first instance should consider sites on previously developed land, brownfield or contaminated land, industrial land or land of grades 3b, 4 or 5.
- 6.102. The applicant has submitted an Agricultural Land Classification Report (ALC) report. The site area surveyed by the report was 68.6 hectares of land. The site was found to comprise land limited to 3b (50.6 hectares) and 3a (18.2 hectares).
- 6.103. Natural England has been consulted on the proposal and state that it is unlikely to lead to significant permanent loss of BMV agricultural land, as a resource for future generations. This is because the solar panels would be secured to the ground by steel piles with limited soil disturbance and could be removed in the future with no permanent loss of agricultural land quality likely to occur, provided the appropriate soil management is employed and the development is undertaken to high standards.
- 6.104. The removal of arable production is a material consideration, but this must be balanced against the benefit of the proposal in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 6.105. Planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installation is removed when no longer in use and that the land is restored to its previous use and condition.

Historic Environment

- 6.106. The site contains no designated or non-designated built heritage assets.
- 6.107. The heritage assessment submitted with the application scopes out 24 listed buildings within 3km of the site on the basis of distance, screening and lack of historic association. The conclusion of this scoping out process is agreed.

- 6.108. The heritage assessment considers three designated heritage assets in more detail; St Mary's Church Runwell (grade I listed), All Saints Church Rettendon (grade I listed) and the granary at Rettendon Place (grade II listed). It finds no harm to the setting of St Marys Church, on the basis that there is no ground level inter visibility and a small change to its wider setting. This assessment is accepted. It finds no harm to the setting of All Saints Church on the basis that there is a small change to its wider setting. However, the site would feature in views from the churchyard, where the wider rural settings is relevant and would also impact on views of the church tower from PROW 231-8 to the east of the site. This would impact on key views which contributes to the significance of the listed building and erode part of the wide rural setting. This would amount to less than substantial harm, given that only part of the wider setting is impacted upon, it would be a low level of harm. This harm is nonetheless a matter of great weight. The granary has its strongest association with the immediate rural setting and no harm to its significance is agreed.
- 6.109. The heritage assessment does not include assessment of built non designated heritage assets. There are two pillboxes within the western part of the site, one adjacent the railway line and within the east-west field boundary separating the western field. They are part of a series of features forming the GHQ defence line constructed in 1940, to slow a possible German invasion. Both are FW3/24 types made of concrete and brick. They form part of a group of defences on the western side of an anti-tank ditch now filled in, although there are other pillboxes to the northeast and southeast, now separated by the A130. The inter visibility between the pillboxes, lines of fire and landscape setting are important to the setting of the pillboxes and contributes to their significance. This would be eroded by the solar installation, adversely affecting their setting. This would be a moderate level of harm, taking account of other changes in the setting.
- 6.110. To the north there is the Toby Carvery, a former mid nineteenth century small county house, which due to its architectural and historic interest should be considered as a non-designated heritage asset. The rural setting contributes to its significance. The northeast part of the site contributes to its setting, even though it is severed by Runwell Road and screened, there would be a low level of harm to its setting.
- 6.111. The NPPF, at paragraph 202 states that where a proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Paragraph 203 states the effect of an application on a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application.
- 6.112. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement is required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. The harm caused would be a low level of less than substantial harm for the purposes of the NPPF. This should be balanced in against any public benefit delivered by the proposals in accordance with paragraph 196 of the NPPF.
- 6.113. In this regard, the proposal provides renewable energy benefits resulting in the creation of renewable energy from solar. The benefit of the proposal outweighs the level of harm on heritage conservation.
- 6.114. There is potential for archaeological remains across the whole of this development area, but there would be no unacceptable archaeological implications arising from the proposal, subject to a condition for evaluation and recording work were the application to be approved.

Residential Living Environment

- 6.115. With the exception of Southlands Cottages and Southlands Farmhouse, there are few residential properties sited along the operational boundaries. These properties are sited about 50 metres from the nearest arrays. The site also adjoins the busy A130 and the A132 which would further reduce the perceived noise impact from either on-site plant or construction noise.
- 6.116. The Council's Public Health and Protection Service raise no objections to the proposal, and it is not considered that the proposal would lead to material adverse impacts on noise.
- 6.117. It is acknowledged that during the construction phases, there would be periods when works are likely to be audible to nearby receptors. The submission of a Construction Management Plan/Statement could be conditioned to help minimise these temporary impacts.
- 6.118. As discussed earlier in the report, there are not considered to be ground floor intervisibility between local residential properties and the proposals. The impact of residential first floor views would offer a more expansive viewpoint of the proposals but this would not give rise to specific loss of residential amenity.
- 6.119. The solar panels are not considered to harmfully affect nearby residential amenity by way of adverse glint or glare to warrant a reason for refusal on this ground.
- 6.120. Precise details of CCTV and fencing could be secured by condition so that it does not lead to loss of privacy and/or be visually intrusive or overbearing on local residents.

Traffic and Highway Safety

- 6.121. A Construction Traffic Management Plan has been prepared and accompanies the application, which assesses all traffic and transport matters providing detailed access designs to be used for construction and operational vehicle access to the site from Runwell Road (A132). The access is considered suitable with the relevant visibility splays achieved.
- 6.122. The proposed construction vehicle route requires all construction vehicles to arrive from the east via the A130, which connects to the A12 to the north and A127 to the south. Both the A12 and A127 connect to the M25. A scheme of traffic management signage would be installed by the applicant in the event planning permission was achieved.
- 6.123. During the construction period, which is approximately 6 months, it is anticipated that there would be approximately 1,081 HGV deliveries (including a 10% buffer) to the site for all equipment and materials forming the solar farm and 105 forming the battery storage facility. This equates to 9 deliveries a day.
- 6.124. Once operational, maintenance vehicle visits (typically transit van or similar) would be limited in number and visiting the site approximately 10-20 times per year. These would therefore have a negligible impact on the local highway network.
- 6.125. PROWs within the site would remain open and available at all times during construction, operation and decommissioning. There will be no impact on offsite PROWs.
- 6.126. The Highway Authority have been consulted on the proposals and have reviewed the information provided. They have considered the safety of the site access, the impact of the

construction phase and also risks posed by Glint and Glare (Glint and Glare Assessment submitted with the application).

- 6.127. The Highway Authority raises no objections to the proposed access arrangement subject to appropriate planning conditions relating to attributes of the proposals and construction management.
- 6.128. The Highways Authority conclude that the proposal as submitted is not considered detrimental to highway safety, capacity or efficiency.

Flooding and Drainage

- 6.129. As most of the development is solar panels which are supported on piled struts, the surface area of the site is comparatively small in comparison to the overall development site area. The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy.
- 6.130. This FRA and drainage strategy outlines how surface water will be managed during operational phases of the development and provides an overview maintenance plan for the key SuDS features proposed.
- 6.131. No critical infrastructure has been placed within the mapped flood zones. Some PV panels are located within the mapped flood zones; however, this is considered acceptable and in line with current NPPF guidance for Essential Infrastructure. New landscaping would provide some improvement by intercepting runoff and promoting sedimentation, filtration and infiltration which is appropriate mitigation in the context of very minimal impact on flooding.
- 6.132. The proposed solar panels and tracks will not lead to any significant increase in run-off. However, as a precautionary measure, swales are proposed to store run-off from the steepest areas of the site and filter strips are provided for the remainder of the site. Ancillary buildings will be surrounded by a crushed stone apron consisting of clean 40-70mm clean stone and the larger substation will be served by a soakaway which has been sized to accommodate the 6hr 100yr + 40% climate change rainfall event.
- 6.133. The outline drainage scheme proposed ensures the proposed development will not increase flood risk away from the application site.

Very Special Circumstances

- 6.134. The NPPF at paragraph 147 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 6.135. Paragraph 148 states that when considering any planning application, local authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm in the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, or any other harm arising from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 6.136. Paragraph 151 states that when located within the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases, developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special

circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production from renewable sources.

6.137. The applicant states that the following comprise very special circumstances:

- Renewable energy generation
- The temporary and reversible nature of the development
- Biodiversity net-gain
- Lack of alternative sites
- Best available technology
- Good design
- Improvements to green infrastructure
- Farm diversification
- Soil regeneration

6.138. The matters referred to by the applicant are addressed as appropriate below:

Renewable Energy Generation, climate status and energy security

6.139. The tackling of the effects of climate change is a key government policy. The NPPF at paragraph 158(a) recognises that all renewable energy schemes can make a valuable contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

6.140. This proposal could produce up to 49.9 MW per annum of electricity – although this is the maximum and the applicant has indicated that this may not be fully achieved by the current proposals. Nonetheless, this is a significant amount of renewable energy reduction and is given significant weight in favour of granting planning permission for this proposal.

6.141. However, as required by paragraph 151 of the NPPF, the benefits of the scheme in respect of the reduction in greenhouse gas emission and maximisation of renewable energy has to be balanced against the harm to the Green Belt by virtue of the proposal being inappropriate development.

6.142. Whilst it is reasonable to weigh the environmental benefits strongly individually and cumulatively, the impact of the proposals on the Green Belt character of openness and permanence is also substantial. Support for sustainable and renewable energy generation does not mean the purpose or character of the Green Belt should be a less significant consideration.

6.143. The effects upon openness, landscape character and visual amenity are also given significant weight as described within this report and these increase the weight of consideration against the proposal. In this case, it is considered that the harm by reason of loss of openness and harm to landscape character is greater than the benefits that the proposal would have in delivering a renewable form of energy.

Temporary and Reversible

6.144. The application is for a forty-year timeframe which by its very nature would represent a considerable period of time during which the adverse impacts of the proposal would be experienced; such that the reversibility of the land is a matter given substantially less weight as a very special circumstance. The forty-year timeframe would not be perceived by those who

frequent the area as being temporary. There is nothing special or exceptional about the proposal in this regard other than it not being proposed for a period longer than 40 years.

Biodiversity net-gain

6.145. It is acknowledged that the proposal would result in biodiversity net gain resulting in the creation of 138% gain in habitat units and 85% in hedgerows. Biodiversity net gain is not in itself a very special circumstance as it is now an expectation of development, as set out within NPPF and the Chelmsford Local Plan. This is more generally reflected also within the NPPF and Chelmsford Local Plan requirement for development to conserve or enhance the natural environment. Whilst the betterment is more generally weighed in the planning balance of these proposals, and uplift is therefore apportioned some positive weight, there is nothing special or exceptional about the proposal in this regard.

Lack of Alternative Sites

6.146. The contents of the applicant's consideration of alternative sites are noted.

6.147. Planning law is clear that applications must be assessed on their merits against the relevant development plan and any other material considerations that may apply. Whilst the need for renewable energy generation is accepted, there is no requirement that points to it needing to be generated on this site specifically.

6.148. Given the economic need for these types of developments to be within 3km of a substation, the proximity of this proposal to the Rayleigh substation is not considered to be wholly unique or 'very special' and whilst the applicant asserts that substantial weight should be afforded to this issue in the planning balance, it can only be afforded weight that reflects the attributes of that case. On balance, the proposals are significantly harmful and there is no overwhelming evidence that suggests that no other sites would be available locally or indeed that an additional solar farm would need to be plugged into National Grid Rayleigh Substation rather than another substation. This also takes into account the existence of other already approved solar farms in this area.

Best Available Technology

6.149. The applicant contends that the use of best available technology has been employed to maximise the productivity of the solar farm. This very special circumstance can only be given very limited weight in consideration of this application and would not clearly outweigh the harms as identified.

Good Design

6.150. Good design has been cited as a very special circumstance. In contrast, the Council's case is that the solar farm would be harmful in terms of its urbanising impacts. The Council attaches no significant weight to good design as a very special circumstance in this case individually and cumulatively.

Green Infrastructure Improvements

6.151. Whilst the proposal would result in some landscape enhancements and, as discussed, a biodiversity net gain of 138% gain in habitat units and 85% in hedgerows, there is nothing

particularly special or uncommon about this outcome. Mitigation is proposed within most planning applications as a matter of course. There is nothing special or exceptional about the proposal in this regard.

Farm Diversification

6.152. The applicant contends that the proposed development would generate additional income to support the farming business. Whilst farm diversification is supported by local and national planning policy, there are other, less harmful ways of diversifying a farm holding which are often utilised by farmers to secure greater viability in their business. This is afforded limited weight in the planning balance and does not clearly outweigh, individually or cumulatively considered with other very special circumstances, the harms arising from the proposal.

Soil Regeneration

6.153. The applicant cites that moderate weight should be attached to soil regeneration and states that there is evidence that conversion of land from arable to grassland which is uncultivated increases soil organic matter and soil organic carbon. Whilst the Local Planning Authority holds no evidence to refute these claims, it is common practice and a tactic used by farmers to let their land lie fallow for an extended period of time to improve cultivation – as such the proposals are not needed to allow for this approach to be taken on the land. Very limited weight is attached to this in the planning balance.

Very Special Circumstances: Conclusion

6.154. It is accepted by both the applicant and the Council that the proposal is inappropriate development.

6.155. Due to its size, visual massing and scale, the proposal would clearly have a significant effect upon the openness of the Green Belt.

6.156. It is acknowledged that the proposal could deliver up to 49.9MW of solar energy. This is a significant amount of renewable energy reduction and is given significant weight in favour of granting planning permission for this proposal.

6.157. Yet, having considered the planning balance along with very special circumstances proposed above singularly and cumulatively, it is clear that the proposal, which it is concluded would result in visual and spatial loss of openness and would adversely affect landscape character and visual amenity, cannot be clearly outweighed by other considerations (very special circumstances). The identified harm is significant in impact and carries substantial weight. The effect cannot be appropriately mitigated, and the overall considerations and benefits (very special circumstances) do not amount to outcomes which clearly outweigh Green Belt and other harms.

6.158. The nature of planning is that it is often a balancing exercise between a number of different elements. In this case, it is considered that the harm by reason of loss of openness and harm to landscape character is greater than the benefits that the proposal would have in delivering a renewable form of energy.

6.159. The very special circumstances have been assessed and are not accepted as overriding considerations.

Sustainability

- 6.160. The NPPF considers that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives which are independent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways so that opportunities can be undertaken to secure net gains across economic, social and environmental objectives. Officers have considered this as an overarching consideration of this application proposal and in relation to the applicant's very special circumstances – environmental benefits.
- 6.161. The proposal is a renewable energy project which, provided that it does not comprise inappropriate development in the Green Belt, is supported by national and local planning policies due to the benefits it would deliver in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It would also deliver moderate social and employment benefits by providing employment in the construction and operational phase and generally contributing to sustaining jobs in the wider solar power industry. However, the loss of agricultural land could lead to the loss of agricultural jobs. This would somewhat be offset by the Government's commitment to promote renewable energy proposals.
- 6.162. There would be habitat and biodiversity net gains associated with the development.
- 6.163. The proposal would lead to loss of openness within the Green Belt that cannot be overcome by very special circumstances. It would also cause unacceptable harm to landscape character that cannot be appropriately mitigated to reduce the level of harm. This effect is given significant and great weight but does not warrant a specific reason for refusal on sustainability grounds.
- 6.164. Based on the consideration given above, whilst it is concluded that the proposal is a form of sustainable development and would meet sustainable development objectives, the development would give rise to unacceptable harm which would run contrary, on balance, to planning policy.

Conclusion

- 6.165. There is a recognised need and support for renewable energy technology through National and Local Planning policy and this development would contribute towards the targets set for the UK's greenhouse gas emission reduction and increasing the country's energy supply for renewable sources.
- 6.166. The assessment of renewable energy proposals requires the impacts to be considered in the context of the strong "in principle" policy support given the Government's conclusion that there is a pressing need to deliver renewable energy generation.
- 6.167. The scheme would be for an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt that would lead to a loss of openness and visual harms. The NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very Special Circumstances' will not exist unless potential harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

- 6.168. The very special circumstances put forward by the applicant has been considered, but these do not outweigh the substantial harm by reason of inappropriateness and loss of openness, that the proposal would have on the Green Belt.
- 6.169. The proposal would give rise to a substantial level of harm to landscape character and visual amenity that cannot be appropriately mitigated to reduce the level of harm.
- 6.170. The proposal would not have a harmful adverse impact on ecology, residential amenity, highway safety or flood risk, subject to controls recommended by planning conditions.
- 6.171. The main benefit arising of the scheme is the contribution to the production of renewable energy and consequential reduction in CO2 emissions. These benefits are afforded substantial weight.
- 6.172. The benefits associated from the development do not outweigh the harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt and the harm caused to landscape character and visual amenity and do not amount to very special circumstances.
- 6.173. It is concluded that the proposal is unacceptable and does not comply with the Chelmsford Local Plan, Solar Farm SPD, the NPPF or the NPPG.

7. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- 7.1. The application is not CIL liable.

RECOMMENDATION

The Application be REFUSED for the following reasons:-

Reason 1

Paragraph 147 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 148 states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 151 of the NPPF states that when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy project will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases, developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to precede. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources. Policy DM6 and DM10 of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan and the Adopted Solar Farm Development SPD reiterate the NPPF.

Policy DM19 - Renewable and low carbon energy of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan relates to proposals for renewable and low carbon energy. It states that planning permission will be granted for renewable and low carbon development provided they:

- i. Do not cause demonstratable harm to residential living environment; and
- ii. Avoid or minimise impacts on the historic environment; and
- iii. Can demonstrate no adverse effect on the natural environment including designated sites; and
- iv. Do not have an unacceptable visual impact which would be harmful to the character of the area; and

- v. will not have a detrimental impact on highway safety.

When located within the Green Belt, renewable or low carbon energy developments will also need to demonstrate very special circumstances in order to be approved.

The development would result in an unacceptable form of development within the Green Belt outside the exceptions listed within the NPPF or Policies DM6 or DM10 of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan. The proposal would be for an inappropriate form of development that would lead to loss of openness.

The proposed development by reason of its siting and scale would result in the creation of a large-scale, man-made, urban character development that would lead to visual and spatial loss of openness.

The very special circumstances put forward by the applicants have been considered, but the applicant has not demonstrated that the harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by the very special circumstances.

The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies DM6, DM10 and DM19 of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan, the Adopted Chelmsford Solar Farm Development SPD and the objectives of the NPPF.

Reason 2

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that all planning proposals and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Paragraphs 174a and 174b require proposals to:

- a) protect and enhance the valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognise 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, and of trees and woodland.

Policy DM6 and DM10 of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan and the Adopted Solar Farm Development SPD reiterate the NPPF.

Policy DM19 - Renewable and low carbon energy of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted for renewable and low carbon development provided they:

- i. Do not cause demonstratable harm to residential living environment; and
- ii. Avoid or minimise impacts on the historic environment; and
- iii. Can demonstrate no adverse effect on the natural environment including designated sites; and
- iv. Do not have an unacceptable visual impact which would be harmful to the character of the area; and
- v. will not have a detrimental impact on highway safety.

The proposed development by reason of its siting and scale would result in the creation of a large-scale, man-made, urban character development. It would be significantly detrimental to the landscape character of the area and would be harmful to visual amenity. The predicted landscape effects arising from the proposed development are not able to be overcome by the proposed mitigation.

The proposal would cause an unacceptable and adverse effect upon the natural environment which in turn would fail to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Further, the applicant's proposal contains insufficient assessment of landscape impacts.

The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies DM6, DM10 and DM19 of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan, the Adopted Chelmsford Solar Farm Development SPD and the objectives of the NPPF.

Background Papers

Case File

Basildon District Council

Comments
<p>18.04.2023 - Thank you for your consultation in respect of the above planning application.</p> <p>I would like to make the following comments on behalf of Basildon Council which borders the application site to part of the western boundary.</p> <p>The impact on the Green Belt will need to be balanced alongside the benefit of renewable energy as outlined in the NPPF 2021.</p> <p>It is noted that the site is highly visible particularly when viewed from Runwell Road adjacent to 2 Southlands Cottages where the land steeply rises and also those parts closest to Runwell Road (i.e. the far north-eastern parcel).</p> <p>There is concern that the proposal will spoil the view from the public right of way network which run in an east-west direction to the north of the River Crouch (Runwell 8 and Rettendon 23 public footpaths) and will be detrimental to the enjoyment and experience of members of the public which use these footpaths and benefit from the currently open landscaped setting. Erecting fencing either side of the public footpaths will introduce a man-made industrial feature into the natural landscape, detrimental to the landscape character. We would ask that Place Services Landscaping are consulted if they haven't been already and that views from the Wickford Memorial Park are taken into consideration.</p> <p>Please can these comments be passed onto the relevant case officer.</p>

Runwell Parish Council

Comments
<p>17.05.2023 - Runwell Parish Council have a policy to object to inappropriate development of the greenbelt. Residents and Councillors have raised the following comments: 1. Glare and glint effects on livestock in adjoining fields; 2. Issues with the Public Right of Way which crosses through the proposal ' safety of the walkers using the path (consider a safer diversion); 3. Re-instatement of surfaces following completion of the installations; 4. Drainage ' ways of improving natural drainage; 5. Concerns about chemical release when washing the solar panels; 6. Devaluation of material assets (homes) of neighbouring properties; 7. Untested health implications to those living in close proximity to the solar farm and loss/impairment of Health & Well-being due to the visual amenity being lost (majority of native trees and hedges are deciduous and do not obscure the view all year round); 8 loss of agricultural land (sheep have never been grazed on this land previously uncertainty of suitability); 9 A review of similar renewable energy project applications, it is noted that under very special circumstances similar projects have been approved as there is a benefit for local residents.</p>

Essex County Council Highways

Comments

03.11.2023 - Your Ref: 23/00532/FUL

Our Ref: CO/EGD/SD/RM/CHL/23/532/56301

Date:- 3rd November 2023

Recommendation Issue 2.

The Highway Authority has reconsidered the Glint & Glare Impact Assessment and amended the conditions accordingly:

' The Solar Panels used in this proposal, would have a tracking capability, to track the sun's path across the sky.

' The existing established vegetation adjacent to A130 and the A132 Runwell Road together with the additional planting proposed would mitigate the impact of the proposal.

From a highway and transportation perspective the impact of the proposal is acceptable to the Highway Authority subject to the following conditions:

1. The additional planting shown, shall be provided and planted clear of the highway boundary extent as shown in the:

- i. Proposed Site Plan, drawing no. RC3-02-P02, Revision 04.
- ii. Southlands Farm- Detailed Landscape Plan, drawing no. P22-1918_EN_003C.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and to protect the integrity of the highway in accordance with policy DM1.

2. The submitted Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), October 2022 shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The CTMP provides for in particular;

- i. vehicle routing,
- ii. construction access restricted to left in left out vehicle access and turning movements,
- iii. the parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors,
- iv. loading and unloading of plant and materials,
- v. storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development,

vi. Turning facility for articulated 18.55 metre in length heavy goods vehicles,

vii. wheel and underbody washing facilities.

Reason: To ensure that vehicles can enter and leave the highway in a controlled manner, to ensure that vehicles can enter and leave the highway in a forward gear, to ensure that on-street parking of these vehicles in the adjoining roads does not occur, to ensure that loose materials and spoil are not brought out onto the highway in the interests of highway safety and Policy DM1 and DM19 and to avoid inappropriate HGV movements through the built up areas.

3. A before and after condition survey (Highways Dilapidation Survey), to identify defects to highway in the vicinity of each of the vehicular access in 4 below, and where necessary ensure that repairs are undertaken at the developer expense, where the damage is caused by the developer to the satisfaction and, at no cost of the Highway Authority.

Reason: To preserve the integrity of the highway, in the interests of highway safety and Policy DM1.

4. Prior to commencement, the Solar Farm Vehicular Access, which would be used for the Construction and future Maintenance, shown in principle the Proposed Site Plan, drawing no. RC3-02-P02, Revision 04 and detail design and construction shown in the submitted Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), October 2022 3 above, shall be constructed as shown in principle at Appendix A, Proposed Site Access Arrangement On A132 at Existing Field Access, drawing no. SK01, Revision A. with subsequently submitted Heavy Goods Vehicle 18.55 metres long Swept Path drawing number SK03 2201-018 and SK04 2201-018. The vehicular access shall be provided with an appropriate vehicular crossing of the highway verge to accommodate all vehicle movements for the construction phase, details to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority and the Highway Authority .

Reason: To ensure that vehicles can enter and leave the highway in a controlled manner in the interest of highway safety in accordance with policy DM1.

5. The visibility splays in both directions to the highway vehicular access shown in principle the Proposed Site Plan, drawing no. RC3-02-P02, Revision 04, pass over highway land. The applicant shall ensure that the foliage within the verge is cleared and to Maintain these visibility splays in perpetuity, as measured from and along the nearside edge of the carriageway.

Reason: To provide adequate inter-visibility between vehicles using the road junctions/accesses and those in the existing public highway in the interest of highway safety in accordance with policy DM1.

6. No unbound material shall be used in the surface treatment for each of the three vehicular accesses in 5 above, within 20 metres of the highway boundary.

Reason: To avoid displacement of loose material onto the highway in the interests of highway safety in accordance with policy DM1.

7. There shall be no discharge of surface water from the development onto the Highway.

Reason: To prevent hazards caused by water flowing onto the highway and to avoid the formation of ice on the highway in the interest of highway safety to ensure accordance with policy DM1.

8. The gates provided at the vehicular accesses in 4 above, shall be inward opening only and shall be set back a minimum of 20 metres from the back edge the carriageway.

Reason: To enable vehicles using the access to stand clear of the carriageway whilst gates are being opened and closed and to allow parking off street and clear from obstructing the adjacent footway/cycleway/carriageway in the interest of highway safety in accordance with policy DM1.

9. The public's rights and ease of passage over public right of way; footpath, 8 (Runwell Parish 231), shall be maintained free and unobstructed at all times.

Reason: To ensure the continued safe passage of the public on the definitive right of way and accessibility in accordance with Policies DM1 and DM11.

10. If it deemed necessary for public footpath 8 (Runwell Parish 231), to be closed for safety reasons, during the construction phase or to be diverted, no development shall be permitted to commence on site until such time as a Legal Order(s) have been obtained, by agreement with the Essex County Council Public Rights of Way Team (see the Informatives below), securing the diversion of the existing definitive right of way, be it temporary or permanent, to a route to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority. The new route(s) must be constructed to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority. Hedges other vegetation or foliage must not encroach upon the width of footpath 8. This responsibility lies with the applicant and it is not the responsibility of the Highway Authority to maintain the hedges other vegetation or foliage clear of footpath 8.

Reason: To ensure the continued safe passage of pedestrians on the public right of way and accessibility in accordance with Policies DM1 and DM11.

General

I. Prior to any works taking place in public highway the developer shall enter into an appropriate agreement with the Highway Authority to regulate construction works. This will include the submission of detailed engineering drawings for approval with the submitted Stage 1 Road Safety Audit with designer's responses for vehicular access in 4 above. The designers' responses will be reviewed by the Highway Authority Engineers and where deemed necessary; the applicant may be required to make additional considerations with follow up actions to make the use of the vehicular access safe from a highway and transportation perspective.

II. The Highway Authority cannot accept any liability for costs associated with a developer's improvement. This includes design check safety audits, site supervision, commuted sums for maintenance and any potential claims under Part 1 and Part 2 of the Land Compensation Act 1973. To protect the Highway Authority against such compensation claims a cash deposit or bond may be required.

III. The above to be provided at no cost to the Highway Authority.

IV. The above to be imposed on the planning permission (if granted) by planning obligation or condition, as necessary.

Please include the Informative:

All work within or affecting the highway is to be laid out and constructed by prior arrangement with, and to the requirements and satisfaction of, the Highway Authority, details to be agreed before the commencement of works.

i. The applicants should be advised to contact the Development Management Team by email at development.management@essexhighways.org:

ii. The Essex County Council Public Rights of Way team by email at highway.status@essexhighways.org

South Essex Parking Partnership

Comments

No response received

Public Health & Protection Services

Comments

18.04.2023 - Provided the recommended mitigation is employed as outlined in the acoustic report, it appears that the noise levels from the operation of the development will be satisfactory.

Environment Agency

Comments

20.07.2023 - INSTALLATION OF A SOLAR FARM WITH BATTERY STORAGE AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE

LAND SOUTH OF NATIONAL GRID CHELMSFORD ROAD, RAWRETH, ESSEX

Thank you for your consultation dated 29 June 2023. We have reviewed the application as submitted and are able to remove our holding objection, detailed in our letter, referenced AE/2023/128277, dated 12 May 2023.

We now have no objection to this planning application, providing that you have taken into account the flood risk considerations which are your responsibility. We have highlighted these in the flood risk section below. Flood Risk

Our maps show the site lies within fluvial Flood Zone 3a defined by the 'Planning Practice Guidance: Flood Risk and Coastal Change' as having a high probability of flooding, although the majority of the site does fall within flood zone 1. The proposal is for the installation of a solar farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure land south of national grid, which is classified as an 'essential infrastructure' development, as defined in Annex 3:Flood Vulnerability classification of the Planning Practice Guidance. Therefore, to comply with national policy the application is required to pass the Sequential and Exception Tests and be supported by a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA).

Flood Risk Assessment To assist you in making an informed decision about the flood risk affecting this site, the key points to note from the submitted FRA Addendum, referenced P23_174 and dated 23 June 2023, version 1.0, are:

- o The site lies within the flood extent for a 1% (1 in 100) annual probability event, including an allowance for climate change.

- o It is proposed that the panel stowage height shall be at 2m, which is above the 1% (1 in 100) annual probability flood level including climate change of 0.15m AOD and therefore dry in this event. The panels will also be above the 0.1% (1 in 1000) annual probability flood level of 1.35m AOD.

Other advice: Other Sources of Flooding

In addition to the above flood risk, the site may be within an area at risk of flooding from surface water, reservoirs, sewer and/or groundwater. We have not considered these risks in any detail, but you should ensure these risks are all considered fully before determining the application.

We trust this information is useful.

CHECK - ECC Minerals & Waste

Comments
No response received

Ramblers Association

Comments
18.04.2023 - Thank you for advising the Ramblers of this planning application. On behalf of the Ramblers Association we

wish to make the following comments:-

The Design and Access Statement (paragraph 2.6) refers to PRoW 231_8, running in an east-west orientation, but NOT to PRoW 229_23, which continues the PRoW up to and beyond the A130. These should BOTH be fully annotated within the relevant submitted documentation, including the Location Plans and Landscape Proposals.

The Design and Access Statement (paragraph 11.6) confirms that the existing PRoWs within the site will remain open and available at all times during construction, operation and decommissioning. This should be Conditioned in any Town Planning approval.

ECC Historic Environment Branch

Comments

20.04.2023 - Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: 23/00532/FUL - Installation of a solar farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure

Land South Of Southlands Cottages, Runwell Road, Runwell, Wickford

The above application has been identified on the weekly list by the Historic Environment Advisor to Chelmsford City Council as having archaeological implications.

As attested by the submitted Heritage Statement and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER), the proposed development site is in an area with a high potential to contain archaeological remains. Two important archaeological excavations have previously been undertaken in close proximity to the proposed development. Beachamps Farm, located 350m to the south of the development, exposed an extensive multi-period settlement site, ranging in date from the Late Bronze Age to the Medieval period. An Iron Age settlement and associated cemetery, a Roman military camp (possibly a fort), a later Roman villa and evidence of Saxon occupation were all uncovered during the excavations (EHERs 7532-7540). 600m to the north of the proposed development, another multi-phase settlement site was uncovered during excavations at the former Runwell Hospital. This site uncovered evidence of Late Neolithic occupation, an Iron Age settlement enclosure ditch and a medieval roadside working area (EHER 15657).

This office agrees with the Heritage Statement's conclusions of the archaeological potential of the site. The undertaken geophysical survey has not identified areas of any intensive occupation, but extramural activity related to the settlement areas identified nearby is likely to extend into the proposed development site, and more ephemeral prehistoric activity is also likely to be present.

Given the above, this office recommends that the following conditions are placed on any consent, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 205:

RECOMMENDATION: Archaeological trial-trenching and excavation

1. No development or preliminary groundworks of any kind shall take place until a programme of archaeological investigation has been secured in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation which

has been submitted by the applicant, and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

2. No development or preliminary groundworks of any kind shall take place until the completion of the programme of archaeological trial-trenching evaluation identified in the Written Scheme of Investigation defined in Part 1 and confirmed by the local planning authorities archaeological advisors.

3. A mitigation strategy detailing the excavation / preservation strategy shall be submitted to the local planning authority following the completion of the archaeological evaluation.

4. No development or preliminary groundworks can commence on those areas containing archaeological deposits until the satisfactory completion of fieldwork, as detailed in the mitigation strategy, and which has been approved in writing by the local planning authority.

5. The applicant will submit to the local planning authority a post excavation assessment (to be submitted within six months of the completion of the fieldwork, unless otherwise agreed in advance with the Planning Authority). This will result in the completion of post excavation analysis, preparation of a full site archive and report ready for deposition at the local museum, and submission of a publication report.

The work should be carried out by an accredited archaeological contractor and will initially comprise an archaeological trial-trenching evaluation of the proposed development site. This evaluation should ensure to target the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey. Depending on the results of this evaluation, it may be followed by a further scheme of archaeological open-area excavation and/or archaeological monitoring, or in situ preservation of remains, as appropriate.

An archaeological brief will be produced from this office detailing the work required, on request, and should be acquired prior to the submission of a Written Scheme of Investigation.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Natural England

Comments
No objection

UK Power Networks (Network Planner)

Comments
No response received

Environment Agency

Comments

No objection

H.S.E East Anglia Area

Comments

25.04.2023 - Advice : HSL-230420110954-46 Does Not Cross Any Consultation Zones

Your Ref: 23/00532/FUL

Development Name: Land South Of Southlands Cottages Runwell Road Runwell Wickford Essex

Comments:

The proposed development site which you have identified does not currently lie within the consultation distance (CD) of a major hazard site or major accident hazard pipeline; therefore at present HSE does not need to be consulted on any developments on this site. However, should there be a delay submitting a planning application for the proposed development on this site, you may wish to approach HSE again to ensure that there have been no changes to CDs in this area in the intervening period.

This advice report has been generated using information supplied by Alex Sadowsky at Chelmsford District (B) on 20 April 2023.

Economic Development & Implementation

Comments

No response received

Anglian Water Services Ltd

Comments

17.04.2023 - Good afternoon,

Thank you for your email consultation on the planning application for 23/00532/FUL.

The Planning & Capacity Team provide comments on planning applications for major proposals of 10 dwellings or more, or if an industrial or commercial development, 500sqm or greater. However, if there are specific drainage issues you would like us to respond to, please contact us outlining the details.

The applicant should check for any Anglian Water assets which cross or are within close proximity to the site. Any encroachment zones should be reflected in site layout. They can do this by accessing our infrastructure maps on Digdat. Please see our website for further information:

<https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/developers/development-services/locating-our-assets/>

Please note that if diverting or crossing over any of our assets permission will be required. Please see our website for further information:

<https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/developers/drainage-services/building-over-or-near-our-assets/>

Kind regards

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Comments

26.04.2023 - Dear Sir

Whilst Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) is not a statutory consultee in relation to the project at this stage, we will work and engage with the developer as this project develops to ensure it complies with statutory requirements that will be enforceable when they fall under our authority.

Approved Document B Volume 2: Buildings other than dwellings - Regulation 38: Fire Safety Information states:

"ensure that the person responsible for the building has sufficient information relating to fire safety to enable them to manage the building effectively"

ECFRS advises that the developer produces fire safety and risk reduction strategies as the responsible person for the scheme. We would also propose that safety measures and risk mitigation are developed in collaboration with the Service.

The strategies should cover the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the project.

During the construction phase the number of daily vehicle movements in the local area will significantly increase. The Service would like to view the transport strategy to minimise this impact and prevent an increase in the number of road traffic incidents. Any development should not negatively impact on the Service's ability to respond to an incident in the local area.

ECFRS recognise the use of batteries (including lithium-ion) as Energy Storage Systems (ESS) is a new and emerging practice in the global renewable energy sector. As with all new and emerging practices within UK industry the Service would like to work with the developers to better understand any risks that may be posed and develop strategies and procedures to mitigate these risks.

The developer must ensure the risk of fire is minimised by:

Procuring components and using construction techniques which comply with all relevant legislation.

Including automatic fire detection systems in the development design.

Including automatic fire suppression systems in the development design. Various types of suppression systems are available, but the Service's preferred system would be a water drenching system as fires involving Lithium-ion batteries have the potential for thermal runaway. Other systems would be less effective in preventing reignition.

Including redundancy in the design to provide multiple layers of protection.

Designing the development to contain and restrict the spread of fire using fire-resistant materials and adequate separation between elements of the BESS.

Developing an emergency response plan with ECFRS to minimise the impact of an incident during construction, operation and decommissioning of the facility.

Ensuring the BESS is located away from residential areas. Prevailing wind directions should be factored into the location of the BESS to minimise the impact of a fire involving lithium-ion batteries due to the toxic fumes produced.

The emergency response plan should include details of the hazards associated with lithium-ion batteries, isolation of electrical sources to enable firefighting activities, measures to extinguish or cool batteries involved in fire, management of toxic or flammable gases, minimise the environmental impact of an incident, containment of fire water run-off, handling and responsibility for disposal of damaged batteries, establishment of regular onsite training exercises.

The emergency response plan should be maintained and regularly reviewed by the occupier and any material changes notified to ECFRS.

Environmental impact should include the prevention of ground contamination, water course pollution, and the release of toxic gases.

The BESS facilities should be designed to provide:

Adequate separation between containers.

Provide adequate thermal barriers between switch gear and batteries,

Install adequate ventilation or an air conditioning system to control the temperature. Ventilation is important since batteries will continue to generate flammable gas as long as they are hot. Also, carbon monoxide will be generated until the batteries are completely cooled through to their core.

Install a very early warning fire detection system, such as aspirating smoke detection/air sampling.

Install carbon monoxide (CO) detection within the BESS containers.

Install sprinkler protection within BESS containers. The sprinkler system should be designed to adequately contain and extinguish a fire.

Ensure that sufficient water is available for manual firefighting. An external fire hydrant should be located in close proximity to the BESS containers. The water supply should be able to provide a minimum of 1,900 l/min for at least 2 hours. Further hydrants should be strategically located across the development. These should be tested and regularly serviced by the operator. If the site is remote from a pressure fed water supply, an Emergency Water Supply (EWS) meeting the above standard should be incorporated into the design of the site e.g. an open water source and/or tank(s). If above ground EWS tanks are installed, these should include facilities for the FRS to discharge (140/100mm RT outlet) and refill the tank.

The site design should include a safe access route for fire appliances to manoeuvre within the curtilage (including turning circles). An alternative access point and approach route should be provided and maintained to enable appliances to approach from an upwind direction.

A Premises Information Box (PIB) should be located at the designated 'main' access point, to hold the Emergency Response Plan, to include water supplies for firefighting, drainage plans highlighting any Pollution Control Devices (PCDs) / Penstocks etc for the FRS.

Ideally, an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) slave/repeater panel presented as a MIMIC panel should also be located here.

As large-scale BESS facilities are a relatively new technology, associated risks may or may not be captured in current guidance such as the Building Regulations 2010 (as amended) and fall outside of the auspices of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. For this reason, we strongly recommend applying the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 855 Standard for the Installation of Stationary Energy Storage Systems.

NFPA 855: Standard for the Installation of Stationary Energy Storage Systems

Yours sincerely

Susan Askew

Protection

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

Essex and Suffolk Water

Comments

No response received

Police - Designing Out Crime

Comments
<p>25.04.2023 - Essex Police comments pursuant of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) and Chelmsford City Council polices.</p> <p>NPPF section 8 "Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities" paragraph 91(b), and section 12 "Achieving Well Designed Places" paragraph 127(c) address creating places that are safe. Chelmsford Local Plan DM23 & DM24 addresses security through "High Quality Design" and "Place Shaping" with a reasoned justification 9.6 - "The layout and design of a development are important in creating a safe environment where people are comfortable to live, work and visit".</p> <p>We welcome the considerations given to crime within the Design and Access Statement however we would dispute the impact of Solar Farm crime. It should be noted that other parts of the country have seen an expediential rise in crime in relation to solar farms with everything from solar panels to cabling, batteries and ancillary equipment being targeted. To comment further we would require the finer detail such as any proposed lighting, compound access control and physical security measures.</p> <p>We would welcome the opportunity to consult on this development to assist the developer demonstrate their compliance with these policies.</p>

ECC Minerals & Waste Planning

Comments
<p>25.04.2023 - Dear Sir / Madam</p> <p>Nature of Response: To address minerals and waste safeguarding implications arising through Application 23/00532/FUL.</p> <p>Proposal: Installation of a solar farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure.</p> <p>Location: Land South Of Southlands Cottages, Runwell Road, Runwell, Wickford, Essex.</p> <p>Thank you for your email received 13th April 2023 consulting the Mineral and Waste Planning Authority (MWPA) on the above proposals.</p> <p>The 'project area' forms the basis for the minerals and waste safeguarding assessment set out below.</p> <p>This response deals with mineral policy matters and waste policy matters in turn. A spatial representation of the project area and the matters discussed can be found in Appendix One.</p> <p>Mineral Matters</p> <p>Safeguarding Mineral Resources</p> <p>Part of the project area is located within land which is designated as a Mineral Safeguarding Area (MSA) and therefore the application is subject to Policy S8 of the Essex Minerals Local Plan 2014 (MLP). The MLP can</p>

be viewed on the County Council's website via the following link:

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/minerals-waste-planning-policy/minerals-local-plan>

Policy S8 of the MLP requires that a non-mineral proposal located within an MSA which exceeds defined thresholds must be supported by a Minerals Resource Assessment to establish the existence, or otherwise, of a mineral resource capable of having economic importance. This will ascertain whether there is an opportunity for the prior extraction of that mineral to avoid the sterilisation of the resource, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraph 210). The same paragraph encourages the prior extraction of mineral where it is practical and environmentally feasible.

It is however noted that the proposal is for a solar farm and that there would not be any significantly intrusive ground works required to establish the development. It is further noted that the Planning Statement date March 2023 states at Paragraph 3.1 that the proposed development is temporary in nature. The MWPA has no objection, providing that the proposed development site will be returned to its 'former use' upon expiration of permission, concluding that the mineral subject to the MSA is not at risk from permanent sterilisation.

If this is not the case, then a Minerals Resource Assessment (MRA) is required to establish the practicality and environmental feasibility of the prior extraction of mineral such that the resource is not sterilised where this can be avoided. If found to be practical and environmentally feasible, prior extraction is expected to take place ahead of sterilisation by non-mineral development.

Mineral Infrastructure Matters

With regard to Mineral Consultation Areas, Policy S8 of the MLP seeks to ensure that existing and allocated mineral sites and infrastructure are protected from inappropriate neighbouring developments that may prejudice their continuing efficient operation or ability to carry out their allocated function in the future. Policy S8 of the MLP defines Mineral Consultation Areas as extending up to 250m from the boundary of an infrastructure site or allocation for the same.

The application site does not pass through a Mineral Consultation Area (MCA) and therefore, a Mineral Infrastructure Impact Assessment (MIIA) would not be required as part of a planning application on this site.

Waste Matters

Safeguarding Waste Infrastructure

Policy 2 of the WLP seeks to ensure that existing and allocated waste sites and infrastructure are protected from inappropriate neighbouring developments that may prejudice their continuing efficient operation or ability to carry out their allocated function in the future. Policy 2 defines Waste Consultation Areas as extending up to 250m from the boundary of existing or allocated waste infrastructure, unless they are Water Recycling Centres, where the distance increases to 400m.

The WLP can be viewed on the County Council's website via the following link:

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/minerals-waste-planning-policy/waste-local-plan>

The application site does not pass through a Waste Consultation Area (WCA) and therefore, a Waste

Infrastructure Impact Assessment (WIIA) is not required as part of the planning application.

Rochford District Council

Comments

No response received

Rettendon Parish Council

Comments

No response received

Network Rail

Comments

05.05.2023 - Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for consulting Network Rail (NR) regarding the above planning application.

Please see below the informative suggested by our Asset protection Team (ASPRO)

Item 1. - Environmental pollution (Dust, noise etc.) on operational railway.

Reasons/Mitigations:

The design and siting of installations should take into account possible effects of noise, vibration and generation of airborne dust in regard to the operational railway. Contractors are expected to use the 'best practical means' for controlling pollution and environmental nuisance complying all current standards and regulations. The design and construction methodologies should consider mitigation measures to minimise the generation of airborne dust, noise and vibration in regard to the operational railway. Demolition work shall be carried out behind hoardings and dust suppression systems are to be employed to risk to the operational line.

Item 2 Collapse of lifting equipment adjacent to the NR boundary fence/line.

Reasons/Mitigations:

Operation of mobile cranes should comply with CPA Good Practice Guide 'Requirements for Mobile Cranes Alongside Railways Controlled by Network Rail'. Operation of Tower Crane should also comply with CPA Good Practice Guide 'Requirements for Tower Cranes Alongside Railways Controlled by Network Rail'. Operation of Piling Rig should comply with Network Rail standard NR/L3/CIV/0063 - 'Piling, Drilling, Crane, MEWP and SMPT operations adjacent to the Railway' Collapse radius of the cranes should not fall within 4m from the railway boundary unless possession and isolation on NR lines have been arranged or agreed with

Network Rail.

Item 3 - Potential impact on the adjacent railway infrastructure from the construction activities

Reasons/Mitigations:

The OP shall provide all construction methodologies relating to the works that may import risks onto the operational railway and potential disruption to railway services, the assets and the infrastructure for acceptance prior to commencing the works. All works must also be risk assessed to avoid disruptions to the operational railway. Existing railway infrastructures including embankment and bridges should not be loaded with additional surcharge from the proposed development unless the agreement is reached with Network Rail. Increased surcharge on railway embankment imports a risk of instability of the ground which can cause the settlement on Network Rail infrastructure (Overhead Line Equipment/gantries, track, embankment, boundary fence, etc) All works, both temporary and permanent, should be designed and constructed, so that they will have no influence on the stability of NR's existing.

Item 4 - Collapse of temporary work

Reason/Mitigations:

Where, in the temporary condition, structural collapse of any temporary works which may be constructed which would include scaffolding and access towers could result in any element falling within 4m of the railway boundary or a NR asset.

Item 5 - Effect of artificial lighting and human factor effects from glare on Train Drivers

Reasons/Mitigations:

Any lighting associated with the proposed work must not interfere with the sighting of signalling apparatus and/or train drivers' vision on approaching trains. The location and colour of lights must not give rise to the potential for confusion with the signalling arrangements on the railway. The developers should obtain Network Rail's Asset Protection Engineer's approval of their detailed proposals regarding lighting.

Item 6 - Structural stability and movement of Network Rail Assets which will affect the Track

Support Zone.

Reasons/Mitigations:

Please also note that the 'track support zone' is defined in Network Rail standard 'NR/L2/CIV/177

- Monitoring track over or adjacent to Construction Works' and any proposal which may require works to be conducted within this zone must be identified by the outside party and subsequent consultation with Network Rail must take place. Should criteria be met within this standard, a track monitoring plan will have to be agreed with Network Rail to ensure that movement, settlement, cant, twist, vibration etc are mitigated the risk to the operational railway

Item 7 - Piling adjacent to the railway infrastructure (if any). with ground movement affecting the track geometry and surrounding ground and structure stability.

Reasons/Mitigations:

The developer must ensure that any piling work near or adjacent to the railway does not cause an operational hazard to Network Rail's infrastructure. Impact/Driven piling scheme for a development near or adjacent to Network Rail's operational infrastructure needs to be avoided, due to the risk of a major track fault occurring. No vibro-compaction/displacement piling plant shall be used in development.

Item 8 - Proximity of the development to the Network Rail infrastructure and boundary fence and adequate space for future maintenance of the development.

Reasons/Mitigations:

It is recommended that all works be situated at least 3 metres from NR boundary fence, to allow construction and any future maintenance work to be carried out without involving entry or encroachment onto Network Rail's land. Where trees exist on Network Rail land, design of any foundations close to the boundary must take into account the effects of root penetration in accordance with the Building Research Establishment's guidelines.

Item 9 - Proximity of OLE Risk/Catenary cables (if any) to proposed work.

Reasons/Mitigations:

No works may be carried out where there is a risk of any plant or element, temporary or permanent, coming within 3.5m of the Overhead Live Electricity (if any). The proximity of the development to the 25kV high voltage Overhead live cables (and the associated steel stanchion supports), will require an electromagnetic compatibility (EMC) assessment to be undertaken by the OP to assess the potential impact on the residents, the level of electrical interference or emissions of electromagnetic fields (EMF) due to the railway equipment. EMF reduces at an exponential rate over distance, so the measured values will drop significantly at 7 meters below any buildings limit as set out by the UK or EU Standards.

Item 10. - Construction activities at height.

Reasons/Mitigations:

Any works at height or within 3.0 metres of the OLE infrastructure will require isolation of the overhead lines and possessions. The use of scaffolding within the close proximity to NR assets introduces high risk to individual when the railway is in operation and the overhead line is energised

Item 11- Stability of railway infrastructure and potential impact on the services.

Reasons/Mitigations:

Existing railway infrastructures including embankment should not be loaded with additional surcharge from the proposed development unless the agreement is reached with Network Rail.

Increased surcharge on railway embankment imports a risk of instability of the ground which can cause the settlement on Network Rail infrastructure (Overhead Line Equipment / gantries, track, embankment etc.). Any works within the railway boundary shall be carried out following Network Rail standard 'NR/L2/MTC/089 - Arrangements for the exchange of asset data and the continuing maintenance of assets undergoing change'.

Item 12.- Trespasses and unauthorised access through an insecure or damaged boundary fence.

Reasons/Mitigations:

Where required, the developer should provide (at their own expense) and thereafter maintain a substantial, trespass proof fence along the development side of the existing boundary fence, to a minimum height of 1.8 metres. Network Rail's existing fencing/wall must not be removed until it is agreed with Network Rail.

Network Rail strongly recommends the developer contacts the Asset Protection Team

AssetProtectionAnglia@networkrail.co.uk prior to any works commencing on site, and

also to agree an Asset Protection Agreement with us to enable approval of detailed

works. More information can also be obtained from our website

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/looking-after-the-railway/assetprotection-and-optimisation/>

I trust the above clearly sets out Network Rail's position on the planning application. Should

you require any more information from Network Rail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Historic England

Comments

27.04.2023 - T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990

LAND SOUTH OF SOUTHLANDS COTTAGES, RUNWELL ROAD, RUNWELL, WICKFORD, ESSEX SS11 7QH

Application No. 23/00532/FUL

Thank you for your letter of 13 April 2023 regarding the above application for planning permission.

Historic England provides advice when our engagement can add most value. In this case we are not offering advice. This should not be interpreted as comment on the merits of the application.

We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers. You may also find it helpful to refer to our published advice at <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/find/>

It is not necessary to consult us on this application again, unless there are material changes to the proposals. However, if you would like advice from us, please contact us to explain your request.

Yours sincerely

Rosa Teira Paz

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

E-mail: rosa.teirapaz@historicengland.org.uk

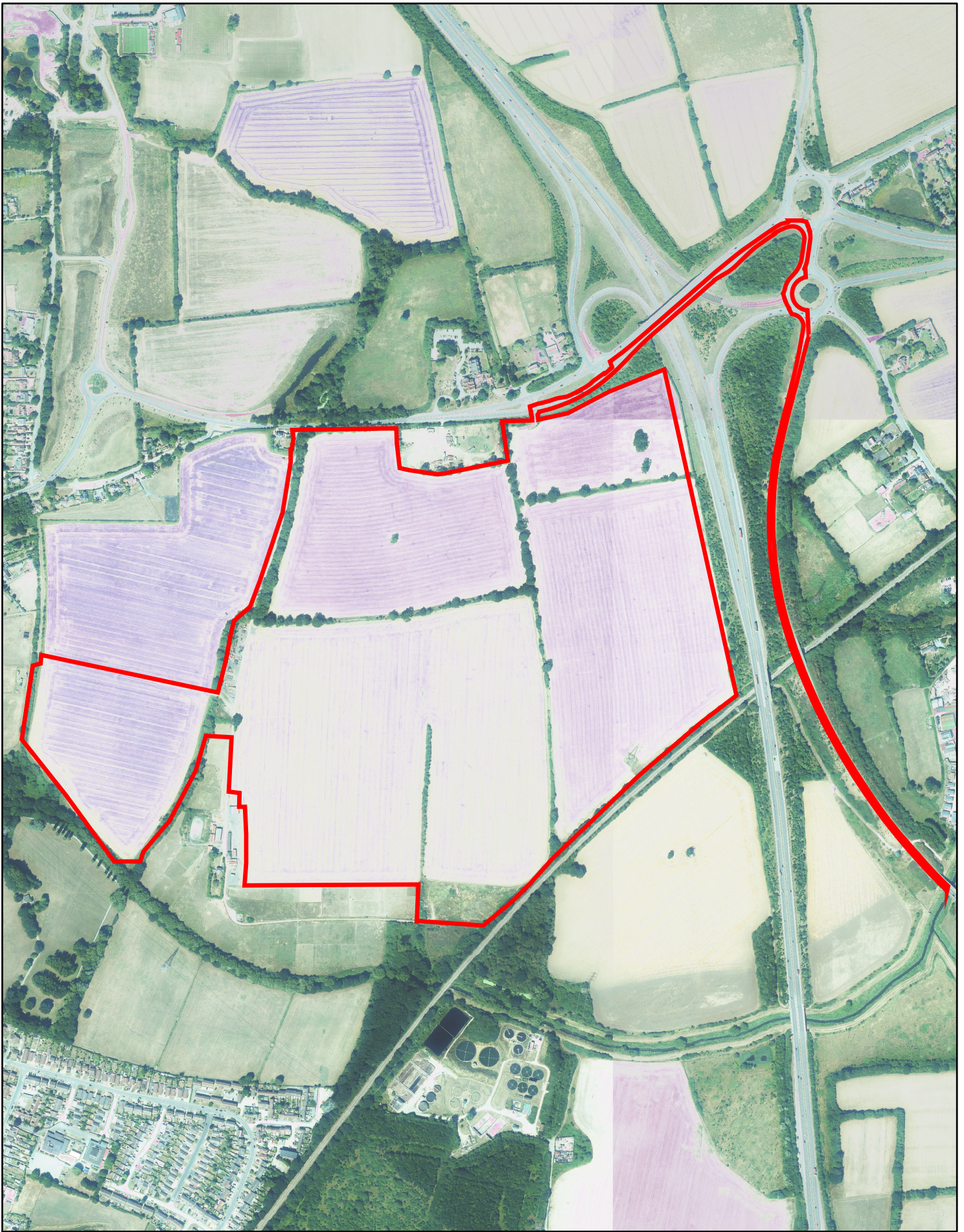
Local Residents

Comments

15 letters of objection received. Concerns raised:

- Significant harm to PROW.
- Impact on local wildlife.
- Not environmentally friendly.

- Views from residential properties will be impacted.
- Traffic, light and noise pollution.
- Potential health implications.
- Health and safety risks.
- Safety and security issues – rise in crime.
- Detrimental impact to local horses.
- Loss of agricultural land.
- Innapropriate development in the Green Belt.
- Benefits of renewable energy should not be at expense of beautiful countryside.
- Devaluation of local properties.
- Potential fire hazards.



0 87.5 175 350 Metres

1:8,000



Planning Committee
23/00532/FUL

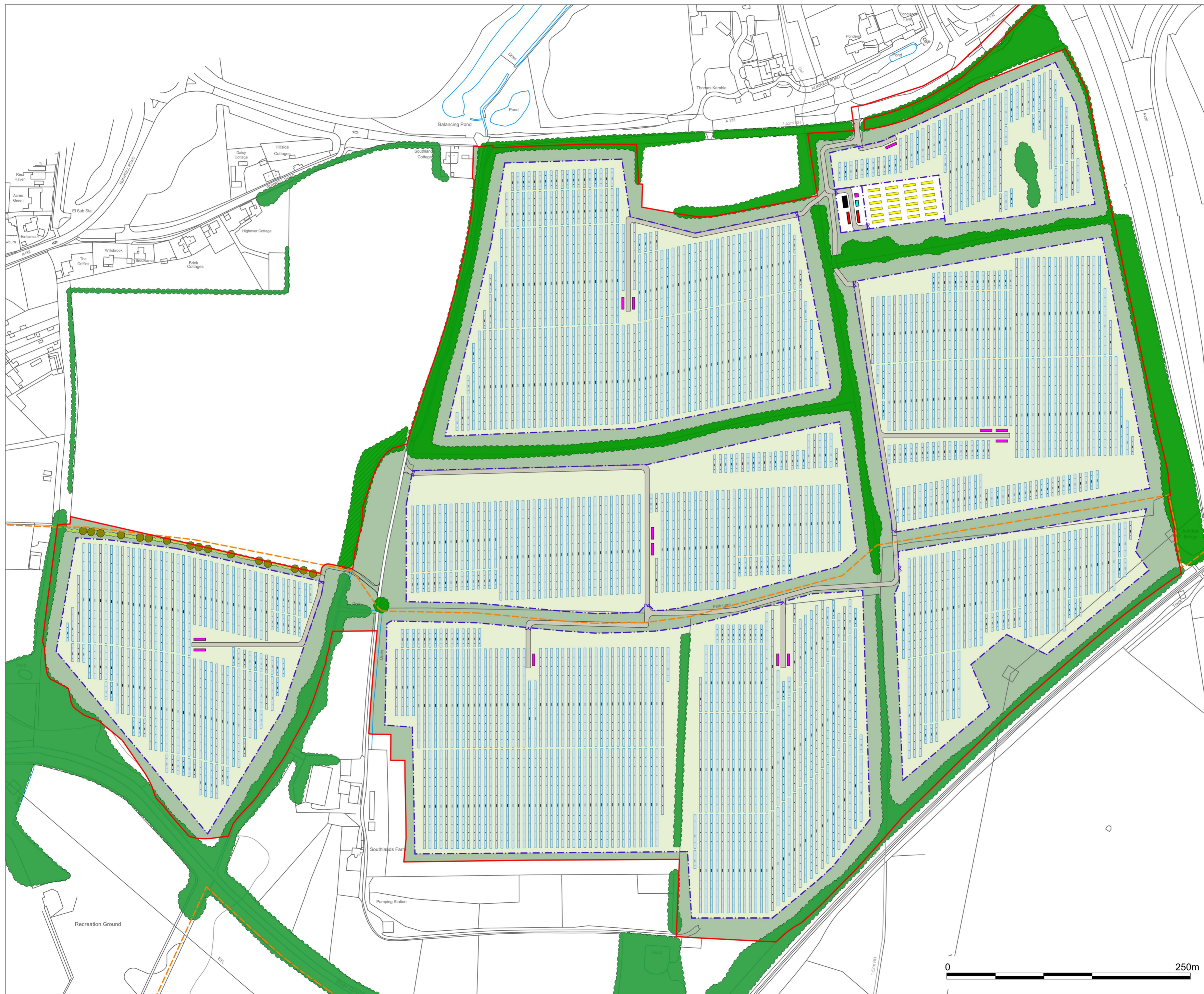
Planning & Development Management
Directorate for Sustainable Communities

PO Box 7544 Civic Centre
Duke Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1XP

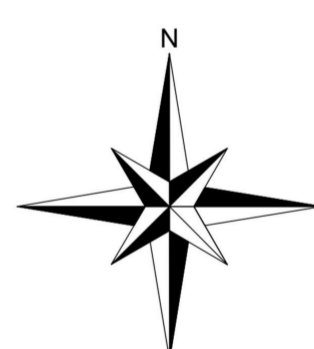
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Telephone: 01245 606826

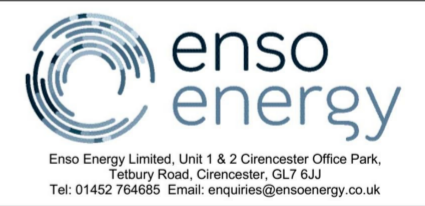


- KEY**
- Site Boundary
 - Security Fence
 - Access Track
 - PV Modules
 - 33kV Substation
 - Transformer
 - Security Gate
 - Inverter
 - Batteries
 - Spare Parts Container
 - Control Room
 - Existing Vegetation
 - Species Rich Grassland
 - Field Margin Planting
 - Proposed Hedgerow
 - Proposed Tree Planting



Revisions:
 First Issue- 04/08/2022 JS
 01 - (06/09/2022 JS) Revised layout and planting added
 02 - (04/10/2022 JS) Revised layout, boundary and planting
 03 - (12/01/2023 JS) Revised layout and utilities added
 04 - (24/01/2023 JS) Revised layout and utilities removed

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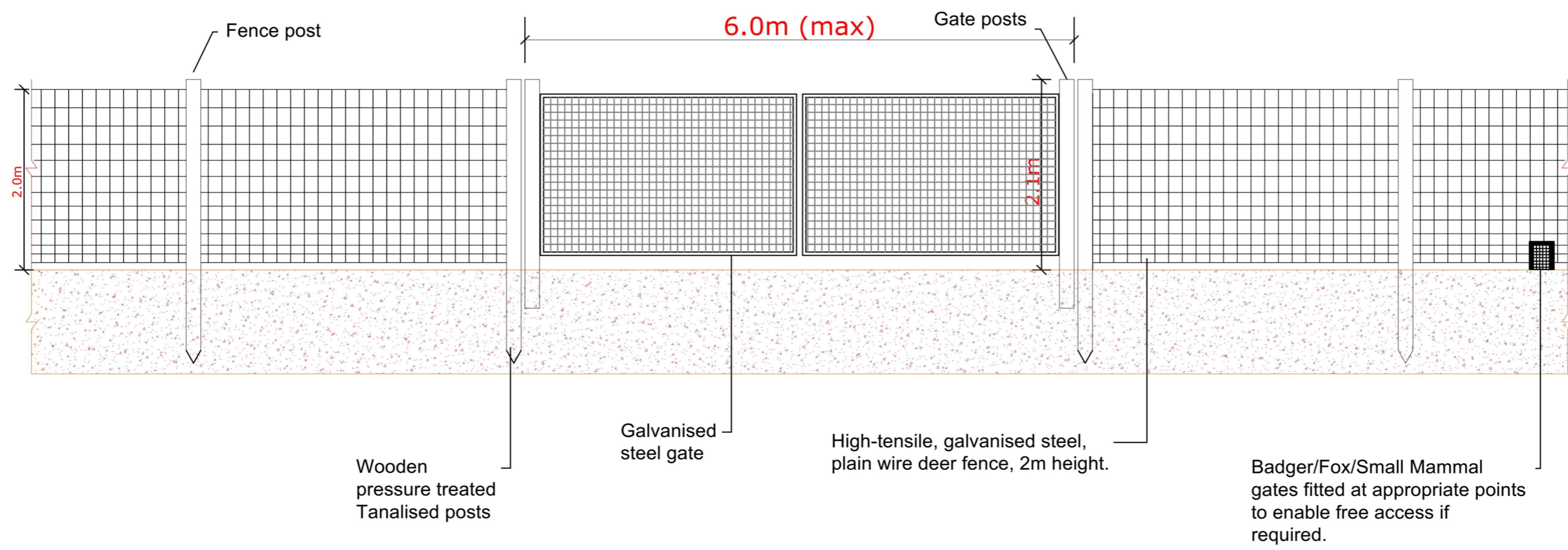


Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

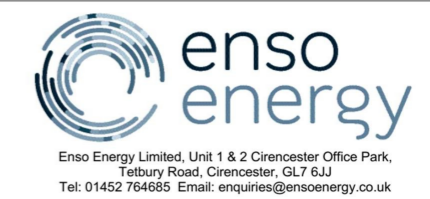
Drawing Title:
Proposed Site Plan

DRWG No: RC3-02-P02	Rev: 04	Sht no: -
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:2500 @ A2	Date: 24/01/2023	





Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



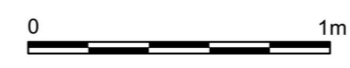
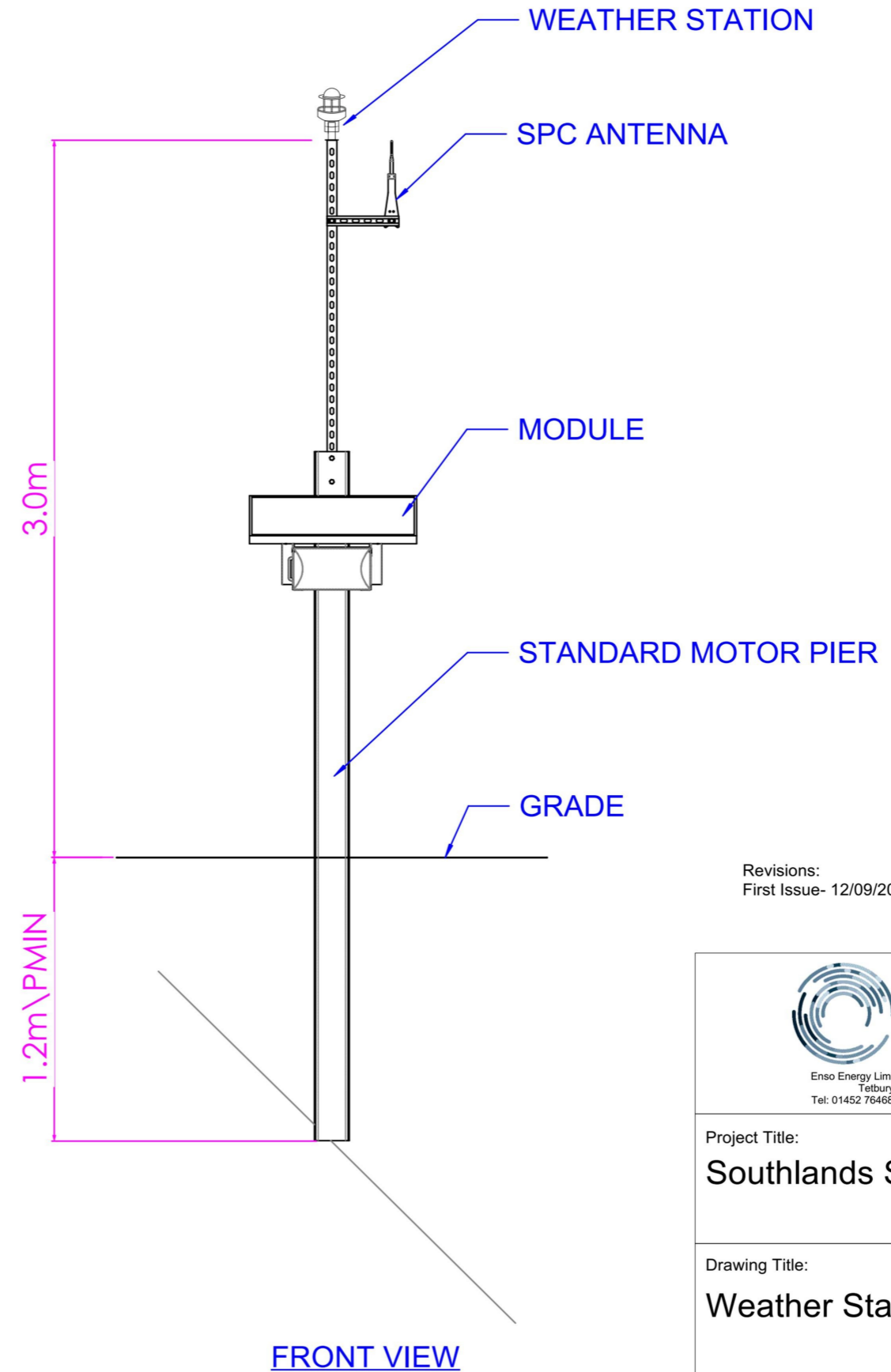
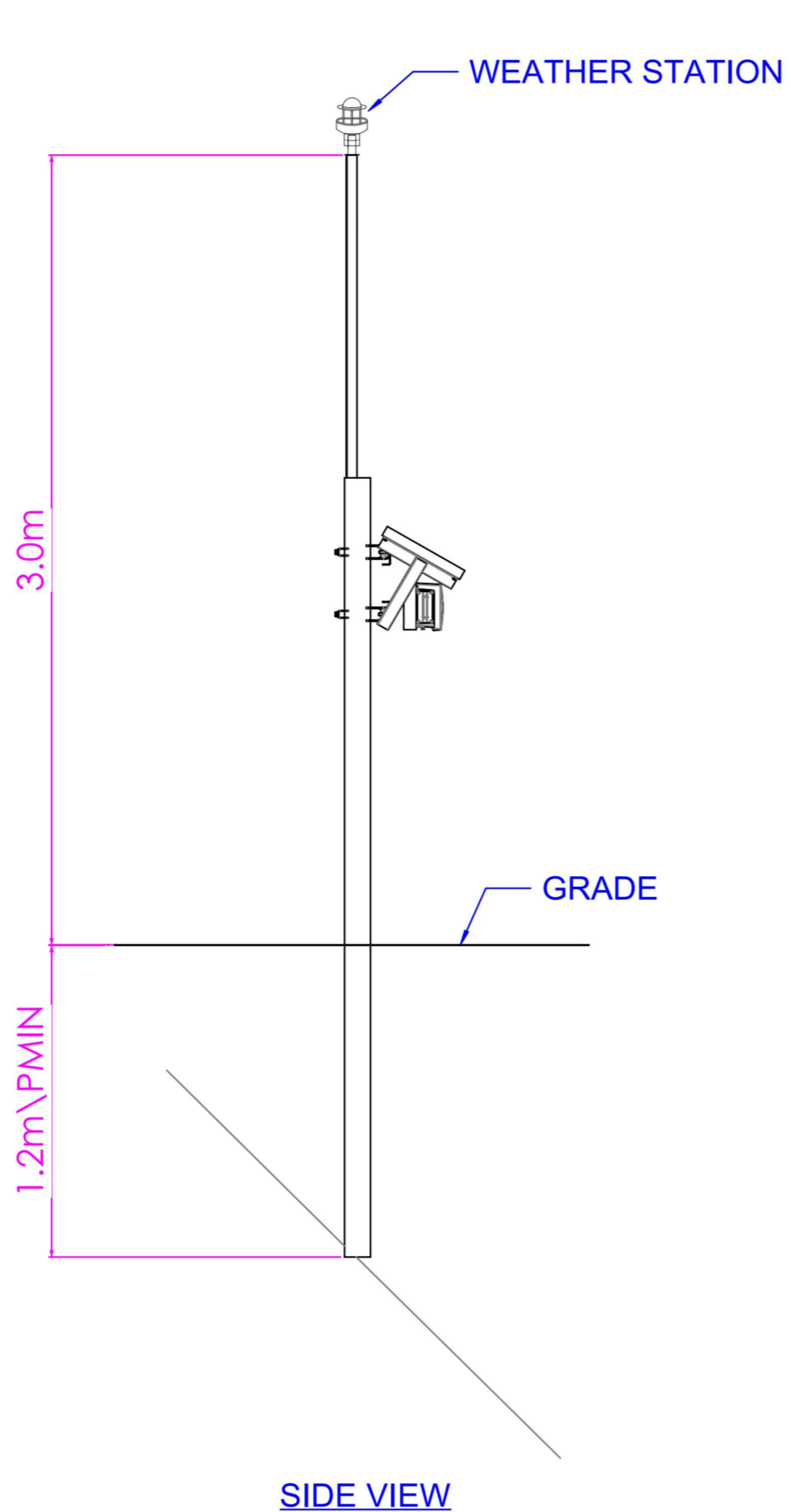
Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
Fence and Gate Elevations

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Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:50 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	

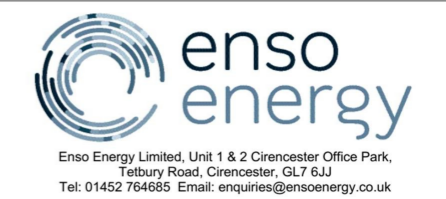
GENERAL NOTES:
1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.
2) DISTANCES BETWEEN FENCE POSTS WILL VARY.





GENERAL NOTES:
 1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.

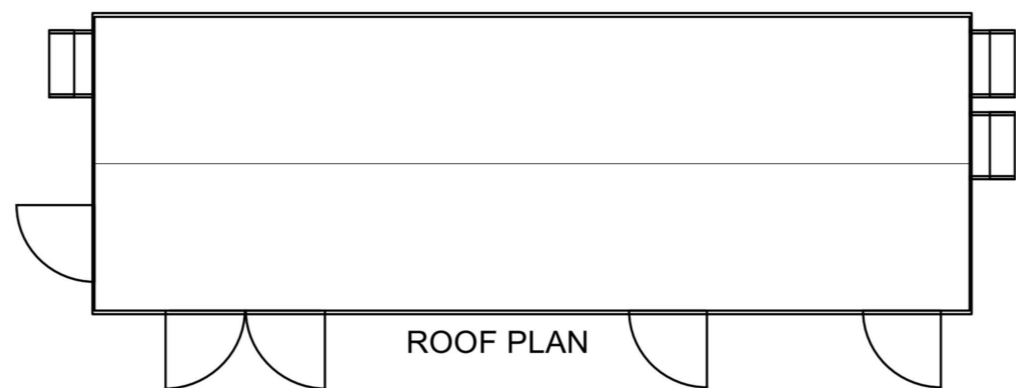
Revisions:
 First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



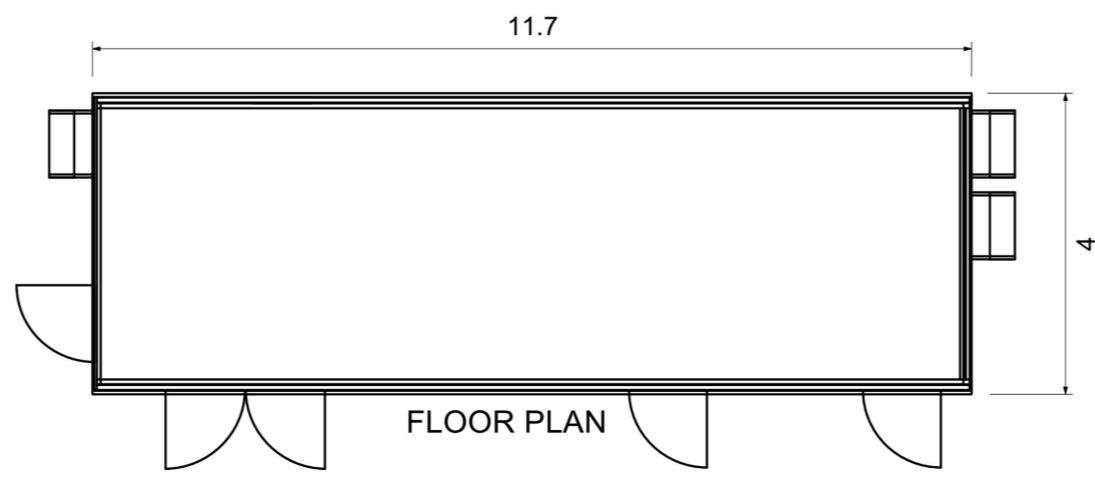
Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
Weather Station Detail

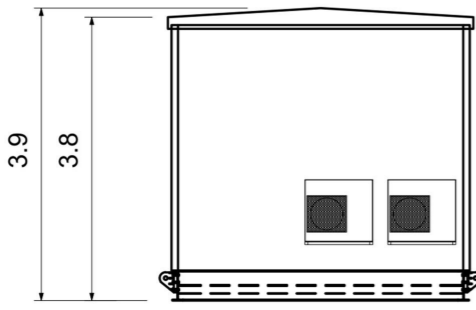
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Scale: 1:25 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	



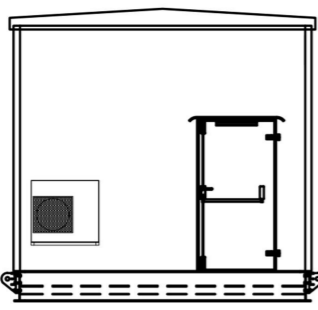
ROOF PLAN



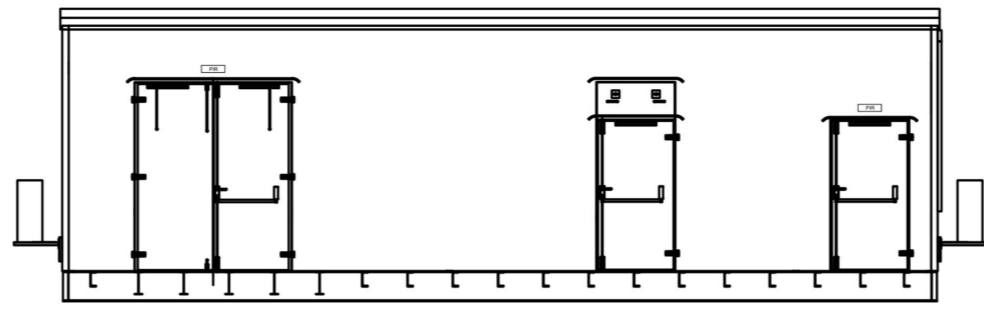
FLOOR PLAN



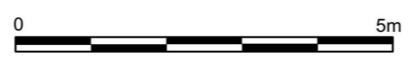
REAR ELEVATION



FRONT ELEVATION

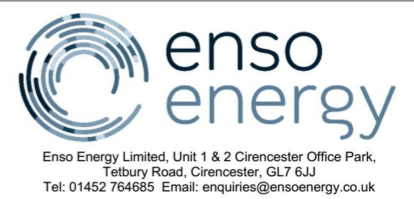


SIDE ELEVATION



GENERAL NOTES:
 1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.
 2) SUBSTATION TO BE PAINTED RAL6005

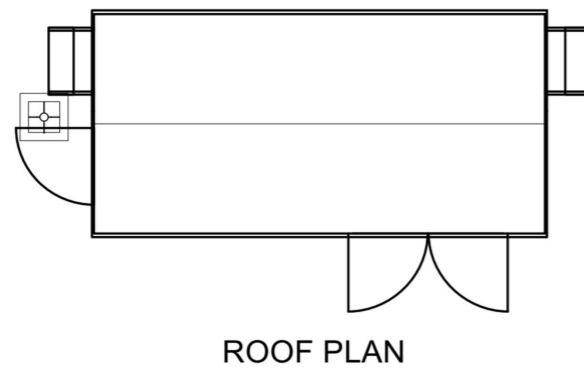
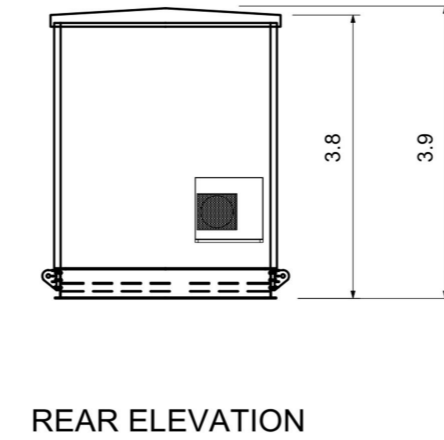
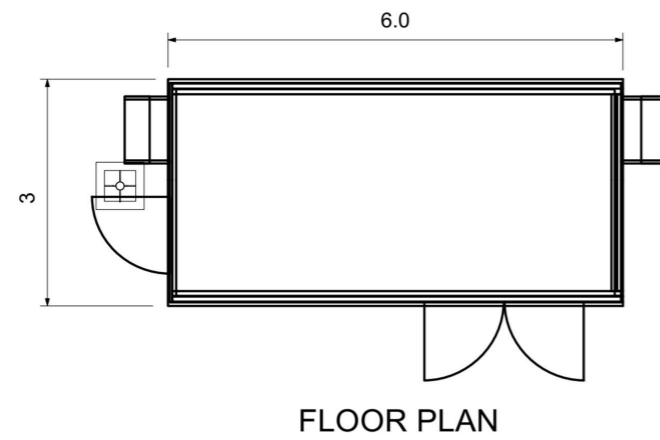
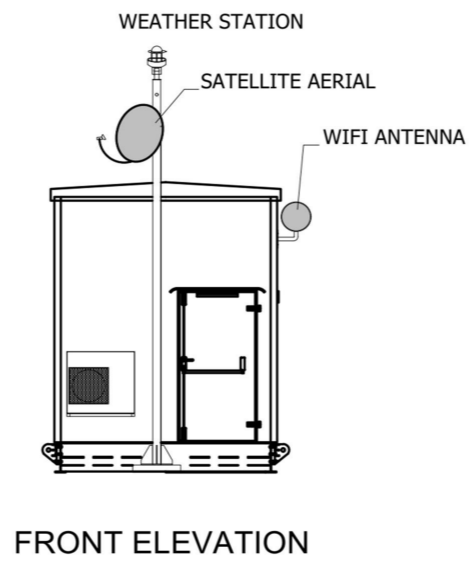
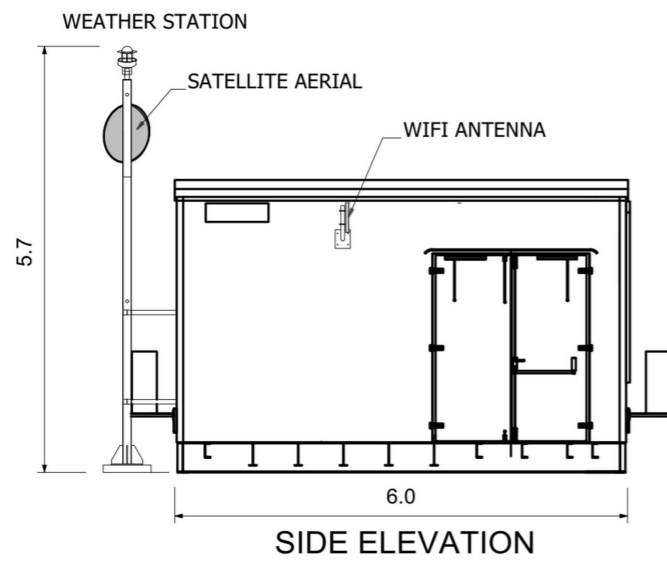
Revisions:
 First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
Substation Elevations

DRWG No: RC3-02-P08	Rev: -	Sht no: -
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:100 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	



GENERAL NOTES:

1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.

Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS

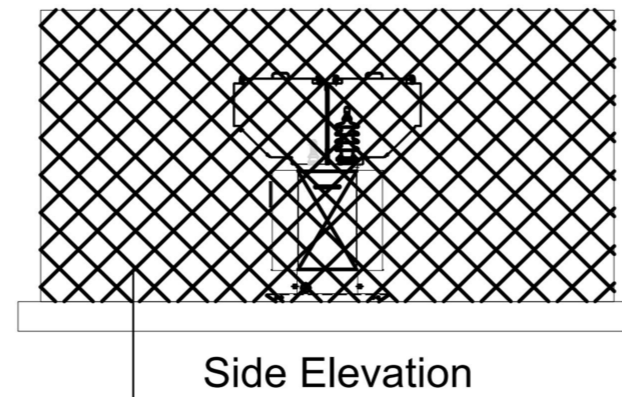
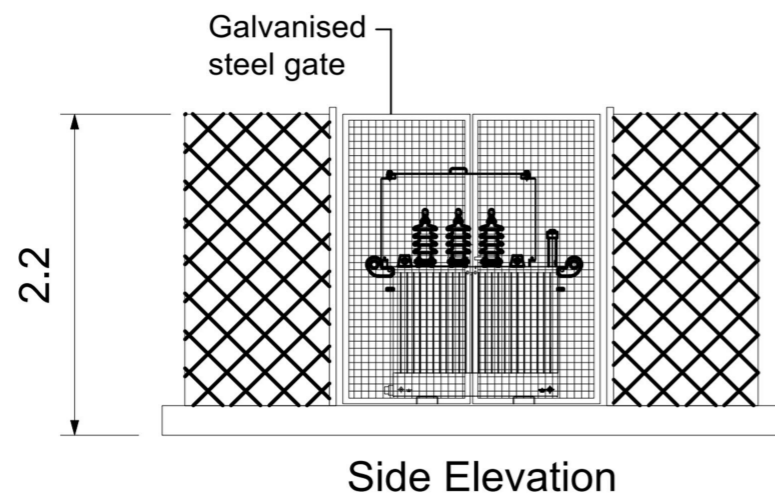


Enso Energy Limited, Unit 1 & 2 Cirencester Office Park,
Tetbury Road, Cirencester, GL7 6JJ
Tel: 01452 764685 Email: enquiries@ensoenergy.co.uk

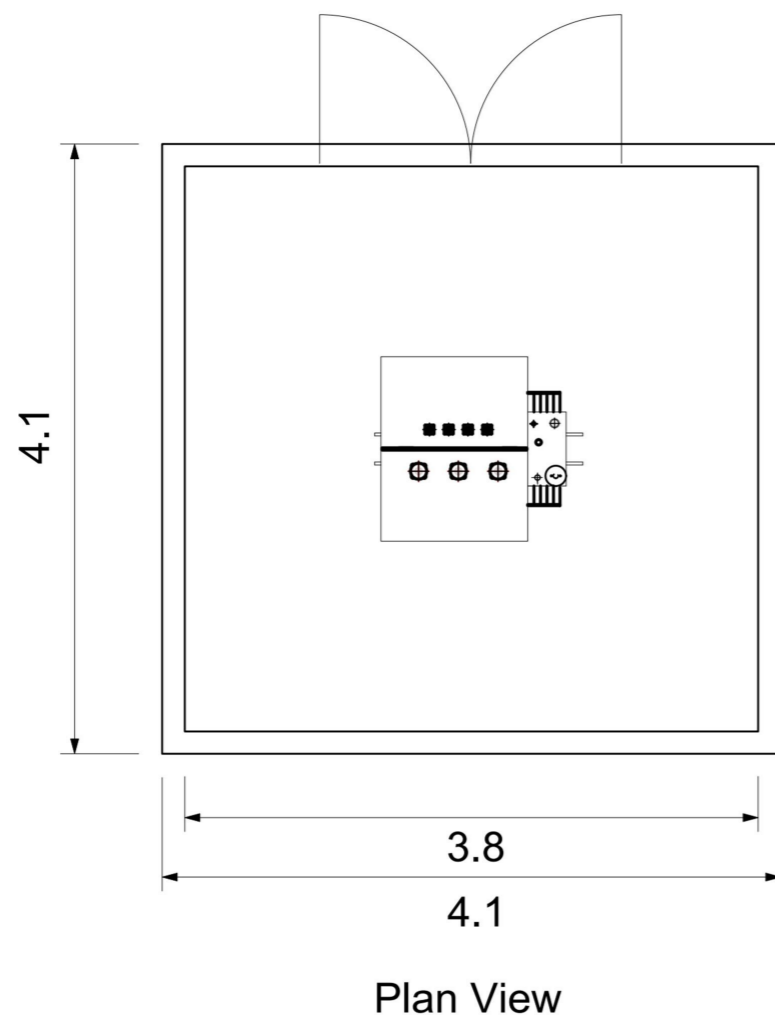
Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
Control Room Elevations

DRWG No: RC3-02-P09	Rev: -	Sht no: -
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:100 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	



High-tensile, galvanised steel, plain wire deer fence, 2m height.



GENERAL NOTES:

1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.

Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



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Tetbury Road, Cirencester, GL7 6JJ
Tel: 01452 764685 Email: enquiries@ensoenergy.co.uk

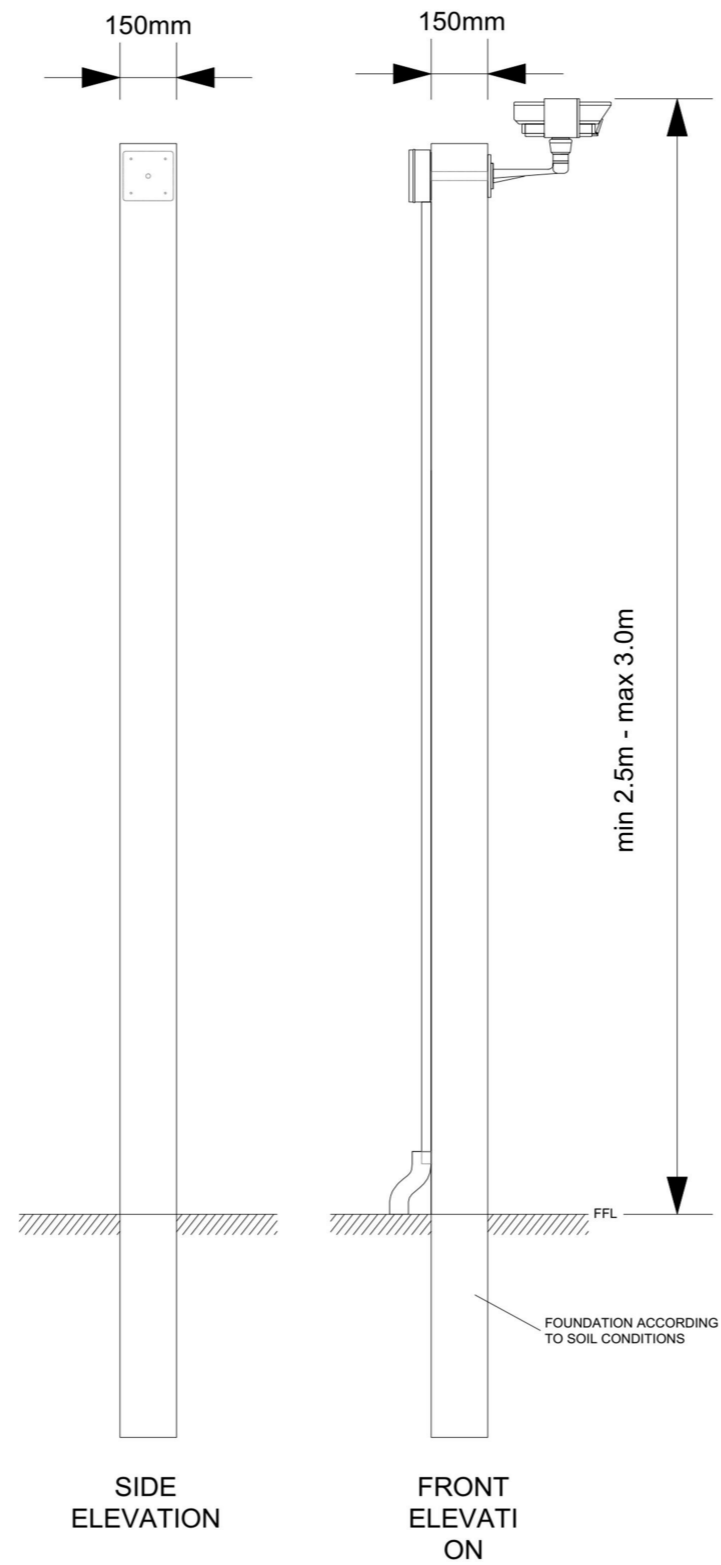
Project Title:

Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:

Auxiliary Transformer

DRWG No: RC3-02-P10	Rev: -	Sht no: -
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Scale: 1:50 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	



Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS

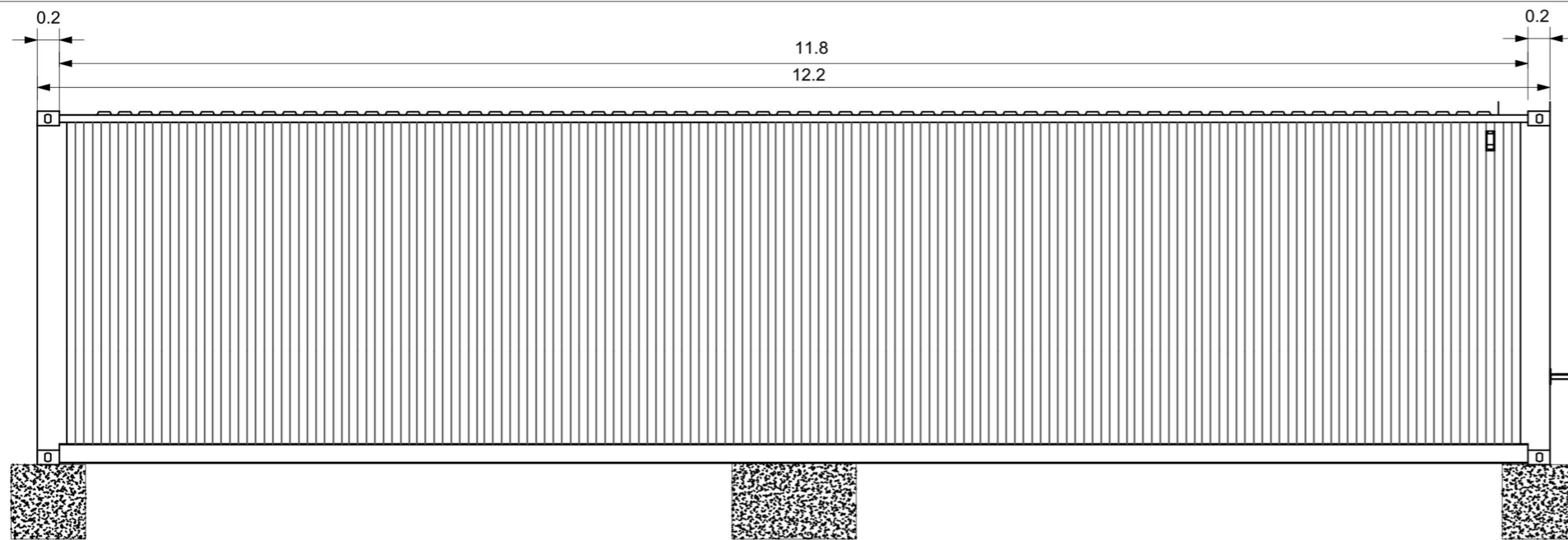


Enso Energy Limited, Unit 1 & 2 Cirencester Office Park,
Tetbury Road, Cirencester, GL7 6JJ
Tel: 01452 764685 Email: enquiries@ensoenergy.co.uk

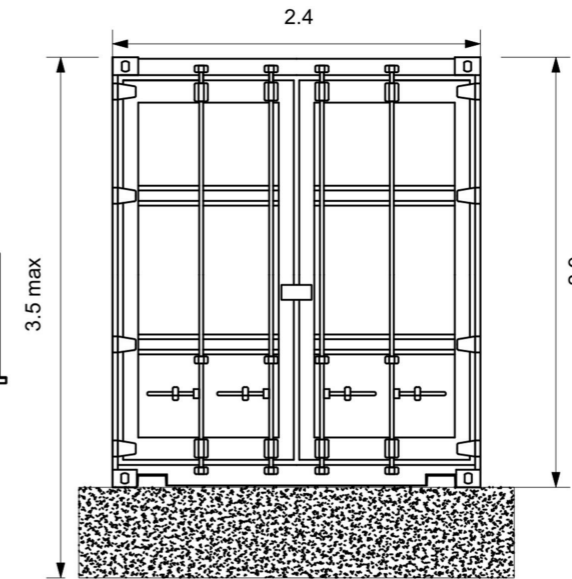
Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
CCTV Elevations

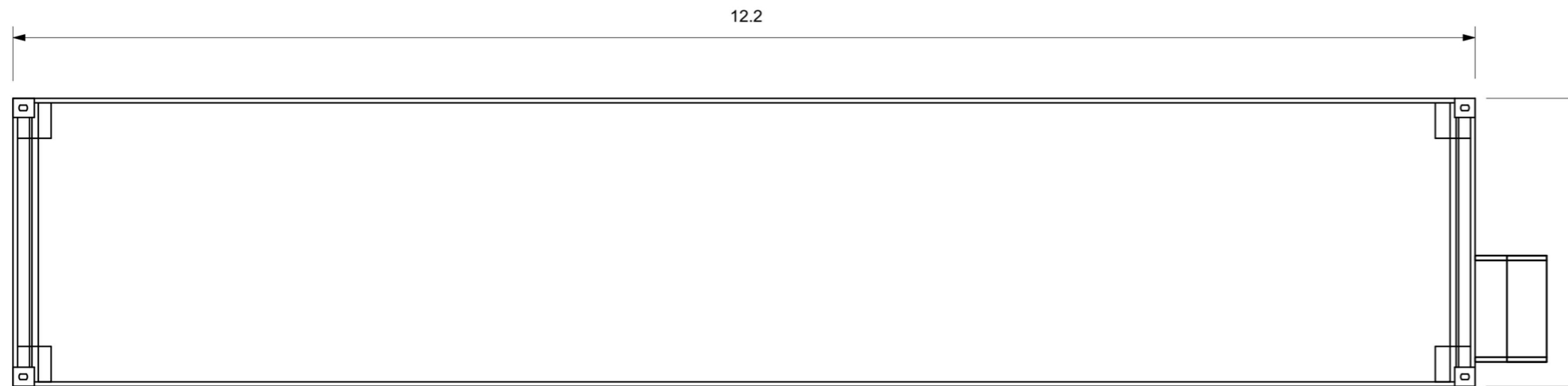
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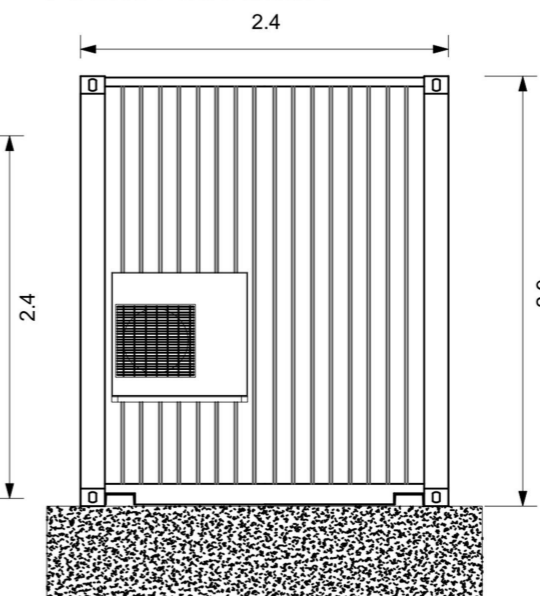
Side Elevation



Front Elevation

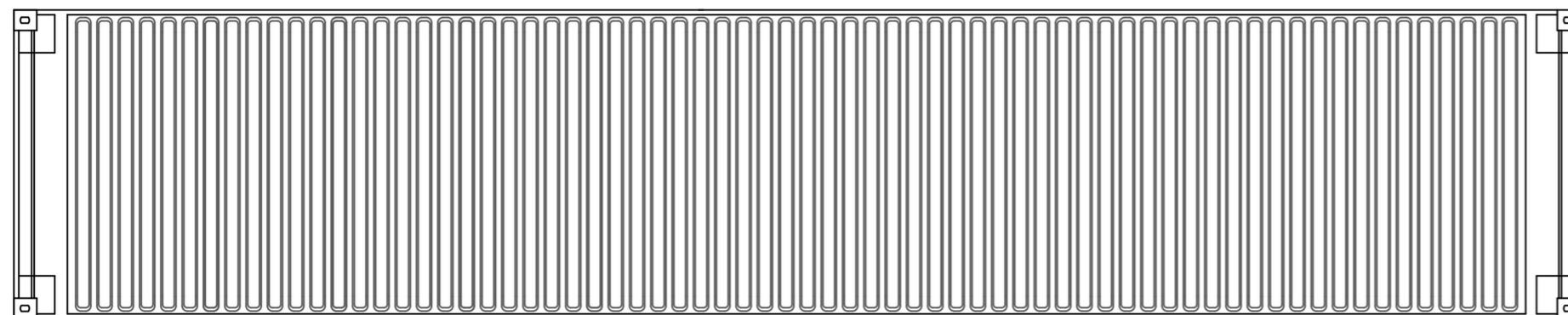


Floor Plan



Rear Elevation

Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



Roof Plan



Enso Energy Limited, Unit 1 & 2 Cirencester Office Park,
Telbury Road, Cirencester, GL7 6JJ
Tel: 01452 764685 Email: enquiries@ensoenergy.co.uk

Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
**Battery Container Elevations
40ft**

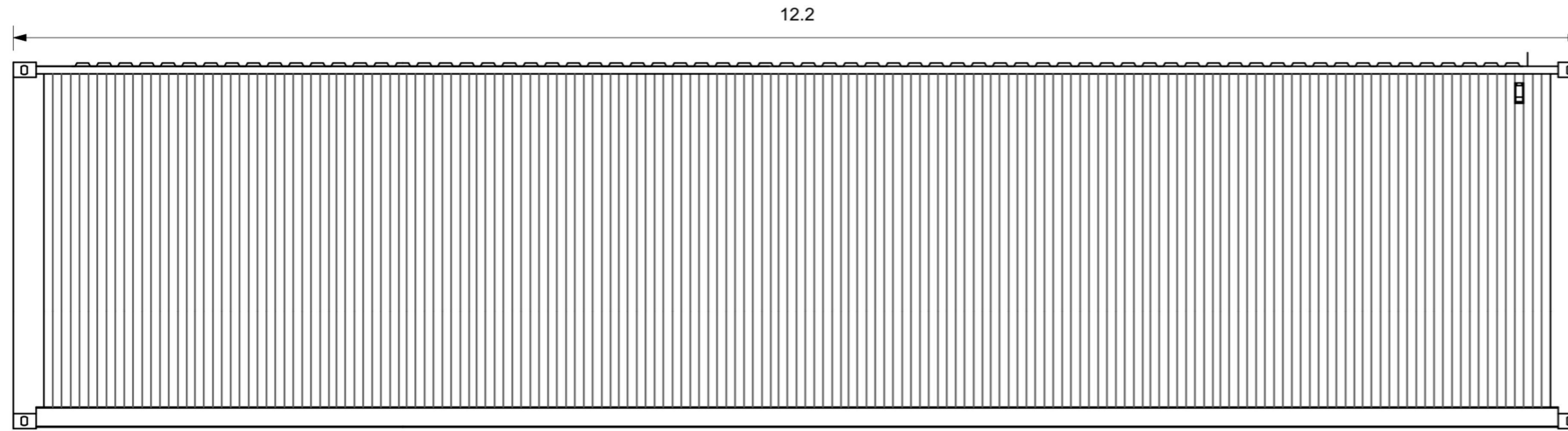
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GENERAL NOTES:

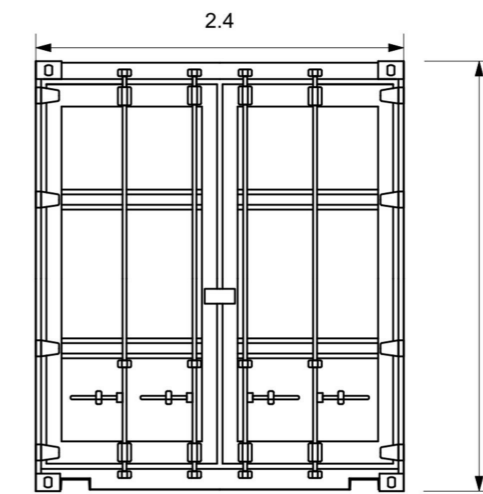
1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS
UNLESS SPECIFIED.

2) BATTERY CONTAINERS TO BE
PAINTED RAL6005

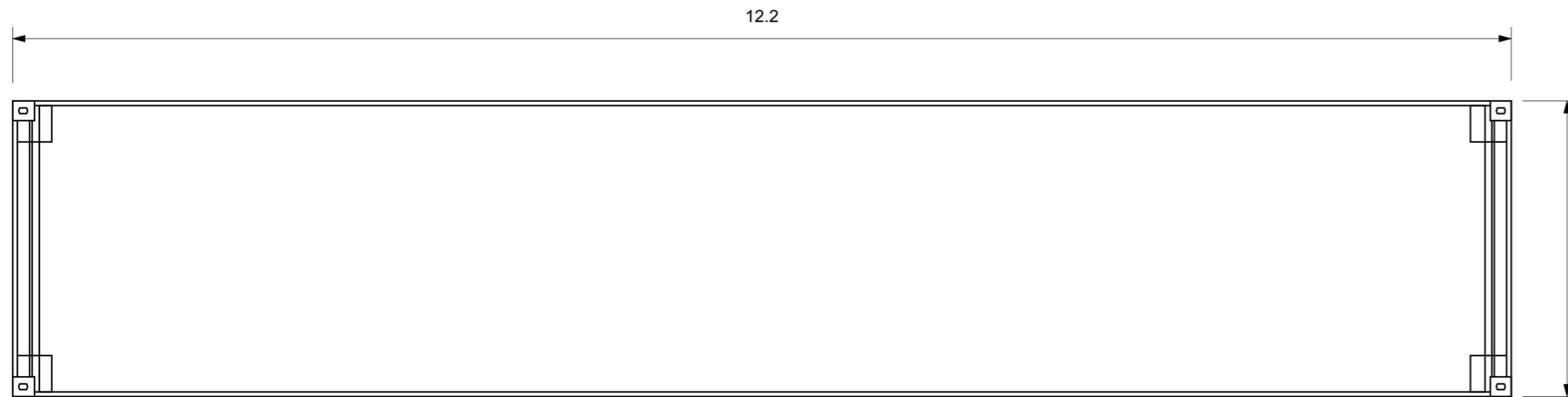




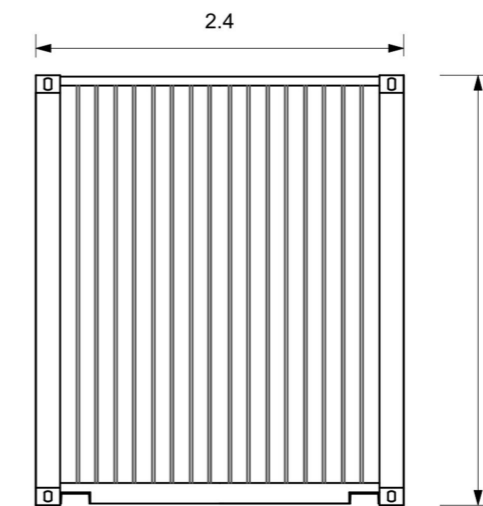
Side Elevation



Front Elevation

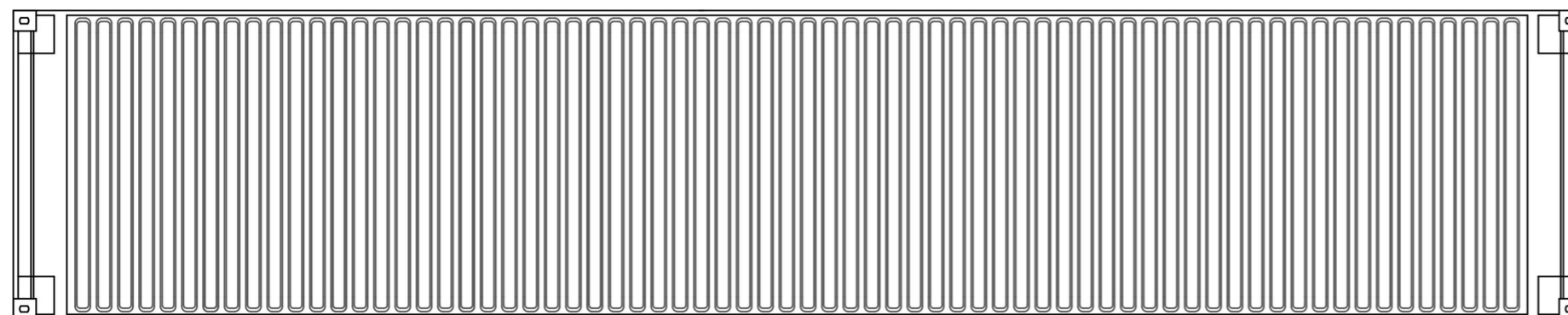


Floor Plan



Rear Elevation

Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



Roof Plan



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Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

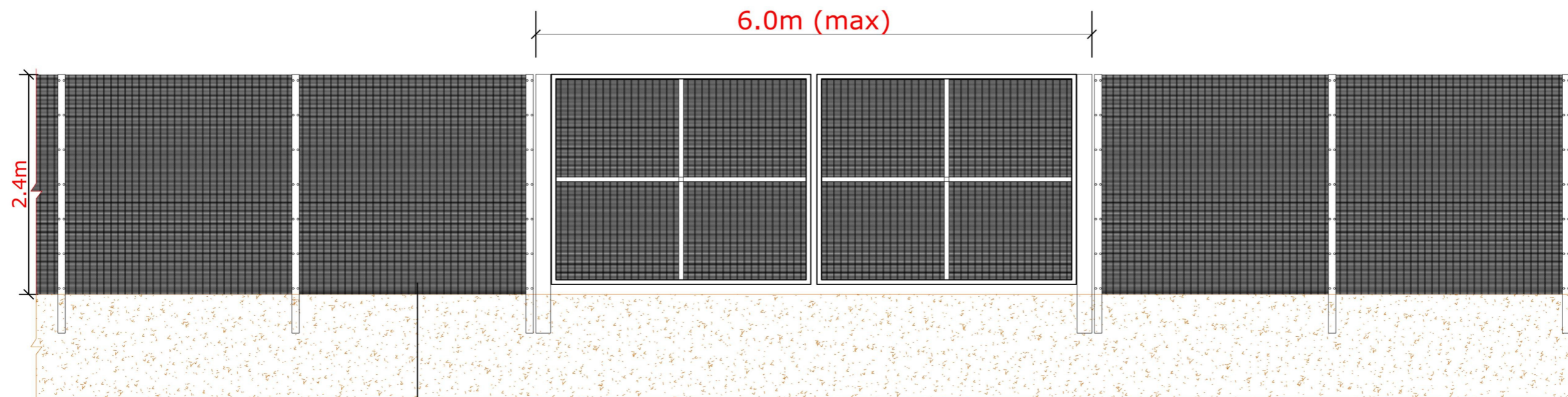
Drawing Title:
**Storage Container Elevations
40ft**

DRWG No: RC3-02-P13	Rev: -	Sht no: -
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:50 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	

GENERAL NOTES:

- 1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.
- 2) CONTAINERS TO BE PAINTED RAL6005





Welded steel wire mesh (SR2)

Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



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Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
Battery Fence and Gate Elevations

DRWG No: RC3-02-P14	Rev: -	Sht no: -
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:50 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	

GENERAL NOTES:

1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS
UNLESS SPECIFIED.

2) COLOUR OF THE FENCE WILL BE
GREEN



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KEY

- EXISTING**
- Native mixed hedgerow
 - Native mixed hedgerow - lower density planting, enhancement of existing hedgerow
 - Native woodland buffer mix
 - Trees & vegetation
 - Public Right of Way
- PROPOSED**
- Emorgate EM1 - Basic General Purpose Meadow Mixture, or similar approved (outside the security fence)
 - Emorgate EG27- Special Old Fashioned Grazing Mixture, or similar approved (within the security fence)
 - Proposed tree planting
 - Fence line
 - Permeable sub-base

MAINTENANCE

Trees
All trees shall be regularly checked and any broken ties, guards or stakes replaced. Mulch shall be topped up to maintain original levels. In periods of dry weather all trees shall be regularly watered to field capacity. The area around the base of each tree is to be kept mulched to 50mm depth minimum and weed free to a minimum diameter of 1m. At the end of each growing season all trees shall receive an application of slow release fertiliser. After approximately 5 years, stakes and ties should be removed once trees have established. Any trees that fail to thrive shall be replaced with stock to the original specification.

Native Hedgerow Mix
All hedgerows shall be maintained weed free and any loose plants re-firmed. All canes and spirals where employed shall be regularly checked and adjusted or replaced as required. All hedge lines shall be regularly watered in times of drought to field capacity and shall receive an application of slow release fertiliser at the end of the maintenance period. Mulch shall be regularly topped up to original levels. All hedge lines shall be allowed to grow up to a minimum of 3m high and maintained at 3m+. Any plants that fail to thrive shall be replaced with stock to the original specification.

Native Woodland Buffer Mix
All planting stock shall be maintained weed free and any loose plants re-firmed. All canes and spirals where employed shall be regularly checked and adjusted or replaced as required. All planted areas shall be regularly watered in times of drought to field capacity and shall receive an application of slow release fertiliser at the end of the maintenance period. Mulch shall be regularly topped up to original levels. Any plants that fail to thrive shall be replaced with stock to the original specification. All plant stations to be watered to field capacity during periods of extended drought.

Species Rich Grass Mix
Areas of grassland should be allowed to grow to full height and be cut once a year at the end of August or managed by grazing.

- NOTES**
- Bare root plants specified for planting during planting season only (i.e. winter months). Containerised and rootballed stock to be employed when necessary as advised by supplier.
 - No cultivation should be undertaken in wet/waterlogged conditions or after heavy frosts;
 - Imported topsoil to accord with BS3882.
 - Supplying nurseries should be registered under the HTA Nursery Certification Scheme, and plant material should be of certified British provenance.
 - All plants shall be packed and transported in accordance with the Code of Practice for plant handling as Published by The Committee for Plant Supply and Establishment (CPSE).
 - All plant material to conform with BS:3936 and BS:4428.
 - Planting operations to be undertaken during appropriate climatic conditions to avoid wet/waterlogged or frost bound soil conditions, frosts, droughts or during periods of excessive cold drying winds.

LANDSCAPE SPECIFICATION

Trees
Tree barriers are to be employed near services. All standard trees are to be planted in separate pits 1m x 1m x 900mm which shall be backfilled with a mixture of approved topsoil and tree and shrub planting compost at a rate of one part compost to two parts topsoil. Break up bottoms of pits to a depth of 150mm and scarify sides. Each tree shall be planted centrally within the pit to the original root collar and secured by two untreated softwood stakes 1.4m min. length with approved ties. After planting all trees shall be watered-in and a mulch layer of 1m diameter approved forest bark spread over the tree pit to 50mm depth. A spiral guard will be fixed to the base of each tree to protect it from rabbit attack and trimmer damage.

Native Hedgerow Mix
Hedgerow trenches shall be dug 450mm x 450mm x 450mm depth the base of which shall be broken up before returning the approved topsoil backfill mixture to the trench at the rate of one part compost to two parts topsoil. All stock shall be planted to the root collar and well firmed in place. After planting a 50mm layer of approved compost fine bark (nominal size 1-10mm) shall be spread over the whole hedge area (450mm wide). On completion, all hedge plants shall be thoroughly watered in. Hedges to be protected from rabbit damage by rabbit proof fencing or individual spirals/shrub guards as appropriate.

Native Woodland Buffer Mix
Individual pits shall be dug to a minimum of 450mm x 450mm x 300mm depth the base of which shall be broken up before returning the approved topsoil backfill mixture to the trench at the rate of one part compost to two parts topsoil. All stock shall be planted to the root collar and well firmed in place. After planting a 50mm layer of approved compost fine bark (nominal size 1-10mm) shall be spread over each pit (1m wide). On completion all plants shall be thoroughly watered in. Areas to be protected from rabbit damage by rabbit proof fencing or individual spirals/shrub guards, as appropriate.

Species Rich Grass Mix
Following construction of solar panels and immediately prior to seeding, remove any unwanted vegetation growth within the fields by scraping the surface to a depth of 150mm. The ground shall then be thoroughly broken up and cultivated and fine graded to even running falls before raking and cross raking. A suitable grass mix to be agreed shall be sown in accordance with good practice.

Seeding will take place in September to allow establishment prior to winter and reduce seed loss to birds. If soils and seed bed have been prepared before September, any weed growth that has established in the meantime will be sprayed off with glyphosate and a seedbed re-prepared. Seed shall be broadcast by approved lightweight machinery. Following seeding the area will be subject to rolling to incorporate the seed with the growing substrate.

PROGRAMME

- All bare root planting to be undertaken during the planting season November – March. [All ground cultivations to be undertaken under suitable conditions].
- Seeding works and cultivation to be undertaken in the late summer to mid autumn or mid spring.
- Any replacement planting required during the initial maintenance period is to be undertaken during the planting season (November to March).

Indicative Plant Schedule

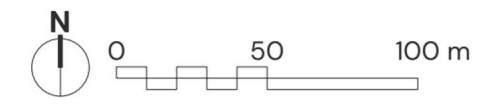
ID	Qty	Species	Size
A.c.c	22	Acer campestre	8-10cm, 250-300cm ht. B, 2x, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks
A.g	21	Alnus glutinosa	8-10cm, 250-300cm ht. B, 2x, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks
B.pu	18	Betula pendula	8-10cm, 250-300cm ht. B, 2x, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks
B.au	12	Betula pubescens	8-10cm, 250-300cm ht. B, 2x, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks
C.b	6	Carpinus betulus	8-10cm, 250-300cm ht. B, 2x, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks
Q.ro	27	Quercus robur	8-10cm, 250-300 cm ht. B, 2x, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks
S.fr	23	Salix fragilis	8-10cm, 250-300cm ht. B, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks
S.au	9	Salix aucuparia	8-10cm, 250-300cm ht. B, 2x, standard, 175-200cm cs, 3 breaks

ID	Qty	Species	%	Size
A.ca	138	Acer campestre	15	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
A.gl	138	Alnus glutinosa	15	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
B.pen	92	Betula pendula	10	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
B.pub	92	Betula pubescens	10	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
C.bet	44	Carpinus betulus	5	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
I.aqu	44	Ilex aquifolium	5	60-80cm ht. 3L pot
M.syl	44	Malus sylvestris	5	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
P.av	44	Prunus avium	5	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
Q.ro	184	Quercus robur	20	60-80cm, Branched, 1+1, B
S.cap	92	Salix caprea	10	60-80cm ht. 3L pot

ID	Qty	Species	%	Size
A.c.	1217	Acer campestre	10	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
C.av	3047	Corylus avellana	25	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
C.mo	4264	Crataegus monogyna	35	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
I.aq	305	Ilex aquifolium	2.5	40-60cm, 2L pot
M.syl	610	Malus sylvestris	5	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
P.sp	1217	Prunus spinosa	10	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
R.c.	205	Rosa canina	2.5	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
S.cap	610	Salix caprea	5	40-60cm, 2L pot
V.op	305	Viburnum opulus	2.5	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B

ID	Qty	Species	%	Size
A.c.	47	Acer campestre	10	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
C.av	118	Corylus avellana	25	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
C.mo	165	Crataegus monogyna	35	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
I.aq	12	Ilex aquifolium	2.5	40-60cm, 2L pot
M.syl	24	Malus sylvestris	5	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
P.sp	47	Prunus spinosa	10	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
R.c.	12	Rosa canina	2.5	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B
S.cap	24	Salix caprea	5	40-60cm, 2L pot
V.op	12	Viburnum opulus	2.5	40-60cm, Branched, 1+1, B

Rev	Date	By	Note
E	200623	KA	Minor amendments
D	190623	KA	Changes to layout
C	200123	VR	Changes to layout
B	051022	VR	Changes to layout
A	220922	VR	Minor amends



SOUTHLANDS SOLAR FARM - Detailed Landscape Design





Section A-A

Revisions:
First Issue- 26/06/2023 JS

ALL DIMENSIONS TO BE CHECKED ON SITE WORK TO FIGURED DIMENSIONS ONLY REPORT DISCREPANCIES TO THE GFP AT ONCE BEFORE PROCEEDING COPYRIGHT ACT APPLIES.

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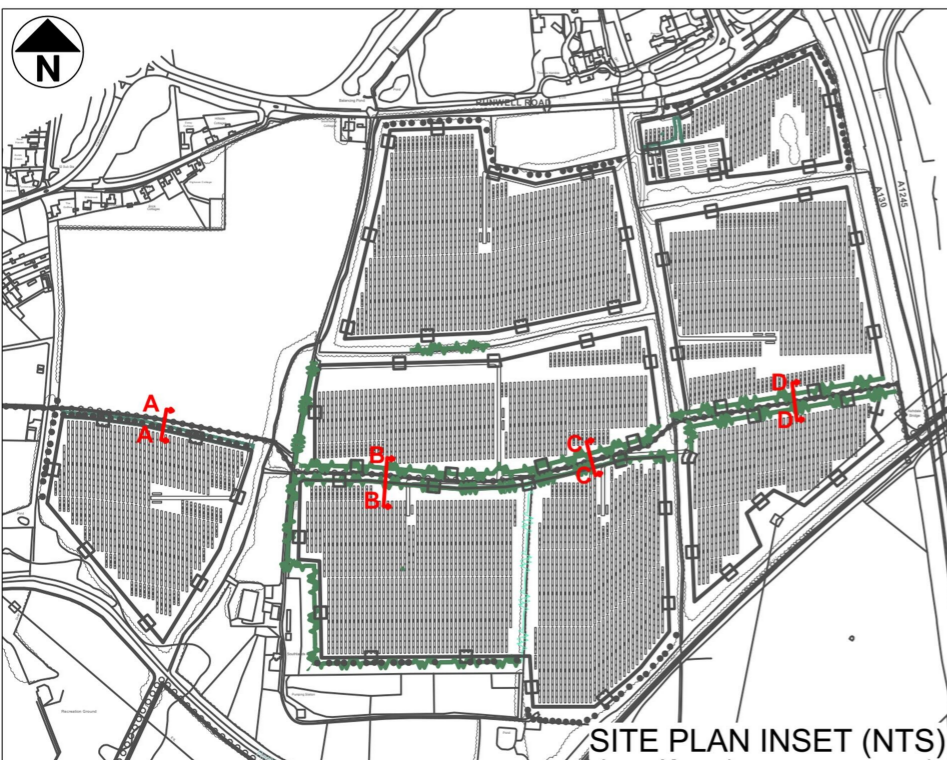
Project Title:

Southlands Solar Farm

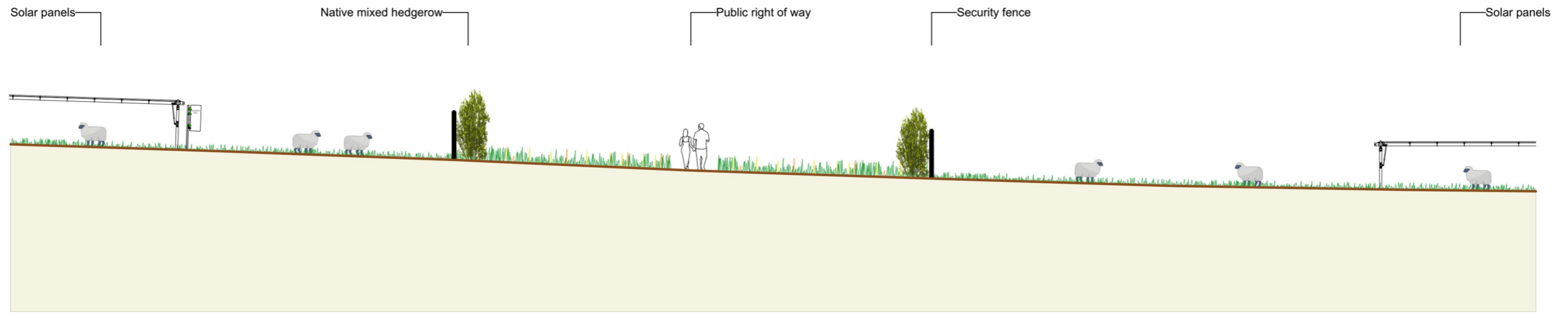
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Illustrative Cross Sections

DRWG No: RC3-02-P17	Rev: -	Sht no: 1/4
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:200 @ A3	Date: 26/06/2023	



SITE PLAN INSET (NTS)



Section B-B

Revisions:
First Issue- 26/06/2023 JS

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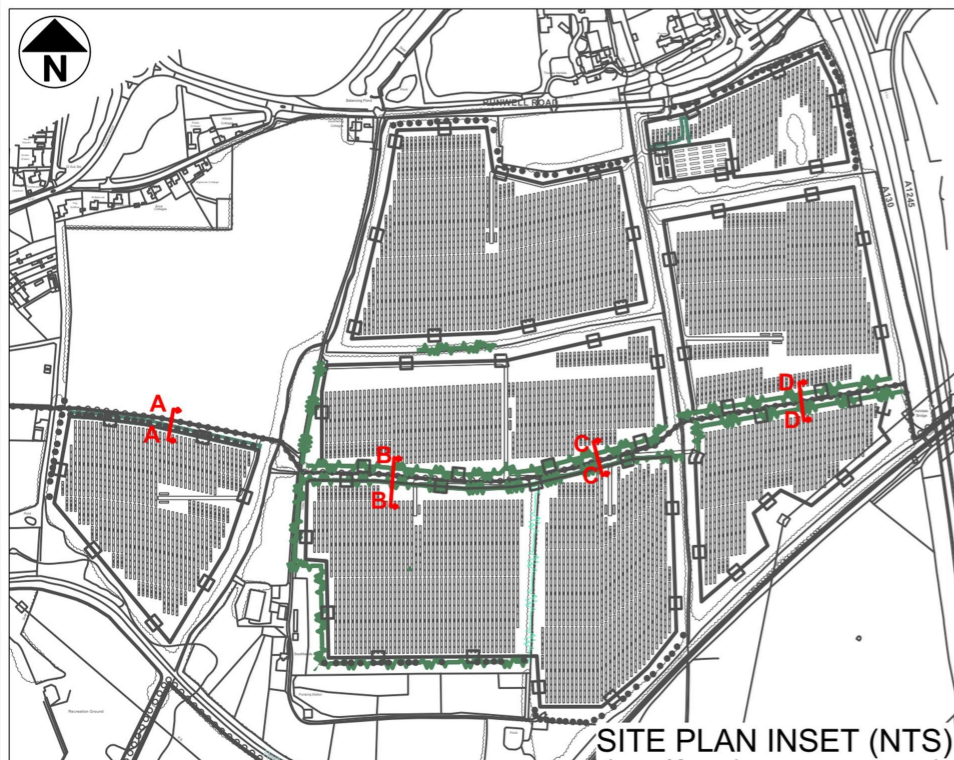
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Southlands Solar Farm

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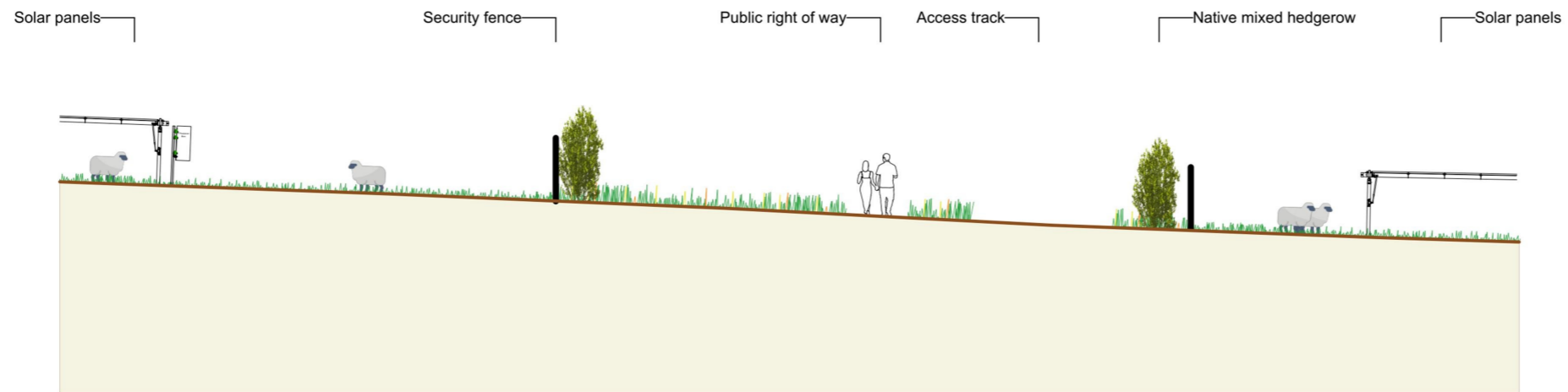
Illustrative Cross Sections

DRWG No: RC3-02-P17	Rev: -	Sht no: 2/4
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:200 @ A3	Date: 26/06/2023	



SITE PLAN INSET (NTS)





Section C-C

Revisions:
First Issue- 26/06/2023 JS

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Project Title:

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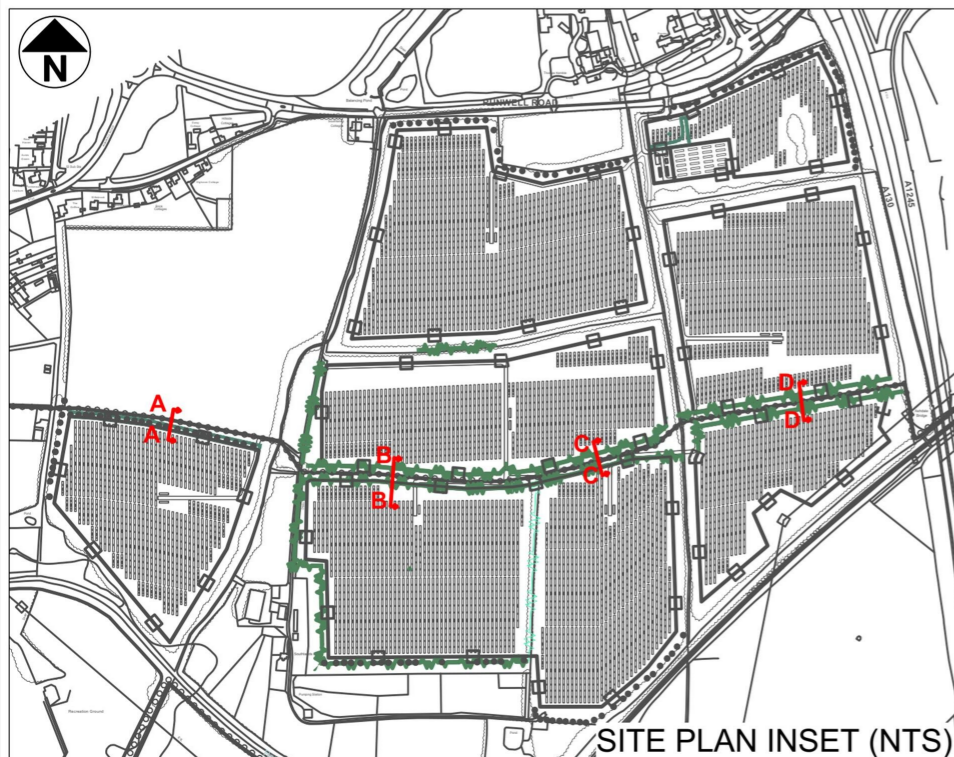
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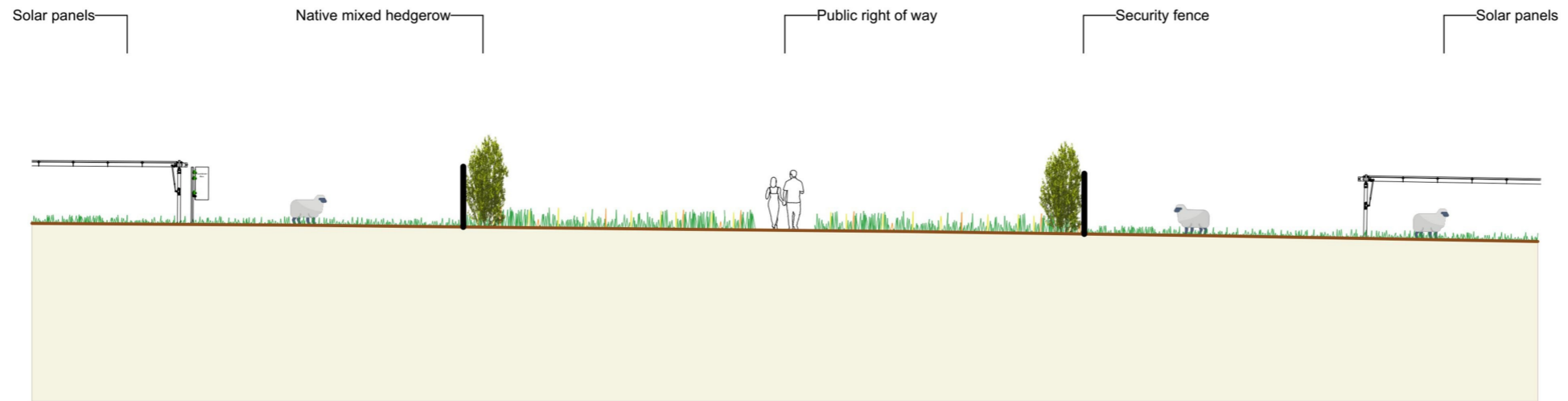
Illustrative Cross Sections

DRWG No: RC3-02-P17	Rev: -	Sht no: 3/4
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Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM
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Scale: 1:200 @ A3	Date: 26/06/2023
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Section D-D

Revisions:
First Issue- 26/06/2023 JS

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Project Title:

Southlands Solar Farm

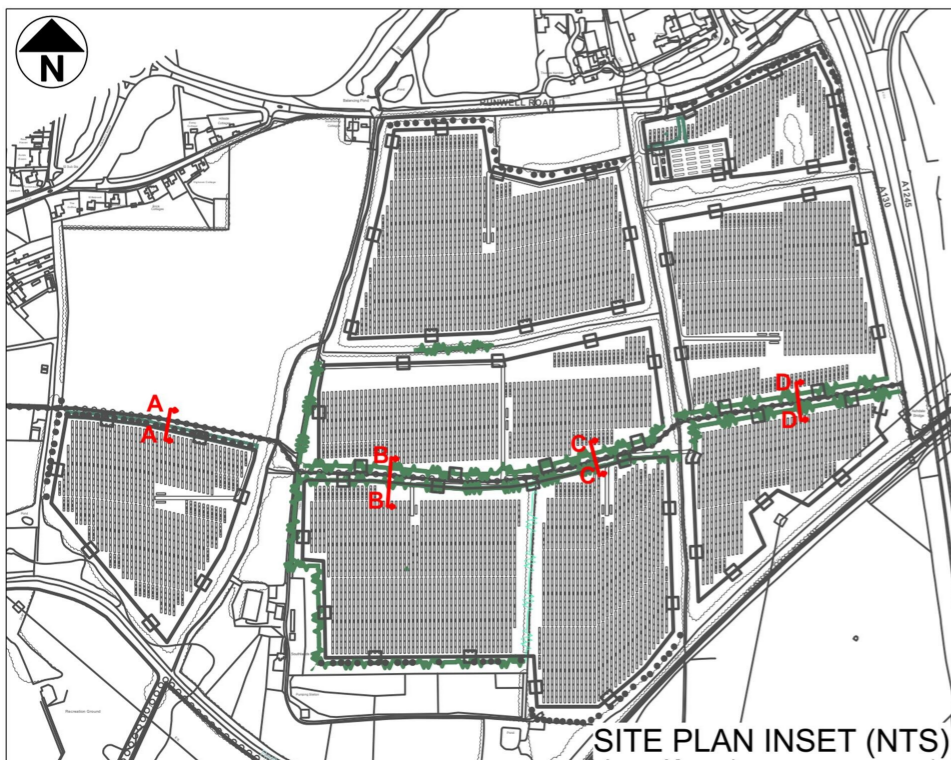
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Illustrative Cross Sections

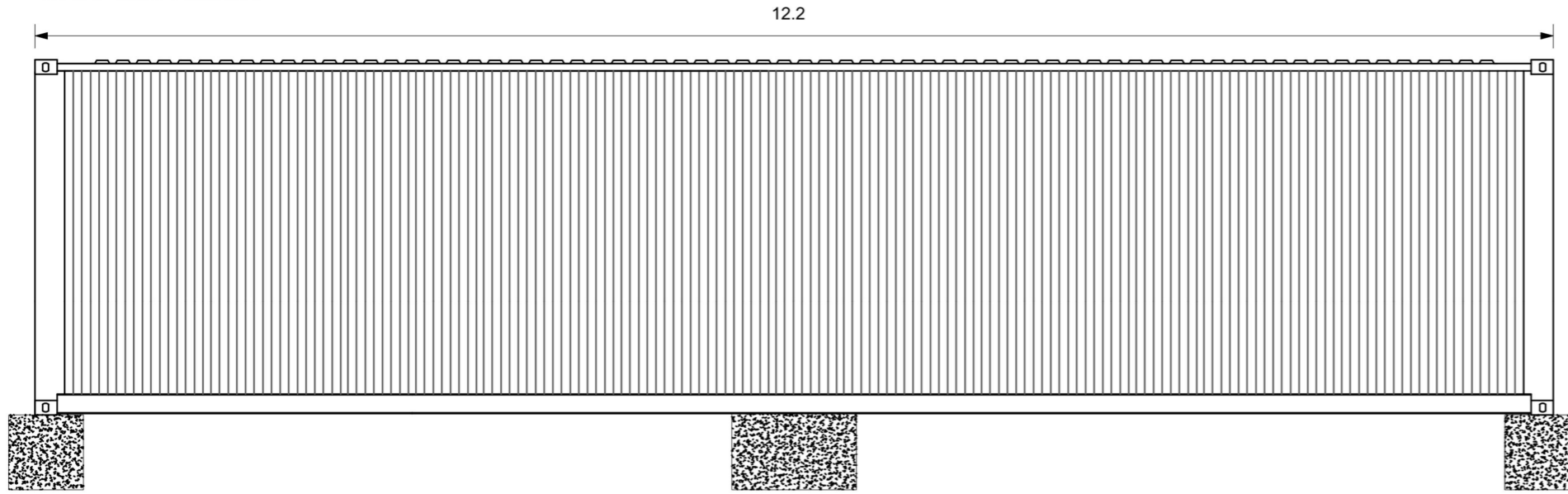
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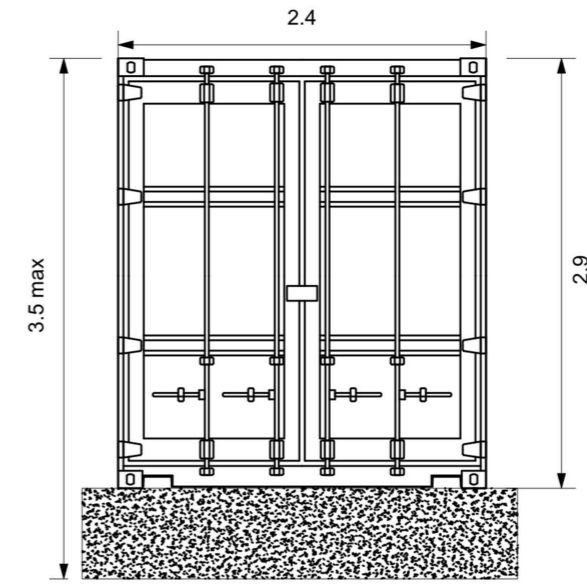
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Side Elevation



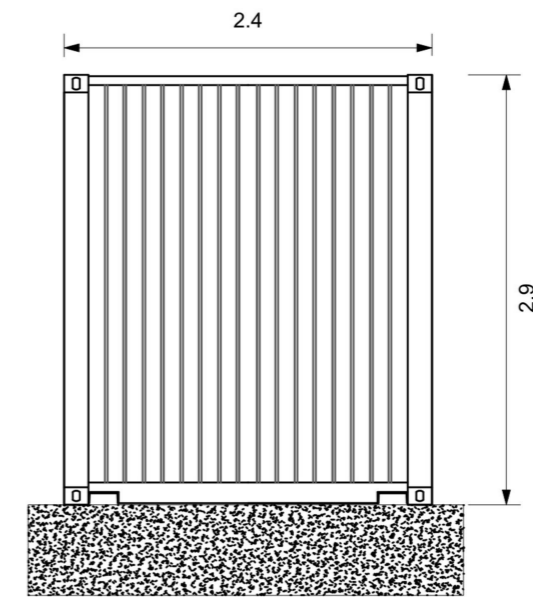
Front Elevation



Floor Plan

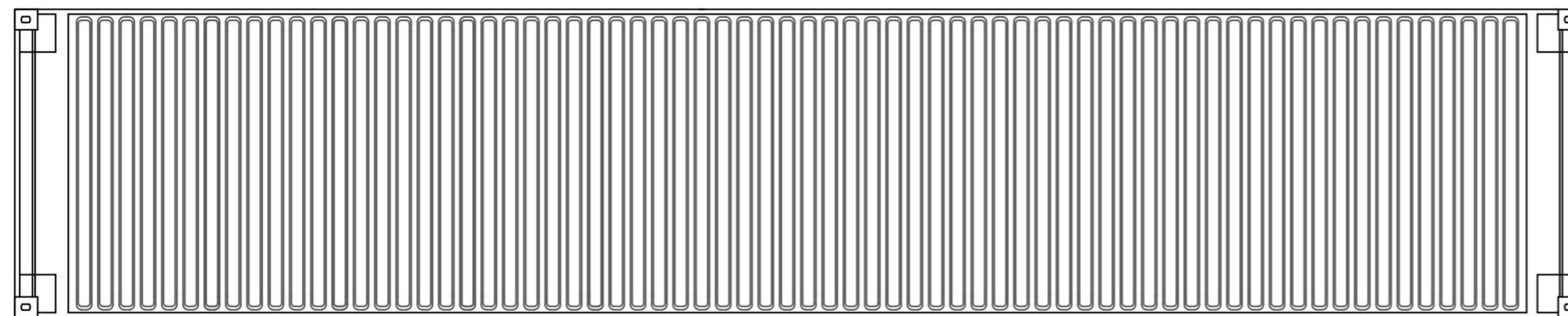


Rear Elevation



Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS

Roof Plan



GENERAL NOTES:

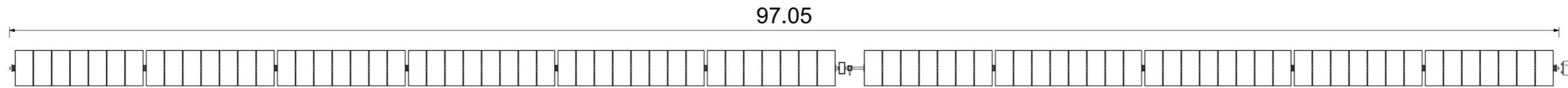
- 1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.
- 2) INVERTER STATIONS TO BE PAINTED RAL6005
- 3) FOUNDATIONS SHOWN INDICATIVELY ONLY. DIMENSIONS TO BE CONFIRMED BASED ON SITE CONDITIONS.



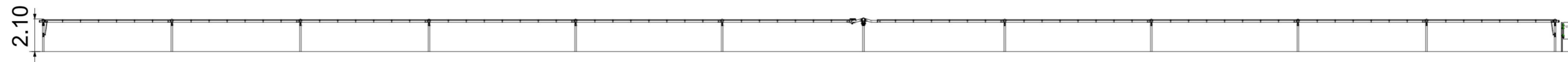
Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
Inverter/Transformer Stations

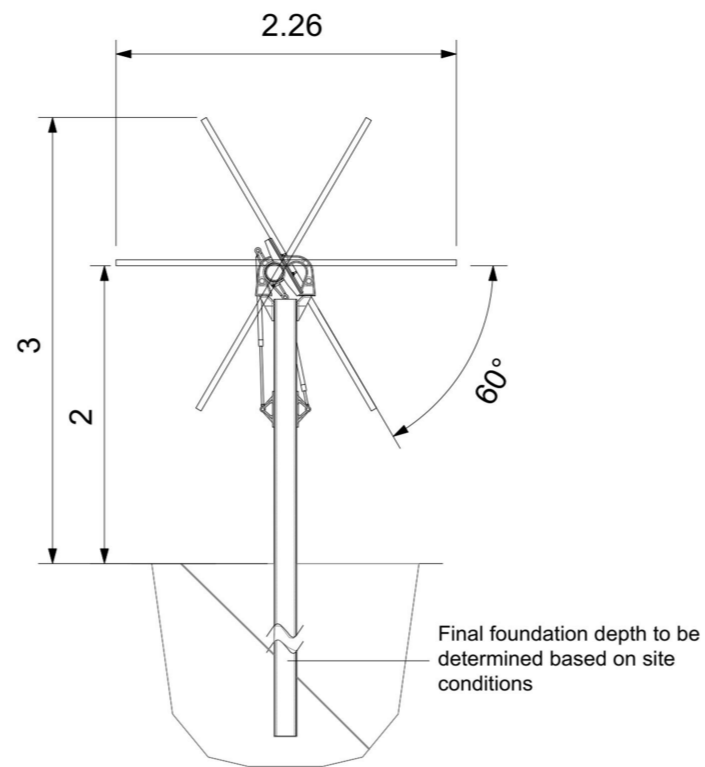
DRWG No: RC3-02-P04	Rev: -	Sht no: -
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:50 @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	



PLAN VIEW (not to scale)



FRONT ELEVATION (not to scale)



SIDE ELEVATION (Scale 1:50)



GENERAL NOTES:

- 1) ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN METERS UNLESS SPECIFIED.
- 2) FINAL DIMENSIONS MAY VARY DEPENDING ON MODULE TYPE

Revisions:
First Issue- 12/09/2022 JS



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Project Title:
Southlands Solar Farm

Drawing Title:
PV Elevations

DRWG No: RC3-02-P03	Rev: -	Sht no: -
Drawn by : JS	Checked by: RM	
Scale: As noted @ A3	Date: 12/09/2022	