

Name of Applicant	Proposal	Expiry Date	Plan Ref.
Brockhill Solar Ltd	Installation and operation of a ground mounted solar farm on two separate land parcels with internal access tracks, security fence, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancement Land lying north of Brockhill Lane, Tardebigge, Worcestershire, B97 6RB	04.09.2026	24/01341/FUL

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) **MINDED to GRANT Full planning permission**

(b) That **DELEGATED POWERS** be granted to the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services to determine the application following the receipt and completion of a suitable and satisfactory legal mechanism in relation to the following matter:

- (i) The management and maintenance of the significant on and off site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) enhancements and a financial contribution for the monitoring of significant on-site and off-site BNG

Consultations

External Landscape Consultant

The application has been accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). The Site lies within the Wooded Estate/Landscapes Landscape Character Type (LCT) as defined in the 'Worcestershire County Council Landscape Character Assessment' (2012). Specifically land cover parcel (LCP) AR10h which is described as being in good condition, with a high sensitivity to change and moderate resilience to development. The northern parcel of land (Site 1) abuts the Principle Timbered Farmlands landscape type and specifically LCP AR09.1b, which is in good condition, of high sensitivity and of low resilience to development

The external landscape consultant considers that the overall judgements within the submitted LVA are broadly acceptable. However, further clarification, assessment and mitigation are required before the landscape and visual effects can be fully understood and appropriately controlled.

A number of matters requiring correction or further work within the LVA. These include correcting a policy referencing error, addressing Green Belt considerations within the landscape assessment, amending the description of viewpoint 5.3.8, and providing a

stronger assessment of visual effects on key receptors, particularly users of Brockhill Lane and nearby public rights of way.

Temporary construction-stage effects should also be assessed, as these are likely to be important from certain viewpoints and receptors notwithstanding their limited duration. The assessment should be updated to consider these impacts where necessary

Additional visual material has been requested. Viewpoint 1 should be developed into a photomontage to assess views from public right of way WO/TC/523, including whether further planting, hedgerow reinforcement and hedgerow trees are required along the eastern boundary. An additional viewpoint and photomontage should also be provided from Brockhill Lane, looking north-west from the Viewpoint 4 location towards both site parcels and the proposed substation.

Particular consideration should be given to the siting and screening of the proposed substation, including whether relocation or additional mitigation would reduce its effect on local landscape character. The viewpoint 7 photomontage should also be corrected, as the baseline view appears to have been duplicated rather than showing year-of-opening and Year 15 views.

Cumulative landscape and visual effects should be addressed, including any relevant nearby or emerging solar schemes. The consultant also recommends that worst-case winter views at Year 15 are assessed to ensure that proposed planting and mitigation are properly tested in seasonal conditions when vegetation screening is reduced.

Recommendations include the reduction of the apparent massing of panels by using vegetation to break up views across the site. Additional hedgerow trees and pockets of woodland are encouraged, including a new woodland parcel within the triangular area to the south-east of Site Parcel 2 and to the west of Site Parcel 1.

A landscape condition should require a detailed planting scheme and long-term landscape management plan. Tree stock should be larger than currently proposed to provide more immediate softening, particularly along the eastern boundary of Site Parcel 2. The final mitigation package should respond directly to the updated visual assessment, photomontages and cumulative assessment.

Tutnall And Cobley Parish Council

The Parish Council are happy with the amendments as long as it adheres with Government Policy.

National Highways

No objection.

Environment Agency

I can confirm that we did receive a consultation from you on this application on 26 March 2025. We noted that the site appears to be entirely within Flood Zone 1 (the low risk zone) and it did not seem to be within any of the other categories on our consultation checklist (attached for information). In accordance with our checklist, we wouldn't expect to provide bespoke comment upon this planning application.

I note your comment that the solar farm is in proximity to Hewell Lake SSSI. Having a look at the designation citation, it appears that the species at Hewell Park Lake would likely fall under Natural England's remit rather than ourselves.

West Mercia Constabulary

No objection but there are opportunities to design out crime, reduce the fear of crime and to promote community safety. I would strongly avoid the use of what is described as 'Deer Fencing' as this does not provide any difficulty or deterrent to the criminal. I would recommend that the boundary fence is to a minimum of LPS 1175 level 3 and to a height of 2.4 metres or to the current UK Government standard, SEAP (Security Equipment Approval Panel) class 1-3.

The use of 2.4 metre welded mesh fencing (in green) would be the most unobtrusive method of providing a secure perimeter border. All gated entrances should be secured with appropriate access systems.

The NFU Mutual recommends good perimeter security fencing for all solar installations along with CCTV, motion sensors and infrared beams, depending on location. It also recommends panels are secured to frames with unique fastenings, requiring special tools – much like alloy wheel bolts.

Monitored CCTV System

Whilst considering the often-isolated locations that Solar Farms are to be established, the installation of a remotely monitored with motion detection CCTV system is an effective deterrent and is most likely to provide effective evidence should a crime occur.

Physical security of panels

It has been identified that individual panels can be easily removed from the aluminium frames which are usually secured by a small bracket which is in turn secured by an alum key. Whilst aluminium can itself be easily forced the use of an additional security bracket may help reduce the ease by which panels can be removed adding to the time that a criminal would need to remove panels increasing the risk to offenders.

Whilst not intending to draw attention to a solar farm the effective use of signage to act as an informative deterrent may also be considered. I would ask that the applicant considers a perimeter alarm system now we are aware that these sites are attracting criminal interest.

There have been several instances where offenders have been able to access sites quite easily with large vehicles enabling the large-scale removal of panels and equipment. Due to the poor planning and design (particularly across fields and tracks in dry weather) they spent some considerable time undetected.

Use of Defensive Ditches and Berms (Bunds)

Landscaping techniques such as ditches and berms (bunds) may also be appropriate in some instances. To be effective in stopping vehicles these need to be designed carefully.

Use of Natural Features and Vegetation

The development will need to have regard in both its design layout, and future maintenance plans for the retention of growth of vegetation on boundaries, including the opportunity for any trees within the boundaries to grow on to maturity.

The use of natural vegetation as a feature should not compromise the benefit of clear and unobstructed natural and formal (CCTV System) surveillance.

Existing hedges and established vegetation, including mature trees, should be retained wherever possible.

Finally, I would ask that security measures be considered for items to be stored 'on site' during the build phase of the development.

National Air Traffic Services NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL")

The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with our safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL") has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.

However, please be aware that this response applies specifically to the above consultation and only reflects the position of NATS (that is responsible for the management of en route air traffic) based on the information supplied at the time of this application. This letter does not provide any indication of the position of any other party, whether they be an airport, airspace user or otherwise. It remains the LPA's responsibility to ensure that all the appropriate consultees are properly consulted.

If any changes are proposed to the information supplied to NATS in regard to this application which become the basis of a revised, amended or further application for approval, then as a statutory consultee NERL requires that it be further consulted on any such changes prior to any planning permission or any consent being granted.

Natural England

Natural England is not able to provide specific advice on this application and therefore has no comment to make on its details. Although we have not been able to assess the potential impacts of this proposal on statutory nature conservation sites or protected landscapes, we offer the further advice and references to Standing Advice.

Natural England advises Local Planning Authorities to use the following tools to assess the impacts of the proposal on the natural environment: Impact Risk Zones: Natural England has provided Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) with Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) which can be used to determine whether the proposal impacts statutory nature conservation sites. Natural England recommends that the LPA uses these IRZs to assess potential impacts. If proposals do not trigger an Impact Risk Zone then Natural England will provide an auto-response email. Standing Advice: Natural England has published Standing Advice. Links to standing advice are in Annex A

Conservation Officer

The two sites are located on the north eastern side of Brockhill Lane, close to the modern HMP Hewell complex which is located to the south of Site 1 and to the west of site 2.

Within close proximity to the sites, and in particular site 2, are a number of designated heritage assets including Hewell Grange (Grade I), Hewell Park and Garden (Registered GII*), Hewell CA and Ivy Cottage and Rose Cottage (Non Designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs))

Hewell Grange

The present Hewell Grange dates from the late 19th century and was built to the designs of Thomas Garner of the well known firm of Bodley and Garner. It replaced a late 18th century house which was located to the southeast adjacent to the lake. The ruins still exist and are separately listed Grade II. This house had views across the lake to the northeast and southeast, parkland to the northwest and ancillary buildings to the south west. Views beyond the park to the north east, east and south east were obscured by a belt of trees along these boundaries. The parkland was essentially inward looking, there were no borrowed views.

The new mansion faced northwest with views to the south east over the extensive French Garden. The house was constructed in Runcorn sandstone in a Tudorbethan style, with a high-quality interior, with equally high quality materials and craftsmanship. Despite being in institutional use since 1945 it has survived remarkably. Access to the Mansion is from Hewell Lane and not Brockhill Lane.

The significance of the Mansion is largely derived from its architectural interest, as well as its historical interest as part of a large country estate in the ownership of the same family since its acquisition following the dissolution of the monasteries. The Registered Park and the listed structures it contains, form the immediate setting of the house, while the surrounding rural landscape forms the wider setting. Historically much of this surrounding land was owned by the family and occupied by tenant farmers including the two sites. The immediate setting comprising the designed landscape clearly contributes to the significance of the house, forming the environment in which it the house is viewed and experienced. The wider setting although not visible from the house, also contributes to the significance as the Mansion forming part of the wider estate and the wider environment in which the estate is experienced. There are however views of cupola of the house from the stretch of Brockhill Lane close to Site 2. There is a strong economic link as the much of the surrounding agricultural land including the two sites, was owned by the family until the mid-20th century and illustrates how country estates functioned up until the early 20th century. The setting therefore makes a minor contribution to the significance of the Mansion.

The Registered Park

The land now comprising the Registered Park was developed from the mid-18th centuries, initially, it is thought, with advice from William Shenstone but then with the involvement of Capability Brown, who was responsible for amongst other things remodelling the lake. Humphry Repton produced a Red Book for the Park in 1812, which recommended various improvements to the house and parkland. Subsequent works included the addition of the portico to the Old Mansion, the construction of the Repton Island in the lake and various changes to the tree planting. The 19th century saw further changes with the walled garden being moved to its current location to the east of the Park, and the planting of the French Garden which is immediately to the rear of the new mansion, constructed in the 1880s, as well as the construction of the grass terraces which rise up to the edge of the estate with a water tower at the top. In addition, there is

the Quarry Garden to the north east of the mansion, and an area of ornamental woodland . Further parkland lies beyond including the Planted Hill. To the east of the lake is a screen of trees with grass land beyond, rising to Brockhill Lane where there is a permeable tree boundary. The Park as envisaged is primarily inward looking, the work of Brown and Repton encloses the Park, it was not designed with external viewpoints.

A modern prison sits within the northeast corner of the Park, although this falls outside the Registered Park. Beyond the parkland the wider setting includes agricultural land and some sparse residential development. The Estate Village, including the Home Farm is located to the southeast, with a small development of prison officer housing to the east. Development comprising the edge of Redditch is some distance away to the south/southeast and there is no intervisibility.

The significance of the Registered Park is derived from it being a designed landscape with contributions by the nationally important garden designers, Brown and Repton. Like many designed landscapes the nature of the Park evolved and changed over the years, especially when the principal residence was relocated, and considered 19th century additions were made, however the work of Brown and Repton remains legible. The wider setting of the Park comprises the agricultural land, including the Sites, which surround it and the estate village to the west/southwest. The Sites, as noted above were part of the original agricultural land to the estate and therefore provide an understanding of the workings of a 19th century estate. This wider setting provides context to the Park and therefore makes a minor contribution to the significance of the Registered Park.

The Hewell Grange CA

The CA largely follows the boundary of the Registered Park, but extends further to the west, up to the A448, and including the agricultural land between this road and the B4096. It also includes The Park, the modern prison officer housing. The Conservation Area Appraisal describes the special interest of the CA as follows, 'The Hewell Grange Conservation Area is significant because of the high number of listed and unlisted historic buildings, and the connection between the wider landscape and the built environment. As a historic entity the interrelationship between the setting of the listed buildings and the registered historic park is a key element of the special interest of this Conservation Area. Some fragmentation has occurred as the original estate has been sold in parcels to individual owners; however this has been largely mitigated by the passing of the bulk of the park into Crown ownership.'

Key views within the CA are identified in the Appraisal and does not include views from the Sites.

The significance of the CA is derived from its architectural and historic interest. It comprises a collection of buildings and garden structures, many individually listed which are all of architectural merit, located in a designed landscape. There are examples of work by notable architects and garden designers. The historic interest is derived from it being a country estate held by the same family from the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. As with the Registered Park, the wider setting includes the sites and the surrounding agricultural land, most of which was part of the wider original land holding to the Estate and therefore provide an understanding of the workings of a 19th century estate. This wider setting provides context to the Estate and CA and therefore makes a minor contribution to the significance of the CA.

Ivy Cottage and Rose Cottage (Non Designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs))

Ivy Cottage and Rose Cottage comprise a pair of late 19th century agricultural workers cottage, clearly visible on the First Edition of the OS (Surveyed 1883), and part of the wider Hewell Estate. Constructed in brick beneath steeply pitched clay tile roofs, with high brick chimneys and hood mould details to the windows. Rose cottage to the right has been clearly extended, albeit sympathetically and the original windows to both cottages have been replaced.

The significance of the cottages primarily relates to their historical interest and their relationship with the Hewell Estate. Architecturally they are modest cottages, but they are not without interest, with the high chimneys and window details giving them some interest and presence. The surrounding agricultural land including notably Site 2 immediately to the west/northwest, forms the setting to the cottages, and contributes to our understanding of their history and origins as well as the link to the wider Hewell Estate.

Worcestershire Archive and Archaeological Service

The Desk Based Assessment submitted with application sets out the known archaeological landscape and suggests that the archaeological potential of the site is likely to be limited to post-medieval agricultural remains of low importance but that earlier or more important remains cannot be ruled out.

Geophysical survey identified numerous anomalies, mostly due to medieval and post medieval agricultural activity and extraction. Two clusters of magnetically enhanced responses in F4 were interpreted as likely the remains of a WWII searchlight battery (recorded on the HER ref. WSM15927, please note, any remains associated with this feature would be classed as archaeology, despite its modern date).

The Geophysical Survey also notes that the archaeological potential of the proposed development area is low (although as noted in Results and Discussion, the results of magnetometer survey can be variable on mudstone).

The land use of the proposed development area has clearly been agricultural since at least the medieval period. I would agree with the DBA that any finds of prehistoric date would most likely be artefactual in nature, however, there remains the possibility of discrete features (i.e. post holes/burials) less likely to be identified through magnetometer.

It is recommended that a % of trial trenching pre determination to further assess the potential presence, extent and character of potential archaeological remains as this would help to inform a planning decision and mitigate potential impacts, including through potential re-design should archaeology of significance be revealed.

Should the application be determined and the proposal approved, a programme of archaeological works, should be secured and implemented by a suitably worded condition attached to any grant of planning permission. This would take the form of evaluation by trial trench initially. This could be followed by further mitigation should the results of the evaluation find evidence to justify further stages.

'Local planning authorities should require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible. However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted'. (NPPF Section 16, paragraph 218).

In order to comply with policy, we recommend that a programme of archaeological works should be secured and implemented by means of a suitably worded condition attached to any grant of planning permission. This should comprise the following.

1) No development shall take place until a programme of archaeological work including a Written Scheme of Investigation, has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. The scheme shall include an assessment of significance and research questions; and:

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

2) The development shall not be occupied until the site investigation and post investigation assessment has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation approved under condition (1) and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition has been secured.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 218 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Please Note: A fee will be charged to the applicant for the provision of a Brief (an outline scope of works) for the archaeological work required and for the checking of any responding Written Scheme of Investigation (contractors detailed method statement) and archaeological reports required to facilitate discharge of the recommended conditions.

Should planning consent be given, then the applicant or their successor in title must contact the Planning Advisory Section of the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service to arrange provision of the brief prior to the commencement of works. It will be the applicant's (or their successor in title) responsibility to contract an appropriate archaeological organisation to undertake the programme of works as detailed in the brief. The Planning Advisory Section of the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service will offer advice on all stages of the proceedings.

It should be noted that;

'Geophysics results on Mercian mudstone can be variable.

' Investigation post determination can increase risk to the developer as, should significant archaeology be revealed during trial trenching, further archaeological investigation (i.e. targeted excavation) may be required.

' The potential use of ballast solution (ground mounted solar panels), in archaeologically sensitive areas, can be further discussed following the results of trial trenching, although there would need to be reassurances that archaeological features and deposits would not be impacted by other aspects of the development, throughout the commissioning, operational and decommissioning phases, including ancillary buildings, cable routes, access tracks, removal of panels, movement of soils etc.

' Ongoing communication and consultation with the archaeological service, throughout the course of the development, is recommended and should be built into the condition wording and/or WSI as this will allow for agreed adjustments to the scope or methods.

' The planning advisor should discuss potential changes to the standard condition wording prior to decision.

North Worcestershire Water Management

The proposed development site is situated in the catchment of Batchley Brook and Hewell Stream. The site falls within flood zone 1 and it is not considered that there is any significant fluvial flood risk to the site. The EA's flood mapping also indicates that there are areas of risk to parts of the site from surface water flooding based on the EA's flood mapping risk, these are typically associated with existing small watercourses, ditch lines and exceedance routes from ponds.

The submitted flood risk assessment (FRA) includes details of negligible increases of surface water runoff from solar farms compared to greenfield rates which is understood. Also, the existing site area mostly looks arable in nature, if this is replaced with low intensity managed grassland, it has the potential to change sub and surface conditions that will be more favourable for regular rainfall events. It is also proposed that access tracks will be constructed from permeable materials. There are some impermeable structures, but considerations have been made for this. Based on this we find the FRA acceptable.

Additionally, I have also reviewed the submitted Soil Management Plan. This identifies that most soils within the survey area are moderately to highly susceptible to compaction due to their clay content and have medium to low resilience to structural damage. But if the recommended mitigations are followed, we find this acceptable.

Based on the available information there is no reason to withhold approval of this application on flood risk grounds and I do not deem it necessary to recommend attaching a drainage condition.

Severn Trent Water Ltd

Comments awaited.

WRS - Noise

Operational Noise: The submitted noise impact assessment RSK 2061792-RSKA-RP-001-(02) Dated 16.12.2024) appears satisfactory. The assessment predicts that noise from the proposed development should not adversely impact the nearest sensitive receptors. Therefore, I have no objection to the application in terms of noise. When the

site layout and the equipment to be installed has been finalised, the applicant should submit a revised noise assessment / technical note for approval.

Construction Phase Noise: The applicant should submit a construction method statement detailing the proposed installation method(s) for the PV mounting frames for further comment and approval.

WRS - Air Quality Consulted 26.03.2025

No objection.

Worcestershire County Council Countryside Service

The path of interest appears to be a historic extension of the Canal Tow Path which, otherwise, doesn't continue through the Shortwood Tunnel. To that end it may be of interest to the Canal & Rivers Trust and seems to have been in place since at least the 1880s (see attached map for info). Thus, it is an important, if informal link, in the Canal Network and is of clear historic interest. If it is not a formal part of the Tow Path then it would have almost certainly accrued Public Rights over the last 150 years or so. However, for these rights to be recognised/recorded, someone would need to make a Definitive Map Modification Application.

At present, it is not a formal Public Right of Way as recorded by the Definitive Map and Statement for Worcestershire. This is why we offered no comment as formal PRow are unaffected by the Solar Farm Proposal.

The route appears to be outside the red planning boundary and certainly outside the security fencing. However, it still seems to be within the land ownership of the applicant (the blue boundary). Thus, we would support the Ramblers approach appealing to the developer's better nature to guarantee the maintenance of this historic link and even enhance it but at least leave it unobstructed.

Ramblers Association

The proposed location of the solar farm lies very close to a footpath on the WCC Public Rights of Way map which is designated as "Path u/m". This appears to lie just outside the proposed site boundary and the security fencing for the solar farm.

This path forms the only route allowing walkers to follow the towpath walk along the Worcs-Birmingham canal as there is no towpath though Shortwood Tunnel. Given the popularity of the canal walking route locally, it is therefore very important that this path is recognised and maintained as part of the application.

The route of the path from one portal of the tunnel to the other is not obvious at present and could be made even less obvious should the development occur. We would therefore suggest that as part of the application, the developers be asked to install/enhance signage to indicate the route which walkers should follow. This would benefit walkers and the site owners in clarifying the route.

It may be worth pointing out that the path discussed above has been in existence for many years - in fact I believe that the line is shown on the 1883/4 OS map of the locality.

Canal And River Trust

The Canal and River Trust does not object in principle to the proposed solar farm, but raises significant safeguarding concerns in relation to Shortwood Tunnel, which passes beneath the site. The Trust advises that further ground investigation is required before it can be confirmed whether solar panels and associated infrastructure can safely be installed above or close to the tunnel.

The Trust recommends a pre-commencement condition requiring an agreed programme of ground investigations, assessment of land stability and tunnel integrity, identification of any necessary mitigation, and the establishment of an appropriate easement or standoff zone. The outcome of this work may require amendments to the final layout, including the removal of panels or infrastructure from areas above or near the tunnel.

The Trust also seeks controls to ensure the tunnel is protected during both construction and operational phases. Existing emergency and maintenance access routes to the tunnel must be retained or replaced with suitable alternatives. If panels are permitted above the tunnel, they should be capable of being readily removed to allow future inspection, maintenance or emergency works.

Drainage and groundwater impacts should be assessed as part of the ground investigation process. The Trust is concerned to avoid changes to groundwater levels or drainage patterns that could affect the tunnel structure or surrounding land stability, and any necessary mitigation should be secured.

Ecological considerations also remain relevant, as the tunnel is used by bats. Development should avoid disturbance to bat use of the tunnel, and biodiversity management beneath the panels should support the canal corridor.

Following additional landscape and visual assessment work and further planting proposals, the Trust considers the visual impact on canal users to be acceptable. However, it also requests that the existing above-ground route associated with the canal and tunnel crossing remains available and protected.

The Trust further recommends that construction traffic should not use Bridge 57 on Brockhill Lane, which is subject to a 7-tonne weight restriction. Although the submitted traffic plan indicates that the bridge would be avoided, the Trust requests that this is secured by planning condition.

Thomson Environmental Consultants

A technical review of the ecological information submitted as part of the planning application has been undertaken to ensure that all ecological aspects have been appropriately considered prior to determination.

The LPA has a duty to conserve biodiversity in line with the planning and legislative context. We have reviewed the relevant application documents and assessed these against published best practice guidance to determine whether the submitted information is sufficient for the LPA to assess the planning application. We have also assessed the proposals against relevant legislation and planning policy and recommended an appropriate course of action to ensure the LPA is fulfilling its duty to conserve biodiversity.

Thomson previously reviewed the following documents on behalf of the LPA:

- o Ecological Impact Assessment, ref. 1129726/ Version 2.0 (RSK ADAS Ltd, 2024);
- o Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, ref.1129708/Version 2.0 (ADAS Landscape, 2024).
- o Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, ref. 1129737/Version 1.0 (RSK ADAS, 2024).

Following a review of the above documents (review ref. Thomson RED002-023-001), Thomson Principal Ecologist, Alex Blundell, acting on behalf of the LPA, met with representatives of the applicant REPD and their ecologist Enzygo Environmental Consultants on 5th November 2025 to discuss ecological issues relating to the application. A further 'Ecology Response' was subsequently submitted by Enzygo Environmental Consultants.

The following further information was reviewed by Thomspson Environmental Consultants:

- Follow-up Bat Static surveys of Hedge 4 for foraging and commuting bat activity
The works are to include full tree protection measures, no lighting will be used either during the construction or operational phase.
- Dormouse presence/absence surveys of hedgerows on site
it would be proportionate to carry out these works under precautionary working methods for dormouse, detailed within the CEMP, The CEMP should include the following text or similar:

'Works to reduce the height of H4 and hedgerow removal will be carried out overwinter, as the hedge does not provide suitable hibernation habitat for dormice, dormice are considered to be likely absent over winter and therefore works timed during this period will not affect dormice'.

- Details are required as to how impacts on Shortwood Rough Ground LWS and Worcester and Birmingham Canal LWS will be avoided

It is also noted that the proposals involve 'retaining the vast majority of boundary vegetation including all adjacent woodland parcels, and implementation of proposed tree protection measures as detailed in the Arboricultural Planning Statement (ADAS, 2024f)', It is considered that, so long as these measures, and the inclusion of appropriately worded guidance/control measures for pollution/dust avoidance are included within the CEMP, then no further mitigation to prevent impacts to the LWS would be required.

- Update Desk Study through Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) and using the Magic Map Site.

There are no findings from this updated desk-based review which significantly alter the assessment which is presented within the submitted EcIA (ADAS, 2024a) (e.g. no new designated sites or additional protected species records)', this effort is considered more than adequate as a response to the questions asked

- Update Wintering Bird Surveys, due to significant limitations with the initial surveys.
Following the additional assessment by the applicants appointed Ecologist, it is accepted that the birds onsite would likely be habituated to the background noise of shooting, and therefore the surveys are likely to give a true representation of the bird assemblage and

activity on site. The comments surrounding the proportionality and justification for wintering bird surveys are also noted.

There does not appear to be any 'functionally-linked' land associated with the nearby SSSI, and as such the assemblage within the SSSI are unlikely to be associated with this site. Given the above, it does not seem proportionate to request further wintering bird surveys.

- The Councils appointed Ecologist requested a Skylark Mitigation and Compensation Plan to be provided as well as consultation between applicant, landowners and LPA required to agree suitable off-site location for 'compensation zones' prior to determination. A 'Skylark Mitigation and Compensation Plan' should be conditioned, to ensure that this plan becomes a condition of the proposal going forwards.

The issues previously raised in relation to the BNG Metric have been addressed.

WRS - Contaminated Land

WRS has reviewed available documents and records in respect of potential contaminated land (PCL) issues at the above application site. Due to the layout now covering an area of potential unknown infill, WRS recommend the following condition wording is applied to the application, should any permission be granted to the development, to ensure PCL issues on site are appropriately addressed.

In the event that contamination is found at any time when carrying out the approved development that was not previously identified it must be reported immediately to the Local Planning Authority. The applicant is advised to immediately seek the advice of an independent geo-environmental consultant experienced in contaminated land risk assessment, including intrusive investigations and remediation.

No further works should be undertaken in the areas of suspected contamination, other than that work required to be carried out as part of an approved remediation scheme, unless otherwise agreed by the Local Planning Authority, until requirements 1 to 4 below have been complied with:

1. Detailed site investigation and risk assessment must be undertaken by competent persons in accordance with the Environment Agency's 'Land Contamination: Risk Management' guidance and a written report of the findings produced. The risk assessment must be designed to assess the nature and extent of suspected contamination and approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to any further development taking place.
2. Where identified as necessary, a detailed remediation scheme to bring the site to a condition suitable for the intended use by removing unacceptable risks to identified receptors must be prepared and is subject to the approval of the Local Planning Authority in advance of undertaking. The remediation scheme must ensure that the site will not qualify as Contaminated Land under Part 2A Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the intended use of the land after remediation.
3. The approved remediation scheme must be carried out in accordance with its terms prior to the re-commencement of any site works in the areas of suspected contamination, other than that work required to carry out remediation, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

4. Following completion of measures identified in the approved remediation scheme a verification report that demonstrates the effectiveness of the remediation carried out must be produced and is subject to the approval of the Local Planning Authority prior to the occupation of any buildings on site.

Reason: To ensure that the risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property, and ecosystems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors.

Hereford & Worcester Fire And Rescue

If this proposed new project will be subject to Building Regulations approval, then the Fire Service will be consulted by either Local Authority or Approved Inspector Building Control bodies accordingly, for their comments on Building Regulations requirements and any matters that may need to be addressed, under the Fire Safety Order (2005), once the site becomes 'occupied'.

Hereford & Worcester Fire Rescue Service (HWFRS) recommends that consideration of access for fire appliances to all parts of the Solar Farm and the sufficiency and availability of water provision should be considered at an early stage.

* Where appropriate Fire Service Vehicle access must generally comply with the requirements of ADB 2019 Vol. 2 B5 - section 15 & Table 15.1.

* Access roads should be in accordance with ADB 2019 Vol. 2 Table 15.2 with regards access widths and carrying capacity.

* Water for firefighting purposes may be provided in accordance with ADB 2019 Vol. 2 B5, section 16 or National guidance document on the provision of water for fire - fighting' or BS 9991.

* Water may be provided from Fire Mains or Static Water supplies.

A means by which the Solar Panels can be isolated should be provided.

I have also attached FPA guidance Recommendations for fire safety with PV panel installations - which gives further advice on Provisions for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Worcestershire Highways

The applicant has sought to address the concerns raised in the Highway Authority's response dated the 19th February 2026. These concerns related to access arrangements and Construction Traffic Management and mitigation. As part of this work a discussion was held with the Highway Authority in which the concerns were discussed and enabled the applicant to submit revised drawings to demonstrate the access arrangements and passing places for the site during its construction and operation, under the following drawing references; - - -

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-006 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures - Sheet 1 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-007 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -

Sheet 2 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-008 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -

Sheet 3 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-009 - P02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -

Sheet 4 of 4

The Highway Authority has fully reviewed and considered these drawings and based on its assessment revises its response to one of no objection subject to the following conditions being included within the permission should the Local Planning Authority be minded to approve the planning application.

- *Provision of a Road Safety Audit Stage 1*

No construction, remediation, groundworks or built construction will take place until a brief for the Road Safety Audit Stage 1 and subsequent Road Safety Audit Stage 1 have been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- *Conformity with Submitted Details*

The Development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until the access and passing places have been provided as shown on drawings. - - -

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-006 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -
Sheet 1 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-007 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -
Sheet 2 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-008 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -
Sheet 3 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-009 - P02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -
Sheet 4 of 4

Reason: To ensure conformity with submitted details.

Construction Environmental Management Plan

The Development hereby approved shall not commence until a Construction Environmental Management Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include but not be limited to the following:

- Measures to ensure that vehicles leaving the site do not deposit mud or other detritus on the public highway;
- Details of site operative parking areas, material storage areas and the location of site operatives facilities (offices, toilets etc);
- The hours that delivery vehicles will be permitted to arrive and depart, and arrangements for unloading and manoeuvring.
- Details of any temporary construction accesses and their reinstatement.

The measures set out in the approved Plan shall be carried out and complied with in full during the construction of the development hereby approved. Site operatives' parking, material storage and the positioning of operatives' facilities shall only take place on the site in locations approved by in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure the provision of adequate on-site facilities and in the interests of highway safety.

National Highways Consulted 01.01.2026

National Highways recommended a condition for a Construction Traffic Management Plan on 17th April 2025. Following a review of the new information our position remains and our comments are detailed below.

Construction Traffic

The development does not share a boundary with the SRN. However, the Construction Traffic Management Plan mentions the use of strategic routes. Therefore, National Highways would expect to see a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) that covers the use of the SRN. With respect of a CTMP however, National Highways is content that the above can be undertaken post-planning consent ensured through a suitably worded planning condition.

Arboricultural Officer Consulted 01.01.2026

The application is supported by an ADAS Arboricultural Planning Statement (APS) dated November 2024, hedge and tree reference numbers given in the following comments are taken from this report.

I agree with the data, comments and measures within the APS, the proposal will have no major impact on any of the tree stock around the perimeter of either site

It is highlighted within the APS that a 15m section of H29 and a 4m section of H32 will need to be removed to create the safe access points off Brockhill Lane. These hedges have been categorised as (C) grade quality with which I agree. The loss of these sections of hedge can also be offset by the creation of hedges where existing fields are to be subdivided.

The proposed cable route to link to the main network infrastructure as shown indicatively on drawing number 2106-1 runs closely adjacent to two woodland block and some individual trees in existing hedge lines. There is no detailed information of the cable route within the Arboricultural Planning Statement currently provide therefore no tree protection measures proposed to cover any influence the installation of the cable may have on any trees local to the proposed route. I therefore request that an arboriculture assessment of the route of the cable is carried out to confirm that either the cable route is outside of the BS5837:2012 recommended Root Protection Area of any local trees or what mitigation measures to achieve the installation of the cable are to be adopted if this is not possible.

There are *Malus Cultivar* (Apple) shown in the listing of trees would be an inappropriate species choice in view of the nature of the site and purpose the trees are being planted as they will be on a size limiting rootstock

Also, there is *Betula Pendula* and *Pinus Sylvestrius* listed which although good native species do not have major crown volume or density therefore would not be expected to offer a high degree of glare diffusion.

Therefore, I would suggest that the *Malus*/Apple cultivars, *Betula Pendula* and *Pinus Sylvestris* are changed for alternative species trees.

Public Consultation

Publicity

Site Notice posted 07.05.2025 (expired 31.05.2025)

Press Notice posted 04.04.2025 (expired 21.04.2025)

5 comments objection objecting to the proposal. These are summarised as follows:

Visual Impact/Landscape Character

- o The proposal is considered visually intrusive in a rural, green belt setting, the panels would industrialise open countryside and harm the character of the area.
- o Concerns are raised about panels being placed close to residential boundaries and visible from nearby homes

Green belt

- o Unacceptable use of green belt/rural land for a solar farm. the proposal conflicts with the preservation of openness and local character.
- o The site is described as attractive open countryside that should be protected from large-scale development.
- o Solar panels should be installed on warehouses, industrial buildings, supermarkets, car parks, new housing or other less sensitive sites

Ecology, wildlife and biodiversity

- o The site is important for existing wildlife including deer, badgers, hares, rabbits, wild birds and bats
- o Concerns include habitat loss, fragmentation, displacement of wildlife and reduced biodiversity.
- o Fencing would restrict wildlife movement, particularly deer.
Impact on nearby woodland
- o There is a healthy bat population in the area.
- o Objectors argue ground-mounted solar panels may disrupt bat foraging, commuting routes and echolocation.
- o The protected status of bats is cited as a reason for caution.

Construction Disturbance

- o Concerns raised in relation to noise, dust, mess and general disruption during construction
- o Construction could significantly affect residential amenity of nearby residents
- o Construction hours and site operations should be controlled if permission is granted.

Highway Matters

- o Brockhill Lane and the existing private tracks are unsuitable for heavy construction vehicles
- o There would be issues in relation to congestion, road safety, damage to tracks and lack of passing places.
- o It needs to be ensured that Shortwood Drive and private access tracks will not be used for construction or maintenance.

Residential Amenity

- o The panels are proposed too close to homes and gardens, including Rose Cottage, Ivy Cottage, Little Shortwood Farm and Shortwood House and Stables.
- o There would be loss of outlook, noise, glare and general disturbance.
- o Panels be moved further away from residential properties.

Noise

- o Impact of possible humming from the panels or associated equipment.
- o Additional planting should be provided to help screen views and muffle noise.

Glare and reflection

- o Reflective panels could cause glare, discomfort or potential safety issues depending on orientation.

Other matters

- o Impact on local water supply reliability
- o Concerns are also raised about a water pipe crossing the application site and future access to it if fenced within the development
- o Property values and saleability
- o Several residents believe the solar farm would reduce property values and affect saleability
- o Concerns in relation to panel sourcing, particularly from China, and the environmental/ethical implications of production
- o Objectors also raise concerns about panel lifespan, decommissioning waste and whether the development is truly environmentally beneficial
- o It is queried whether the suggested mitigation/landscaping measures would be appropriate
- o Additional native tree and shrub planting required to screen Ivy Cottage, Rose Cottage and nearby properties.
- o Extend landscaping past property entrances and along the tracks.
- o Move panels further from homes.
- o Restrict construction access to agreed entrances from Brockhill Lane only.

Relevant Policies

Bromsgrove District Plan

BDP1 Sustainable Development Principles

BDP4 Green Belt

BDP15 Rural Renaissance

BDP20 Managing the Historic Environment

BDP21 Natural Environment

BDP22 Climate Change

BDP23 Water Management

BDP24 Green Infrastructure

Others

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Relevant Planning History

22/00840/PREAPP The erection of a 35 MWp Solar PV development and associated infrastructure – Pre Application Advice

Assessment of Proposal

Site Description

The site comprises two land parcels located to the north of Brockhill Lane, Tardebigge, 1.2 km northwest of Redditch and 3.6 km east of Bromsgrove. The area extends to 35.85 hectares and consists of: Parcel A (15.66 ha) to the south and Parcel B (20.19 ha) to the north. The parcels would be developed together as a single solar energy scheme and the two parcels are owned by separate landowners.

Parcels A and B are separated by a field in between which is currently used as a shooting range. HMP Hewell prison and surrounding peripheral woodland is located to the south of the site on the opposite side of Brockhill Lane. Shortwood Rough woodland adjoins the north of Parcel A and west of Parcel B. The Worcester and Birmingham Canal runs through the nearby Shortwood Tunnel to the north, emerging to the north-west of the site.

The surrounding landscape is gently undulating and predominantly agricultural. An overhead power line crosses Field Parcel B from west to southeast, then turns north.

There are no Public Rights of Way within or immediately adjacent to the site. PRoW TC-523, lies approximately 290m east of Parcel A. The site contains no landscape or ecological designations. Nearby ecological designations include Hewell Park Lake SSSI (350m south-west), Foxydiate Wood LNR (1.7km south-east), Picheroak Wood LNR (2.4km south-east), and Dagnell End Meadow SSSI (3.5km east). Hewell Grange Registered Park and Garden and Conservation Area is located immediately south (on the opposite side of the road) from Parcel A.

There are no heritage assets within the site itself, although several designated heritage assets are located nearby, including the Hewell Grange Conservation Area immediately to the south and the Grade I listed Hewell Grange approximately 750m south-west of the site. The site is located within Flood Zone 1, with a low risk of flooding (less than 0.1% annual probability). The site lies within the Green Belt.

Access

Parcel B would be accessed via an existing farm entrance on Brockhill Lane, while Parcel A would be connected to Brockhill Lane through a new access link. There are connections to the wider road network via the A448 and A441, which provide access to the M42 and M5.

Proposal Description

The site comprises an area of 35.85 ha which would generate approximately 25 MW per annum (which is the equivalent to approximately 12,500 households). The proposal would also include the following infrastructure: Transformers, CCTV cameras, Store rooms, Transformer Station, DNO Substation, Security fencing, access gates internal gravelled access tracks. The solar panels will be in a fixed position and would comprise high transparency solar glass with an anti-reflective coating.

A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) area is proposed west of Field Parcel B, outside the Red Line Boundary, but within the ownership of the applicant. Temporary construction compounds and graveled internal access tracks are proposed across both parcels. The site would be secured with perimeter fencing and multiple CCTV cameras. The field parcels would each contain two 6400 kVA transformer stations. Field Parcel A would also include a DNO substation, customer substation, and on-site store room.

The proposed panels will vary in height between 0.8m and 2.4m with an angle of tilt of 20 degrees. The linear solar arrays would have a separation of distance of 3.5m. There would be deer style security fencing provided around the perimeter of both parcels of land at a height of 2m and entrance gates into both parcels of a similar height. During the construction phase, a temporary construction compound would be provided in each land parcel and would comprise a site office, welfare facilities, storage of materials and equipment, wheel washing, parking, and turning spaces for vehicles.

There would be an on-site sub-station compound covering an area approximately 40m x 52.5m which will contain 66- kilovolt transformer, insulators, disconnectors, switches, and circuit breakers. The highest structure within the compound is likely to be no more than 6.5m in height. The compound would be enclosed by a 2.4m palisade security fence. A small single storey building housing the DNO main control system, welfare unit with WC. The DNO substation will be the property of the DNO, who will maintain it as part of their network. The proposed grid connection will be via an underground cable with a looped connection to the 66kV Upton Warren - Redditch North circuit.

The proposal would have an operational lifespan of 40 years. At this point, the facility will be decommissioned, and all the associated equipment removed and the land returned to agricultural use.

In respect of landscape mitigation, the proposed development will include the planting of 'permanent' pasture (more than 5 years), including species rich grassland (3.8 ha), wildflower meadow (0.6 ha) and grazing meadow (31.3 ha). At least 59 new trees, and 1.6 km of new hedgerow will be planted and retained following decommissioning. In respect of BNG, there would be 1.1ha of other neutral grassland and 0.3km of native hedgerow would be provided.

The proposal was revised in response to comments received from the Statutory Consultees and changes made to the site layout. A 66 kV substation was added and the temporary construction compound area was amended to address highway comments. A revised Illustrative Landscape Masterplan was provided which showed the provision of new hedgerow planting to address any Glint and Glare impacts on residential properties. The Landscape and Visual Appraisal, Flood Risk Assessment, BNG Metric, Noise

Assessment, Glint and Glare Study were updated. The matters raised by Ecology, Highways and the Canal and River Trust were also addressed. This assessment is on the basis of the slightly revised version of the proposal.

The application is accompanied by a:

- o Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVIA)
- o Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)
- o Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA)
- o Biodiversity Net Gain Report (BNG)
- o Arboricultural Planning Statement
- o Highway Statement
- o Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP)
- o Flood Risk Assessment (FRA)
- o Heritage Statement
- o Archaeology Desk Based Assessment (DBA)
- o Geophysical Survey
- o Agricultural Land Classification Survey (ALC)
- o Soil Resource Management Plan (SEMP)
- o Glint and Glare Study
- o Site Selection Report
- o Very Special Circumstances Report (VSC)
- o Noise Impact Assessment
- o Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

Members are encouraged to read these documents in full.

Under the provisions of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, all planning applications must be determined in accordance with the adopted Development Plan (the Bromsgrove District Plan, adopted 2017) unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, the 'Framework') was revised

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The proposal has been the subject of a Screening Request under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, Part 2 Regulation 6. In a letter dated 06th Sept 2023, the Council considered that the proposed development does not amount to an EIA development under Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 and the indicative criteria in the National Planning Practice Guidance and that an Environmental Statement would not be required.

Policy Framework

The site is located in the Green Belt and policy BDP4 of the Bromsgrove District Plan (BDP) 2017 and policy GB6: (Control of development in the Green Belt) of the National Planning Policy Framework 2026 (the Framework) sets out the types of development which are appropriate in the Green Belt. Policy BDP15 of the BDP states that small scale renewable energy projects, excluding wind energy developments, would be supported and, within the Green Belt, inappropriate development, which is otherwise acceptable, within the terms of this policy will still need to be justified by very special circumstances.

Policy BDP22 supports zero or low carbon energy generation schemes when adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily.

In respect of the Framework, policies S3 to S5 establish a presumption in favour of sustainable development whilst policy W3 advises that 'when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, Local Planning Authorities *substantial* weight should be given to:

- 1.a. The benefits for improving energy security, supporting economic development and/or the transition to a net zero future;
 - b. In the case of applications for the re-powering and life-extension of existing sites, the additional benefit of utilising an established site for this purpose; and
 - c. The contribution that small-scale and community-led renewable and low carbon energy projects can make to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, along with their associated economic and social benefits.
2. Applicants should not be required to demonstrate the need for renewable or low carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure. Where proposals for this form of development come forward outside areas which have been identified as suitable for them in the development plan, their acceptability should be assessed against the national decision-making policies in this Framework, taken as a whole.
 3. Where development is expected to be time-limited, applications should be accompanied by proposals for decommissioning and site restoration, including details of how these measures are expected to be implemented.

It is noted that the wording has changed when compared with the previous version of the Framework (December 2024), with the weight given to these benefits having increased from significant in the previous version to substantial weight in the current NPPF.

It is noted that policy S5: Principle of development outside settlements in the revised Framework includes Development for: agriculture, horticulture and forestry; outdoor sport and recreation; allotments; cemeteries and burial grounds; mineral extraction and processing; engineering operations and infrastructure (including for transport, energy, water and telecommunications); roadside facilities in accordance with policy TR5; national defence and security; or which is solely for nature conservation, restoration and/or enhancement.

The National Planning Practice Guidance in relation to renewable and low carbon energy (updated August 2023) provides a useful framework in relation to the development of large scale ground mounted solar farms.

The NPPG states that the deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.

Local Planning Authorities should consider the following matters:

- o 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;
- o 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.
- o 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;
- o the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare (see guidance on landscape assessment) and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;
- o the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;
- o the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;
- o 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;

Green Belt

The site is located in the Green Belt. It has been established through case law that the list of exceptions for 'appropriate development' set out in policy BDP4 and the policy GB7 of the Framework amounts to a closed list. Thereby, proposals not included on the list are regarded as 'inappropriate development'.

Policy GB2 of the NPPF sets out that the Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas (LBUA's)
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Policy GB6 of the Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Such circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness or any other harm resulting from the proposal, is

clearly outweighed by other considerations. In making this assessment, substantial weight should be given to the harm to the Green Belt which would be caused, including harm to its openness.

Policy GB6 of the Framework also sets out that in the case of proposals for renewable energy installations and low carbon energy development in Green Belt, very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

Policy GB7 (g) of the Framework states that the following categories of development are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, and therefore should not be regarded as harmful to the Green Belt or be required to demonstrate very special circumstances:

Development where all of the following apply:

- i. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;
- ii. There is an evidenced unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- iii. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to policy TR3 of this Framework; and
- iv. In the case of major development involving the provision of housing, the development proposed complies with policy GB8.

Grey belt land has been defined in the glossary of the NPPF as land in the green belt consisting of previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in policy GB2.

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises on the contribution that assessment areas make to the purposes a, b, and d (footnote citation). For each purpose, the contribution can be considered strong, moderate or weak/none based on illustrative features. In respect of the purpose given in paragraph GB2 (a), the PPG advises that this relates to the sprawl of large built up areas. Villages should not be considered large built up areas.

Purpose (a) Prevention of the Sprawl of LBUA's

In terms of purpose (a) of paragraph GB2, this proposal does not strongly contribute to the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up areas (LBUA's) of Redditch or the Birmingham Conurbation since the proposal is not located in close proximity to either LBUA. Whilst the urban extent of Redditch has recently been extended to the north west, the proposal (parcel A) would remain at least 1km from this area and would be separated by existing topographical features, notably Butler's Hill Wood and the relatively elevated topography separating Weights Lane from the proposal. [The development type also varies from the residential development, characteristic of the LBUA). In summary, the contribution of the site is therefore considered to be weak in terms of the fulfilment of purpose (a) of paragraph 143.

Purpose (b) - Prevention of the Merging of Neighbouring Towns into one another

In terms of purpose (b), this site does not strongly contribute to preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another.

The PPG advises for purpose GB2 (b) that this relates to the merging of towns, not villages. Furthermore, the PPG advises a strong contribution to this purpose includes areas that form a substantial part of a gap between towns and the development of which would be likely to result in the loss of visual separation of towns. Given the nearest town in this case would be Bromsgrove, some 3.5km to the east of the site and given the overall size of the proposal in relation to this gap between Bromsgrove and Redditch, it would not form a substantial part of the gap. Whilst there would inevitably some loss of the openness of the landscape as a result of the proposal at this location, the site is relatively enclosed and further landscape mitigation measures would be conditioned. Therefore, the site is considered to make a weak contribution in respect of the merging of neighbouring towns.

Purpose (d) preservation of the setting and special character of historic towns

This purpose would not be relevant to the scheme.

Grey Belt summary

In accordance with the definition of Grey Belt in the Framework (i.e. land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) set out in policy GB2 (of the NPPF), that the site is considered Grey Belt land.

Policy GB7 Grey Belt Criterion (i)

Returning to policy GB7 (g)(i), although the purposes given in policy GB2 (a), (b) and (d) are not undermined, those given in parts GB2 (c) and (e) are also now relevant as a judgement must be made as to whether the proposal would fundamentally undermine the purposes, taken together, of the remaining green belt across the area of the plan.

Safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment

The third purpose of the Green Belt outlined in policy GB2 (c) is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The proposal would see a relatively large number of solar panels, structures and other elements of an industrial character erected in what are currently open agricultural fields. The scale of the development would mean that the encroachment would be significant at a local level.

Notwithstanding that, the test is whether the proposal would fundamentally undermine the purposes taken together across the remaining green belt. The proposal would cover some 38.8 hectares. There are approximately 19,000 hectares of designated green belt in Bromsgrove District. Thereby, the proposal would amount to a small loss of the Green Belt between Bromsgrove and Redditch. It is noted that the proposal would be partly contained within existing field patterns and boundary treatments and further planting mitigation is proposed. The proposal would not fundamentally undermine the purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

Assisting with urban regeneration

In respect of Green Belt purpose GB2 (e), namely, assisting urban regeneration by encouraging recycling of derelict and other urban land, the application has been accompanied by a Site Selection Report (SSR). The SSR outlines that the proposal has an agreement in place with National Grid Electricity Distribution (DNO) to connect the scheme to the 66 kV Upton Warren - Redditch North circuit, which is located approximately 2.1km to the south of the proposed development. In this context, a 3km

radius has been drawn along the circuit for the purposes of undertaking the SSR, which also considered the availability of brownfield sites. However, there were no available brownfield sites which could accommodate the 35Ha required to facilitate the proposal. All of the other 16 alternative sites have been discounted taking into account constraints including, woodland, agricultural land classification, statutory ecological designations and the proximity of heritage assets.

In the absence of an alternative brownfield site, it is not considered that there would be any conflict with purpose (e) of Policy GB2 to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. The proposal would not fundamentally undermine this purpose across the remaining green belt within the District.

In summary, it is concluded that the development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes, when taken together, of the remaining Green Belt. Criterion (i) of policy GB7 (g) is met.

Policy GB7 Grey Belt Criterion (ii) Demonstrable unmet need

This criterion requires that there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed. Detailed information in respect of the need for renewable energy is set out in detail in Section 7.5 of the submitted Planning Statement. The following information provides some overview in relation to the current position in respect of renewable energy supply and need.

National Level

There are numerous publications which highlight the need for this type of development, including the government's Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (CP30). The Government declared an environmental and climate change emergency on 1st May 2019 following the finding of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change that to avoid more than 1.5°C rise in global warming, global emissions would need to fall by around 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero by around 2050. The requirement for such infrastructure is recognised in the adopted National Policy Statements (NPS)s.

The NSPs outline that in order to meet the Government's objectives and targets for net zero by 2050, significant large and small scale energy infrastructure is required. This includes the need to 'dramatically increase the volume of energy supplied from low carbon sources' and reduce the amount provided by fossil fuels. Solar and wind are recognised specifically in the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) as being the most cost effective way of generating electricity and that by 2050, secure, reliable, affordable, net zero energy systems are 'likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar (para 3.3.20)

The Planning Practice Guidance: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (August 2023) states that planning has an important role in the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure, specifically highlighting the need to increase the amount of energy from renewable sources to slow down the negative impacts of climate change, and to ensure that the UK has a secure energy supply, as well as stimulating investment in new jobs and businesses.

Local Level

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019 and the Carbon Reduction Strategy and Action Plan was adopted in October 2022. The Council is affirming that it will place the Climate Emergency at the centre of its decision-making process. The declaration is a material consideration in planning decision making.

The Worcestershire Energy Strategy was launched in 2019 and updated in 2026 and covers the period to 2030. The County has a new target to increase installed capacity from 320MWh in 2024 to 520MW by 2030.

In summary, there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed in accordance with criterion GB7(g)(ii).

Paragraph GB7 (g) (iii) Sustainability of location

Paragraph GB7 (g) (iii) requires that the development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to policy TR3 of the Framework. Policy TR3 is concerned principally with patterns of growth, choice of transport modes, safe access and impacts on the transport network. There is little relevance to these matters in relation to the proposal. Solar farm developments are most likely to be found in rural areas, given their spatial requirements. While there would inevitably be traffic during the construction phase, during the operational phase of the solar farm this would evidently be very low in terms of vehicle movements and concerned mainly with maintenance and repair. Its location would have negligible impacts on the number of movements. No objections have been raised by Worcestershire Highways in this respect.

The proposal does not relate to the provision of housing, therefore criterion GB.7 (g) (iv) is not relevant.

Green Belt summary

The proposal is considered to comply with policy GB7 criterion (g) of the Framework and is therefore not considered to amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The courts¹ have held that in this scenario, it is not necessary to consider its impact on the openness of the green belt, nor does the proposal need to demonstrate very special circumstances. In the context of the proposal not amounting to inappropriate development, it is not considered necessary to notify the Secretary of State (National Planning Casework Unit) in relation to whether the application should be called in for determination under the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) direction 2024.

Heritage Assets

S72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that, when considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Policy BDP20 of the BDP states that the District Council will support development proposals which sustain and enhance the significance of Heritage Assets including their

¹ *Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, R (on the application of) v Epping Forest District Council* [2016].

setting. In considering applications that directly or indirectly affect Heritage Assets, a balanced judgement will be applied having regard to the scale of any harm or loss as a result of proposed development and the significance of the Heritage Asset. The application has been accompanied by a Built Heritage Assessment.

The Conservation Officer identifies a number of heritage assets near the proposed solar farm, particularly around Site 2. These include Hewell Grange, Hewell Park and Garden, the Hewell Grange Conservation Area, and the non-designated Ivy Cottage and Rose Cottage.

The proposed development is not considered to directly affect Hewell Grange, the Registered Park and Garden, but would impact on the setting of the Conservation Area, notably in respect of Site 2. However, the application sites form part of their wider rural and historic estate setting. This setting makes a minor contribution to the their significance because the land was historically associated with the Hewell Estate and helps explain the wider agricultural context of the estate.

Hewell Grange is significant as a Grade I listed, late 19th-century mansion, valued for its architectural quality. The Registered Park and Garden is significant as a designed landscape influenced by nationally important designers, including Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton. The Conservation Area is significant because of the relationship between listed and unlisted historic buildings, the registered parkland, and the wider estate landscape.

The Conservation Officer considers that the solar farm would introduce an industrial feature into the rural setting of these designated heritage assets. Although field boundaries would be retained, the development would be highly visible from Brockhill Lane, where the boundaries of the Registered Park and Conservation Area would be experienced in the context of the solar development.

The resulting harm to the designated heritage assets is assessed as being at the lower end of less than substantial harm. This harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal in accordance with the NPPF. In respect of Ivy Cottage and Rose Cottage, the Conservation Officer considers that the development would clearly affect their setting and significance. The cottages are late 19th-century agricultural workers' cottages linked to the Hewell Estate, and Site 2 forms part of their immediate rural setting. Proposed boundary reinforcement and wildflower planting would reduce the impact but would not remove the harm caused by introducing an industrial feature into their rural setting

As Ivy Cottage and Rose Cottage are non-designated heritage assets, the decision-maker must apply a balanced judgement, having regard to the scale of harm and the significance of the assets. Overall, the Conservation Officer identifies limited heritage harm, but this must be considered fully in relation to the statutory duty of the legislation, the Bromsgrove Local Plan Policy BDP20, and the relevant NPPF heritage tests.

Members should note that the Conservation Officer will provide an update in relation to the amendments in the Heritage (Chapter 20) of the National Planning Policy Framework published on 17th August 2026. It should be noted that this will not fundamentally change the conclusions drawn in respect of the impact of the proposal on Heritage Assets.

Archaeology

The site is considered to have low archaeological potential, with evidence mainly relating to medieval/post-medieval agricultural activity and possible remains of a WWII searchlight battery.

Worcestershire Archive and Archaeological Service accepts that archaeological investigation can be secured by condition after determination, rather than before a decision is made. A programme of trial trenching is recommended, comprising a 3% sample with a 1% contingency, focused particularly around the recorded searchlight battery area. If significant remains are found, further mitigation may be required. A Written Scheme of Investigation has been recommended and a relevant condition has been attached.

The proposal would assist in the delivery of renewable energy and therefore align with this requirement in the BDP, the Worcestershire Energy Strategy, the NPPF and National Policy Statements as outlined above. The imperative to deliver a substantially greater proportion of electricity from renewable sources to combat climate change and build resilience in the national energy supply does amount to a public benefit in favour of the proposal. Therefore, it would comply with Policy BDP20 and the revised NPPF (August 2026).

Landscape and Visual Impact

Policy BDP21 of the BDP requires proposal to protect and enhance the distinctive landscape character of Bromsgrove, as identified in the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA).

The impact of the proposal on the landscape as a resource must be considered separately from the impact on visual amenity, which is the impact of the proposal on people observing the development in places where it can be viewed, such as from roads, public rights of way and individual dwellings.

The site falls within the Wooded Estatelands Landscape Character Type. The key landscape characteristics and associated guidelines for the 'Wooded Estatelands' LCT are a large-scale, wooded agricultural landscape of isolated brick farmsteads, clusters of wayside dwellings and occasional small estate villages. Key visual elements in this landscape are the many large, irregularly shaped ancient woodlands, often prominently situated on low crests.

The northern boundary of Parcel 1 adjoins the Principle Timbered Farmlands LCT, described as: 'rolling lowland landscapes with occasional steep sided hills and low escarpments. They have a small scale, wooded, agricultural appearance characterised by filtered views through densely scattered hedgerow trees. These are complex, in places intimate, landscapes of irregularly shaped woodlands, winding lanes and frequent wayside dwellings and farmsteads'.

The site does not form part of a statutory landscape designation, nor does it relate to the setting of any such area. The LVA concludes that the development would result in negligible effects on the wider Wooded Estatelands and Principal Timbered Farmlands

Landscape Character Types, with the most significant impact being on the character of the site itself. A major residual effect on site level landscape character is identified at Year 15; however, the development would be sited within the existing field pattern and would be reversible at the end of its operational life. The LVA concludes that the proposed solar farm would have limited effects on the wider landscape, with impacts largely contained to the immediate site and its closest receptors, and that proposed mitigation would further reduce adverse effects while providing some ecological benefits.

The consultation response from the external landscape consultant is noted. Whilst the broad approach set out in the LVA is considered appropriate, clarification on a number of points and further amendments and additional photomontages were requested. A further Landscape and Visual Technical Note has been provided by the applicant which concludes that the independent assessment broadly agrees with the submitted Landscape and Visual Assessment and confirms the methodology is robust and proportionate. Construction impacts are expected to be temporary and do not require further landscape evaluation. Operational landscape and visual effects are considered acceptable, with mitigation and existing screening reducing impacts.

There have been minor amendments received to protect the landscape and mitigate the impact on the Conservation Area in respect of Parcel A. These include setting the panels further away from the field boundaries, provide a more regular patterns of panels at this interface and the provision of additional landscaping around the proposed substation. Additional photomontages will be provided in respect of the proposed substation.

Trees and Landscaping

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Planning Statement (APS). The majority of the existing hedgerows with trees within the site would be retained with the exception of the removal of two sections of hedgerow to facilitate access onto Brockhill Lane from each of the land parcels.

In respect of new tree planting and landscaping, the Landscape Masterplan sets out a series of measures. These include the retention of all existing hedgerows and trees along the boundaries and within the site and gapping up where appropriate. The existing hedgerows would be allowed to grow to a height of 3 to 4m to assist in screening the proposal. There would be additional native hedgerow planting along the private access roads adjoining the sites and notably along the entire western boundary of Parcel B which is currently open as well as around the proposed substation. There would also be heavy standard tree planting along the western boundary to provide additional screening. There would be additional native tree planting to filter views from residential properties including Ivy Cottage, Rose Cottage and Little Shortwood. The views of the Tree Officer are noted and measures within the APS are considered acceptable. The proposal is unlikely to have any major impact on any of the tree stock around the perimeter of either site. It is highlighted within the APS that a 15m section of H29 and a 4m section of H32 will need to be removed to create the safe access points off Brockhill Lane. These hedges have been categorised as (C) grade quality which is the appropriate grade. The loss of these sections of hedge can also be offset by the creation of additional hedgerows.

There are concerns expressed in relation to the route of the cable to connect the solar farm could potentially have on trees local to the route shown and would prefer to have confirmation that it will be excavated outside of the BS5837:2012 recommended RPA of

any trees. It is understood that the cable connection would be carried out by the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) utilising permitted development rights.

The additional hedge and tree planting on the western boundary of the site is welcomed and heavy standard tree planting is recommended alongside appropriate species selection to achieve effective screening and glare diffusion. An appropriate condition has been attached.

Ecology

Policy BDP21 of the BDP seeks to ensure that a well-functioning, coherent, and resilient ecological network is established and explains that the Council expects all development to take into account and contribute towards meeting environmental targets. Similarly, Policy BDP24 outlines the importance of the delivery a high-quality multi-functional Green Infrastructure network through new developments. The application has been accompanied by an Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) a Biodiversity Net Gain(BNG) Assessment and associated BNG Metric.

In terms of statutory designations, Hewell Park Lake SSSI is located approximately 0.3km to the south of the site. It is an artificial lake surrounded by 19th century planted woodland. Both the lake and woodland have ornithological importance, supporting all three species of woodpecker and breeding Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*). Furthermore, the lake holds records for Grass Snake.

The comments of the External Ecologists (Thomson Environmental Consultants) have reviewed the submitted ecological information, including the Ecological Impact Assessment, Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment and subsequent ecology responses from the applicant's ecologist. There are no ecological objections in principle raised. It is considered that the updated information is sufficient to enable the LPA to assess the ecological implications of the proposal, subject to appropriate conditions. Matters relating to bats, dormice, Local Wildlife Sites, desk-study updates, wintering birds and Biodiversity Net Gain have either been addressed or can be controlled through planning conditions. In particular, no lighting is proposed during construction or operation, tree protection measures are to be implemented, and precautionary dormouse working methods should be secured through the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).

The impacts on Shortwood Rough Ground Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and the Worcester and Birmingham Canal Local Wildlife Site (LWS) are considered acceptable, provided the CEMP includes suitable controls for pollution prevention, dust avoidance and protection of retained vegetation. Further wintering bird surveys are not considered proportionate, as the site is unlikely to be functionally linked to the Hewell Park Lake SSSI and the available survey information is accepted as representative.

A Skylark Mitigation and Compensation Plan is required and an appropriate condition has been applied. The Ecologist also confirms that previous concerns regarding the Biodiversity Net Gain metric have been addressed. Overall, the ecological issues are capable of being satisfactorily managed through conditions, principally requiring a robust CEMP and a Skylark Mitigation and Compensation Plan. The submitted BNG metric shows a sufficient net gain of biodiversity units through onsite tree and hedge planting

and the provision of neutral grassland habitat. Additional areas for Skylark mitigation has also been agreed and thereby the proposed enhancements are significant and will be managed and monitored through the use of an appropriate legal obligation. The uplift would be approximately 235.97% in habitat units and 57.5% in hedgerow units.

Members should note that that Natural England has been consulted and reconsulted in relation to the amended plans and supporting information and has replied providing standing advice only (referred to as Annex A). The Annex states that where off-site delivery of biodiversity gain is proposed on a special site designated for nature (e.g. a SSSI or habitats site) prior consent or assent may be required from Natural England. In this case, the area of enhancement would not be within or in close proximity to Hewell Lake SSSI. The response of the external ecologist is that the site is not functionally linked to the SSSI and therefore any potential ecological impacts have been duly considered.

The consultation response from the Canal and River Trust and a public comment have raised concerns about the use of the canal tunnel by bats. It is considered that any impact would be addressed through the CEMP and in the Precautionary Working Methods Statement required by condition. The proposed development is considered to with policies N2 and N3 of the NPPF which require development to contribute positively to the natural environment, and support nature's recovery.

Shortwood Tunnel

Members should note that a small section of the proposal at the northern end of Parcel B would be above the Shortwood Canal Tunnel.

The views of the Canal and River Trust (CRT) are noted. There is no in principle objection to the proposed solar farm but there are important safeguarding issues relating to Shortwood Tunnel, which passes beneath the site. The Trust requires further ground investigation to establish land stability, tunnel integrity and whether panels or associated infrastructure can safely be located above or close to the tunnel. The Trust recommends a pre-commencement condition requiring ground investigations, assessment of tunnel impacts, any necessary mitigation, and an appropriate easement or standoff zone. The final scheme layout may need to be amended depending on the results, including potential removal of panels or infrastructure from sensitive areas.

The Trust also seeks protection of tunnel access for inspection, maintenance and emergency works during both construction and operation. Drainage and groundwater impacts also need to be assessed to ensure the development does not affect the tunnel structure or surrounding land stability.

Ecological considerations remain relevant due to bat use of the tunnel, and the development should avoid disturbance while supporting biodiversity along the canal corridor. The Trust considers the visual impact on canal users acceptable but requests that the above ground canal tunnel walking route remains available for use. The Trust also requests that construction traffic avoids Bridge 57 on Brockhill Lane due to its 7-tonne weight restriction, and that this is secured by condition.

In respect of the footpath, it is noted that the informal path connecting the canal sections is located to the north of (and outside of) the boundary of the application site. The applicant has confirmed that this path will remain open and would not be impacted during

the construction or operational phase of the proposal. Thereby, the comments of the Ramblers Association and CRT have been satisfactorily addressed.

Drainage

The proposed development site lies in an area designated by the Environment Agency (EA) as Flood Zone 1 and is outlined to have a chance of flooding of less than 1 in 1,000 (<0.1%) in any year. The application has been accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Surface Water Drainage Assessment (updated 21.11.2025). The views of NWWM are noted the FRA is considered acceptable since the solar farm is expected to generate only negligible additional surface water runoff compared with greenfield conditions. The change from mainly arable land to low-intensity managed grassland may improve surface and soil conditions during regular rainfall events. The access tracks are proposed to be permeable, and whilst there will be some impermeable structures, the impact of these is considered acceptable.

It is noted that Natural England have provided standing advice only. The views of NWWM have also been sought in respect of the potential hydrological impact on Hewell Lake SSSI. The view taken is that the site is taking measures to replicate the greenfield runoff conditions, there should not be any impacts from the proposed development upon hydrological features elsewhere, which would include Hewell Lake SSSI. The policy is considered to comply with Policy CC3 of the Framework.

Agricultural Land Classification

Policy N2 1(b) of the National Planning Policy Framework (2026) requires proposals to: Take into account the quality of agricultural land (including that classified as best and most versatile agricultural land, and its grade), and if significant development of agricultural land is necessary, use areas of poorer quality land where possible.

Best and most versatile agricultural land is classified in the Glossary of the NPPF as Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). ALC is graded from 1 to 5 and based on yield, range and versatility of use, and need for input.

The application is accompanied by an Agricultural Land Classification Report dated November 2024. The site comprises of the following: Grade 3a: 32.15ha (90%), Grade 3b: 3.6 ha (10%). Thereby, the majority of the site falls into the BMV category. The applicant has put forward a number of points in respect of the loss of BMV land.

Firstly, the vast majority of land within Bromsgrove District comprises land of moderate quality (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) and thereby there are no alternative sites available of lower agricultural quality, following the site selection process outlined in further detail above in relation to other matters including the presence of heritage assets. Secondly, the proposal would be reversible and grazing could continue alongside the presence of the solar farm. The loss of higher quality agricultural land carries moderate weight. It is important to consider the gradual erosion of agricultural land to uses such as the proposal nationally. However, the Written Ministerial Statement 2024² states that the total area of agricultural land used for solar is very small, and even in the most ambitious scenario would still occupy less than 1% of the UK's agricultural land. In summary, whilst the

² Solar and protecting our Food Security and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land Written Ministerial Statement made on 15 May 2024 Ref: UIN HCWS466

proposal would result in the loss of BMV land at the lower end of the quality spectrum, the overall availability of land of such quality would remain available and the proposal would comply with Policy N2 1(b) of the Framework. The loss of BMV land is also a matter for Natural England. However, only standing advice has been provided which references the 'Guide to Assessing Development Proposals on Agricultural Land' available on GOV.UK. The advice does not alter the outcome of the assessment of ALC set out in this section.

Noise

The public consultation exercise has raised the issue of noise during the construction and operation of the site with the noise potentially leading to disturbance and the loss of residential amenity.

The proposal is supported by a Noise Impact Assessment, which assesses the operational noise impacts of the development on the nearest noise sensitive receptors. The Assessment concludes that the development would have a low impact on the existing and nearest sensitive receptors. The views of WRS are noted in relation to noise and no objections have been raised, a Construction Method Statement has been conditioned. No adverse comments have been raised by WRS in relation to air quality or contaminated land, in the latter case, subject to a precautionary condition in relation to unexpected contamination.

Glint and Glare

The proposal is accompanied by a Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study. It should be noted that there is no national policy for determining the impact of glint and glare on road safety and residential amenity. The Study states that no significant impact is predicted upon residential amenity further to the implementation of the landscape masterplan. Similarly, no significant impact is predicted upon road safety and aviation activity associated with Stoney Lane Farm Airfield. The views of NATS (National Air Traffic Services) in relation to aviation safeguarding are noted.

Highway Impact

The proposal is supported by a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) which considers the overall impact of the proposed development on the local highway network and recommends suitable traffic and construction management proposals to limit the potential impact of the development on the surrounding highway network.

The Highway Authority had initially raised concerns in relation to access arrangements, the CTMP and mitigation. Following discussions with the applicant and consideration of the updated drawings showing temporary traffic management measures, access arrangements and passing places, the Highway Authority now raises no objection, subject to conditions.

The required conditions are:

- Road Safety Audit Stage 1 to be submitted and approved before construction, remediation, groundworks or built development begins. Implementation of approved access and passing-place arrangements in accordance with the submitted temporary traffic management drawings before the development is brought into use.

- Construction Environmental Management Plan to be approved before commencement, covering mud and debris control, site operative parking, material storage, welfare facilities, delivery hours, unloading and manoeuvring arrangements, and any temporary construction accesses and reinstatement.

The Highway Authority's position is therefore that the proposal is acceptable in highway safety terms, provided the recommended pre-commencement and compliance conditions are secured and implemented in full. National Highways also requires the provision of a Construction Traffic Management Plan through a condition, specifically to address any use of the Strategic Road Network during construction.

Crime Risk

The consultation response from West Mercia Police is noted and raised concerns about theft of solar panels, cables and copper, reflecting a wider increase in thefts from solar farm developments. Whilst no objection was made, stronger security measures were recommended. Key recommended measures included:

- replacing deer fencing with 2.4m welded mesh fencing;
- securing all gated entrances with appropriate access controls;
- using monitored CCTV, motion sensors and infrared beams;
- using secure panel fixings;
- incorporating defensive ditches, bunds, natural features and vegetation;
- ensuring secure storage of tools, materials and vehicles during construction.

The report notes that some security measures, including CCTV and enhanced boundary vegetation, are incorporated into the scheme. However, the recommended welded mesh fencing could have adverse landscape impacts, conflicting with the scheme's landscape and hedgerow enhancement objectives.

Overall, while a crime risk remains and is acknowledged by the applicant, it is concluded that this risk is not so significant in planning terms that it would harm residential amenity or justify refusal. Crime risk is therefore treated as a neutral matter in the planning balance.

Fire Risk

The comments received from the Technical Fire Safety Inspector at Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service should be noted. In the interests of clarity, there are no energy storage facilities proposed on the site and the electricity generation will be directly exported to the grid from the proposed substation at the southern end of the site.

In terms of fire risk, 3-year study by the BRE (Building Research Establishment) explored fires involving solar photovoltaic systems including a review of historical incidents, relevant literature, standards of installation and training. The report concluded that the incidence of such fires is very low, but the study makes a number of recommendations to reduce risks. These include improvements to installation practices and to the way the fire and rescue services deal with such fires.

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue (HWFS) raises no objection but advises that fire safety requirements should be considered at an early stage. The key issues identified are emergency access and firefighting provision. The layout should ensure suitable fire

appliance access to all parts of the solar farm, with access roads designed to appropriate width and load-bearing standards. Adequate water supplies for firefighting should also be available, either through fire mains or static water supplies. The Fire Service also recommends that a means of isolating the solar panels is provided. An appropriate informative will be attached outlining the recommendations of HWFS.

Third Party Representations

The comments from the occupiers of properties in the vicinity are noted. The objections relate to several topic areas which have been appropriately addressed above. It is accepted that the proposal would result in the partial industrialisation of the rural landscape and significantly so, at local level. However, the proposal has been subject to a detailed LVA which has been independently assessed. The impact of the proposal would be significantly reduced through appropriate mitigation measures including hedgerow and tree planting which would also reduce, over time, the impact on the closest residential properties to the proposal notably Shortwood House, Ivy Cottage and Rose Cottage. There have been no technical objections from WRS in relation to noise as a result of the panels and construction disturbance would be temporary and controlled by a CTMP condition. The ecological impact has been duly considered, and the requisite amount of Biodiversity Net Gain will be secured through an appropriate legal mechanism.

The matter of the pressure of the local water supply has been raised in the consultation exercise. The views of Severn Trent have been sought but it is understood that the panels would be cleaned using deionised water brought to the site rather than the use of the mains supply. The points raised in relation to property values are not material planning considerations.

Conclusion - Planning Balance

The main issues to consider are the principle of development in the Green Belt and the impact on Heritage Assets. It has been concluded above that the proposal would not constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would not result in the significant loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land. While there would be some harm to the setting of the designated heritage assets (Hewell Conservation Area), this would be outweighed by the benefits of the proposal, notably in renewable energy generation. Matters including glint and glare, noise, drainage, highway safety, crime and fire risk are considered to be neutral in the planning balance. It is not considered that there are any other material harms which would weigh against the proposal in the planning balance.

The priority of the Council, in adopting Government policy is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition from fossil fuels and towards renewable sources of energy production and this carries substantial weight in favour of the proposal. The potential of the solar farm to generate up to 25MW of electricity would make a significant contribution towards the delivery of the Government's Climate Change programme and the Worcestershire Energy Strategy. These renewable energy benefits attract substantial positive weight in favour of the proposed development. The proposal would therefore accord with the updated National Planning Policy Framework (2026) taken as a whole.

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) MINDED to GRANT Full planning permission

(b) That **DELEGATED POWERS** be granted to the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services to determine the application following the receipt and completion of a suitable and satisfactory legal mechanism in relation to the following matter:

- (i) The management and maintenance of the significant on and off site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) enhancements and a financial contribution for the monitoring of significant on-site and off-site BNG

Conditions

- 1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of the grant of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans and drawings:

Drawing No. 2106_01 Site Location Plan
Drawing No. 2106_02. Rev 17 General Layout
Drawing 1120019-ADAS-XX-XX DR-L-8006, Rev 6 Illustrative Landscape Masterplan
Drawing No. 2106_03 Panel Elevations and Mounting Structure Details
Drawing No. 2106_04 DNO Substation
Drawing No. 2106_05 Transformer Station
Drawing No. 2106_06 Store Room and Customer Substation
Drawing No. 2106_07 Gate and Fence Detail
Drawing No. 2106_08 Access Track
Drawing No. 2106_09 CCTV Detail
Drawing No. MT001 - SYN - XX-00-DR-C-0004-C03 Substation Elevation Details
Drawing No. GCS0022 - Indicative 66KV Single Circuit Loop Substation Details

Reason: To provide certainty to the extent of the development hereby approved in the interests of proper planning.

- 3) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Badger walkover shall be conducted on the sites by an appropriately qualified Ecologist to check the presence of any new badger setts. Should there be any badger setts in place, an appropriate License from Natural England shall be obtained in advance of any further work proceeding.

Reason: in accordance with the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, policy BDP21 of the Bromsgrove District Plan and the NPPF.

- 4) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority and shall include the following measures:
- 10x bird boxes placed on retained trees (Schwegler 1SP and 1B or similar)
 - 10x bat boxes placed on retained trees (Greenwoods Ecostyrocrete or similar recommended, although as with the bird boxes, Schwegler boxes are quality replacements to these).
 - 4x log piles within the field margins
 - 4x insect houses installed (Wildcare Insect Hotel XXL or similar). These could be tree-mounted; however it is noted that the type specified is free-standing, and as such could be positioned within suitable locations on-site
 - 4x areas of hibernacula. there are guidelines for construction of these features on the Froglife.org website.

Reason: To ensure that appropriate measures to enhance biodiversity on site are implemented as part of the development.

- 5) Prior to the commencement of development, ground investigation, as detailed in the document 'Proposed Technical summary ' provided by Solmek Ltd and dated 2nd October 2025 (as amended to include borehole details) shall be carried out in accordance with the details contained within the report, and the findings and any recommendations and mitigation s submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, in conjunction with the Canal & River Trust. The agreed recommendations should, if necessary, include:

- o a plan demonstrating an agreed easement/standoff zone around the line of the Shortwood Canal tunnel.
- o Consideration of the impacts of, and strategies to mitigate, any changes in natural drainage and ground water level on the canal tunnel as a result of the development.

The agreed mitigations should, if necessary, include :

- o a revised layout plan with panels excluded from the agreed easement/standoff zone, as required,
- o a drainage plan; and
- o a Method Statement demonstrating how the canal tunnel will be protected during the construction and operational phases of development.

All works shall then be carried out in accordance with those agreed details.

Reason; This information is required to allow a proper consideration of the layout and the proposal in relation to the structural integrity of the canal tunnel and land above it, in accordance with paragraph 187 of the NPPF.

- 6) The development hereby approved shall not commence until a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (the HMMP), has been prepared in accordance with the revised/latest BNG metric and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The HMMP must include:
- o a non-technical summary;
 - o the roles and responsibilities of the people or organisation(s) delivering the HMMP;
 - o the planned habitat creation and enhancement works to create or improve habitat to achieve the biodiversity net gain in accordance with the Biodiversity Gain Plan;
 - o the management measures to maintain habitat in accordance with the Biodiversity Gain Plan for a period of 30 years from the completion of development; and
 - o the monitoring methodology and frequency of reporting in respect of the created or enhanced habitat to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Once approved, the created and/or enhanced habitat specified in the approved HMMP shall be managed and maintained in accordance with the approved HMMP for a period of 30 years from completion of development.

Reason: To secure the delivery of ecological enhancement.

- 7) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), covering the solar plant delivery, underground cable connection works and works compound area, shall be submitted to and approved by the LPA prior to commencement of the works. The CEMP is to mitigate potential construction phase impacts on retained trees, retained habitats, birds, hazel dormouse, badgers, bats, reptiles, GCN and other amphibians. The CEMP shall also detail how impacts on Shortwood Rough Ground LWS and Worcester and Birmingham Canal LWS will be avoided.

Reason: to minimise negative impacts on ecological receptors during construction in accordance with the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, policy BDP21 of the Bromsgrove District Plan and the NPPF.

- 8) In the event that contamination is found at any time when carrying out the approved development that was not previously identified it must be reported immediately to the Local Planning Authority. The applicant is advised to immediately seek the advice of an independent geo-environmental consultant experienced in contaminated land risk assessment, including intrusive investigations and remediation.

No further works should be undertaken in the areas of suspected contamination, other than that work required to be carried out as part of an approved remediation scheme, unless otherwise agreed by the Local Planning Authority, until requirements 1 to 4 below have been complied with:

1. Detailed site investigation and risk assessment must be undertaken by competent persons in accordance with the Environment Agency's 'Land Contamination: Risk Management' guidance and a written report of the findings produced. The risk assessment must be designed to assess the nature and extent of suspected contamination and approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to any further development taking place.
2. Where identified as necessary, a detailed remediation scheme to bring the site to a condition suitable for the intended use by removing unacceptable risks to identified receptors must be prepared and is subject to the approval of the Local Planning Authority in advance of undertaking. The remediation scheme must ensure that the site will not qualify as Contaminated Land under Part 2A Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the intended use of the land after remediation.
3. The approved remediation scheme must be carried out in accordance with its terms prior to the re-commencement of any site works in the areas of suspected contamination, other than that work required to carry out remediation, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
4. Following completion of measures identified in the approved remediation scheme a verification report that demonstrates the effectiveness of the remediation carried out must be produced and is subject to the approval of the Local Planning Authority prior to the occupation of any buildings on site.

Reason: To ensure that the risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property, and ecosystems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors.

- 9) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Skylark Mitigation and Compensation Plan, detailing how and where appropriate mitigation will be secured, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Mitigation Plan shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: To ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are in place in accordance with the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, policy BDP21 of the Bromsgrove District Plan and the NPPF.

- 10) A Non-Licensed Method Statement detailing precautionary working methods (including any impact on the canal tunnel) in respect of birds, badgers, bats, reptiles, GCN and other amphibians will be submitted to and approved by the LPA prior to commencement of the works.

Reason: To demonstrate how Reasonable Avoidance Measures will avoid negative impacts on birds, badgers, bats, reptiles, GCN and other amphibians during construction and operation of the site.

- 11) The Development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until the access and passing places have been provided as shown on drawings: Transport Note: Further Information for Highway Authority dated 19 November 2025 Document Reference: C25184/TN01:

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-006 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -

Sheet 1 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-007 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -

Sheet 2 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-008 - p02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -

Sheet 3 of 4

C25108-ATP-DR-TP-009 - P02- Indicative Temporary Traffic Management Measures -

Sheet 4 of 4

Reason: To ensure compliance with submitted details.

- 12) No construction, remediation, groundworks or built construction will take place until a brief for the Road Safety Audit Stage 1 and subsequent Road Safety Audit Stage 1 have been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- 13) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted a Construction Traffic Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (in consultation with the Highway Authority for the M42 and M5 motorway). The plan shall include as a minimum:

- a) Construction phasing
- b) An HGV routing plan to include likely origin/destination information, potential construction vehicle numbers, construction traffic arrival and departure times, signage, accesses and construction delivery times (to avoid peak hours)
- c) Details of any special or abnormal deliveries or vehicular movements.
- d) Clear and detailed measures to prevent debris, mud and detritus being distributed onto the Local highway and SRN.
- e) Mitigation measures in respect of noise and disturbance during the construction phase including vibration and noise limits, monitoring methodology, screening, a detailed specification of plant and equipment to be used and construction traffic routes.
- f) A scheme to minimise dust emissions arising from demolition/construction activities on the site. The scheme shall include details of all dust suppression measures and the methods to monitor emissions of dust arising from the development.
- g) Waste management.
- h) Wheel washing measures.
- i) Protection measures for hedgerows and grasslands

- j) Details of site operative parking areas, material storage areas and the location of site operatives facilities (offices, toilets etc);
- k) Details of any temporary construction accesses and their reinstatement.

Thereafter, all construction activity in respect of the development shall be undertaken in full accordance with such approved details unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Highways Authority.

Reason: To mitigate any adverse impact from the development on the M42 and M5 motorway and to satisfy the reasonable requirements of road safety.

- 14) No development shall take place until a programme of archaeological work including a Written Scheme of Investigation, has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. The scheme shall include an assessment of significance and research questions; and:

- 1)
 - a) The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording.
 - b) The programme for post investigation assessment.
 - c) Provision to be made for analysis of the site investigation and recording.
 - d) Provision to be made for publication and dissemination of the analysis and records of the site investigation
 - e) Provision to be made for archive deposition of the analysis and records of the site investigation
 - f) Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the Written Scheme of Investigation.
- 2) The development shall not be occupied until the site investigation and post investigation assessment has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation approved under condition (1) and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition has been secured.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

- 15) No development shall commence until a detailed landscaping and tree planting scheme, including details of maintenance of the proposed planting, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The landscaping scheme shall be based on the submitted Drawing 1120019-ADAS-XX-XX DR-L-8006, Rev 6 Illustrative Landscape Masterplan and Drawing No. 2106_02. Rev 17 General Layout. The planting scheme shall include details of species, sizes, and densities of trees and all other planting proposals. The approved scheme shall be implemented during the planting season November - March inclusive, immediately following commencement of the development, or as may be agreed otherwise in writing by the Local Planning Authority and shall be maintained in accordance with the agreed scheme for a minimum period of 10 years following the completion of the approved landscaping scheme. Any trees or

plants that within a period of ten years after planting are removed, die, or become, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, seriously damaged or defective shall be replaced as soon as it is reasonably practical with others of species, size and number as originally approved.

Reason: To ensure the provision, establishment and maintenance of a reasonable standard of landscape, in the interest of safeguarding the visual amenity and landscape qualities of the area.

- 15) The development hereby approved shall proceed only in accordance with the details set out in the Arboricultural Planning Statement by RSK ADAS Limited Ref: 1052657_Brockhill Solar Ltd_Brockhill Solar_APS (Rev A) dated: November 2024 setting out how the existing trees are to be protected and managed before, during and after development. The development shall not first come into use unless and until an Arboricultural Supervision Statement shall have been submitted to, and agreed in writing by, the Local Planning Authority, the contents of which shall have first been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard existing trees from the impacts of development.

- 16) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Construction Method Statement (CMS) detailing the proposed installation method(s) for the PV mounting frames shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The CMS shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: In order to protect the amenity of adjoining occupiers in accordance with the Bromsgrove District Plan (2017) and the NPPF (2026).

Informatives

- 1) In dealing with this application the local planning authority have worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner, seeking solutions to problems arising from the application in accordance with the NPPF and Article 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The authority has helped the applicant resolve technical issues such as:

- o the impact of the development on the landscape and conservation area
- o improving the design of the proposed development
- o highway impact

The proposal is therefore considered to deliver a sustainable form of development that complies with development plan policy.

- 2) It is expected that contractors are registered with the Considerate Constructors scheme and comply with the code of conduct in full, but particular reference is made to "respecting the community" this says:
- Constructors should give utmost consideration to their impact on neighbours and the public

- Informing, respecting and showing courtesy to those affected by the work.
- Minimising the impact of deliveries, parking and work on the public highway.
- Contributing to and supporting the local community and economy.
- Working to create a positive and enduring impression, and promoting the Code.

The CEMP should clearly identify how the principle contractor will engage with the local community, this should be tailored to local circumstances. Contractors should also confirm how they will manage any local concerns and complaints and provide an agreed Service Level Agreement for responding to said issues.

Contractors should ensure that courtesy boards are provided and information shared with the local community relating to the timing of operations and contact details for a site coordinator in the event of any difficulties. This does not offer any relief to obligations under existing Legislation.

- 3) The granting of this planning permission does not remove any obligations on the applicant to undertake a technical design check of the proposed highway improvement works with the Highway Authority (Worcestershire County Council, WCC), nor does it confirm detailed design approval by the Highway Authority until the design check process has been concluded. Upon the satisfactory completion of the technical check the design would be suitable to allow relevant conditions imposed under this permission to be discharged but works to the public highway cannot take place until a legal agreement under Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 has been entered into to allow the works and the applicant has complied with the requirements of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991 (NRSWA) and Traffic Management Act 2004. The person or organisation shall follow the necessary procedure by applying to WCC Streetworks Team for road space for a period to be agreed.

WCC normally use Section 278 to allow the developer to employ a contractor and for that contractor to work on the existing public highway in the same way as if WCC were conducting the works.

When any work is undertaken by a party acting on behalf of a developer on the existing adopted highway it will also be necessary to electronically provide notices to WCC (start date, location, workspace area) to allow these works to take place in accordance with NRSWA. Also, details regarding temporary traffic management controls for works in the public highway are to be submitted to WCC for approval using the online application process.

The applicant is urged to engage with WCC as early as possible to ensure that the approval process is started in a timely manner to achieve delivery of the highway works in accordance with the above-mentioned conditions. The term "highway improvement works" includes, but is not limited to, a proposed junction or access arrangement, highway drainage, street lighting, structures in or adjacent to highway, and any necessary traffic regulation orders or statutory notice.

- 4) Hereford & Worcester Fire Rescue Service (HWFRS) recommends that consideration of access for fire appliances to all parts of the Solar Farm and the

sufficiency and availability of water provision should be considered at an early stage.

- * Where appropriate Fire Service Vehicle access must generally comply with the requirements of ADB 2019 Vol. 2 B5 - section 15 & Table 15.1.

- * Access roads should be in accordance with ADB 2019 Vol. 2 Table 15.2 with regards access widths and carrying capacity.

- * Water for firefighting purposes may be provided in accordance with ADB 2019 Vol. 2 B5, section 16 or National guidance document on the provision of water for fire - fighting' or BS 9991.

- * Water may be provided from Fire Mains or Static Water supplies.

A means by which the Solar Panels can be isolated should be provided.

Please refer to FPA guidance 'RC62 Recommendations for fire safety with PV panel installations', which gives further advice on provisions for the Fire and Rescue Service.

5) BNG Informative

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