

Planning Statement for Planning Statement for a Development Comprising the Delivery of Solar Development and Associated Works.

**Land West of A4074, to the North-West of Nuneham
Courteney, South Oxfordshire.**

On behalf of RES Ltd.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This statement has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of the applicant, RES Ltd, in support of the planning application for the construction and operation of a solar farm at Land West of A4079, to the North-West of Nuneham Courtenay, South Oxfordshire.
- 1.2. Following a description of the site, consideration is given to the proposed development. The report assesses the proposal in relation to relevant planning policy and shall demonstrate that the application is in accordance with the Development Plan. This statement draws conclusions as to the suitability of the proposal for the granting of planning permission in the context of the Development Plan and taking into account any material consideration.

Who are RES Ltd?

- 1.3. Renewable Energy Systems (RES) Ltd is the world's largest independent renewable energy company with 40 years' experience developing, constructing and operating renewable assets. RES has delivered more than 23GW of renewable energy projects across the globe and support an operational asset portfolio of over 12GW worldwide.
- 1.4. The Group's head office in Kings Langley, near London, is complemented by other offices across the UK including Glasgow, Cardiff, Gateshead, Exeter, Truro, Guildford, Rugby and Larne, with engineers working across the UK. Internationally, RES has overseas subsidiary offices in France, Scandinavia, Turkey, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Australia, Canada, and across the USA. The RES Group employs 3,000 staff.
- 1.5. Within United Kingdom and Ireland, RES has the expertise to develop, construct and operate solar farms of outstanding quality. RES track record has given them a reputation for excellence that is second to none and have achieved significant success in the solar energy market. Examples of recent planning consents are Varley (25MW), Ballymoneen (105MW), Manusmore (76MW), and Derril Water (42MW), and of recent planning submissions are Culimore (40MW), Ballyteige (37MW), Rathdyff (25MW) and Kingston (50MW).

Pre-Application Discussions

- 1.6. A request for pre-application advice was submitted to South Oxfordshire Council and discussions undertaken with the Local Planning Authority under the reference P20/S4368/PEJ. It is understood a meeting was held with Officer on 13 January 2021 prior to the formal issue of written advice on 16 February.
- 1.7. Since the time of these initial pre-application discussions, separate discussions and meetings have been held with a number of consultees including the Public Rights of Way Officer and the Conservation Officers at both District and County Level.

EIA Scoping

- 1.8. An EIA Scoping Request was made under Regulation 15 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 in order to determine the scope of the EIA. The Scoping Request was accompanied by a Scoping Report which set out the proposed context of the ES. The Scoping Opinion was issued on 16 November 2022 (Ref P22/S3476/SCO) and confirmed the matters for inclusion within the ES should comprise those set out in the Scoping Report, which were:



- Landscape and Visual Effects
- Conservation and Heritage
- Agricultural Land
- Ecology

2. SITE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

- 2.1. The site is located approximately 550m to the north of Nuneham Courtenay. The River Thames is located approximately 400m to the west of the site. The site is illustrated in the 'Location Plan' (refer to Figure 1 – Site Location Plan below). The site comprises approximately 56.87 hectares of agricultural land and our client is currently investigating the potential for solar development within the site.



Figure 1 – Site Location and Context Plan

- 2.2. Existing access to the site for farm vehicles is taken from the A4074.
- 2.3. Land to the west of the site is located in Flood Zone 3, an area at highest risk of flooding owing to the close proximity of the River Thames. The site is however, located in Flood Zone 1 in its entirety and is therefore at lowest risk of flooding.
- 2.4. There are no designated assets located within the proposed site boundary, however the northern boundary of the proposed development site abuts the identified southern boundary of the Scheduled Monument of Romano-British pottery site, prehistoric ring-ditches and enclosures, including medieval ridge and furrow.

- 2.5. Located approx. 220m northwest of the site boundary are two grade II listed Lower Farmhouse and Lower Farmhouse Barn Range Approximately 20 metres to East. Located 400m to the south of the site boundary is the Conservation Area of Nuneham Courtenay, a Conservation Area which contains 25 grade II listed buildings and 700m south of the southern boundary of the proposed development is the grade I Registered Park and Garden of Nuneham Courtenay which contains a large number of listed buildings including the grade I and scheduled Carfax Conduit, the grade I Nuneham Courtenay and the grade II* Church of All Saints.

Relevant Planning History

- 2.6. A review of the Council's planning application portal identified no relevant planning history on the site.

Context

- 2.7. In light of the drive toward net zero, combatting climate change and electrifying the economy, there is a clear need for the deployment of solar farms and other renewable energy
- 2.8. generation, which is driven by a plethora of government legislation at both a local and national level in the UK.
- 2.9. In June 2019, the UK became the first major economy to implement a legally binding net zero carbon emissions target by 2050¹. Decarbonising the power sector is integral to achieving this target and requires major investments into renewable technologies, such as solar power, which are supported by planning policy at both local and national levels.
- 2.10. The National Infrastructure Committee (NIC), official advisor to the Government on Infrastructure, has published a report (Net-Zero Opportunities for the Power Sector, March 2020²) setting out the key infrastructure requirements needed to meet the UK's 2050 net-zero target, including the amount of renewable energy development that would need to be deployed. The NIC recommends that in meeting these targets, the UK's energy mix needs to be made up of around 90% renewables. The NIC recommends that across all scenarios, significant levels of solar, onshore wind and offshore wind will need to be deployed with between 129-237GW (gigawatts) of renewable energy capacity in operation by 2050. Furthermore, the British Energy Security Strategy³ published in April 2022 states that solar deployment will increase five-fold by 2035.
- 2.11. South Oxfordshire District Council declared a Climate Emergency at their meeting of Full Council held on 11 April 2019.
- 2.12. The Net Zero 2030 Action Plan for 2022/23 states that the Council have committed to a number of actions to mitigate the impacts of climate change in the District. These include but are not limited to:

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/978011187654>

² <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/net-zero-opportunities-for-the-power-sector/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-energy-security-strategy/british-energy-security-strategy#renewables>



- Engaging with the community providing support and encouragement;
- Improving water and energy efficiency measures;
- Delivering our plans and strategies to align with our commitment to reaching net zero by 2030;
- Encouraging and supporting sustainable new buildings and renewable energy generation.'

3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1. The proposal is for the construction and operation of a solar (PV) farm on land West of A4079, to the North-West of Nuneham Courtenay, South Oxfordshire. The development would have the capacity of up to 49.9MW of renewable energy.

3.2. The description of development is as follows:

“Construction and operation of a solar farm with all associated works, equipment, necessary infrastructure and biodiversity net gains – known as ‘Nuneham Solar Farm.’”

3.3. The solar farm would consist of solar PV panels on metal arrays arranged in rows, allowing for boundary landscaping, perimeter fencing and site access, as detailed on the submitted Infrastructure Layout (Figure 4 – O4531-RES-LAY-DR-PT-003 Rev 5). The panels will have a maximum height of 3.6m. The arrays are spaced a minimum of 2m apart (subject to topography) to avoid any shadowing effect from one panel to another. Construction of the development is anticipated to take 8-12 months. Further detail of the construction phase is provided in the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) submitted in support of the application. The development will have an operational life of 40 years, after which time it will be decommissioned.

3.4. The application comprises a number of agricultural field enclosures, approximately 56.87 hectares. The scheme will produce up to 49.9MW of renewable energy. See Figure 3 (Drawing reference O4531-RES-LAY-DR-PT-008 Rev 1) for field numbers and Figure 4 (O4531-RES-LAY-DR-PT-003 Rev 5) for the Infrastructure Layout. The following features are anticipated to be included as part of the proposed solar development:

- The installation of fixed-tilt, bi-facial, ground mounted solar arrays running from east to west across the site, as shown on Figure 8 (O4531-RES-SOL-DR-PT-001 Rev 2) ‘Typical PV Module and Rack Detail’. The solar arrays will be maximum 3.6m in height including a minimum 0.75m ground clearance to allow for dual purpose renewable energy generation and agricultural sheep grazing. The solar panels will be angled at approximately 10-30° to the horizontal, in order to capture maximum radiation. Furthermore, the solar panels will have a non-reflective surface, which will increase the proportion of radiation absorbed, removing the risk of unwanted reflection and glare;
- Inverters/transformer units which will convert the Direct Current (DC) into an Alternating Current (AC) which is compatible with the National Grid. The total maximum inverter capacity will not exceed 49.9MW⁴.
- Independent Distribution Network Operator (iDNO) substation.
- Grid Connection to the existing overhead power lines adjacent within the site boundary.

⁴ No specific capacity for individual inverters has been given in the planning application but the total combined capacity cannot exceed the MEC of 49.9MW, excluding any capacity to overcome reactive power consumption within the solar farm between the inverters and the connection point, per EN-3 Footnote 91.



- Internal access tracks, to allow for the construction and maintenance of the solar panels.
- As the proposed solar farm will require little maintenance, the site will be unmanned. In order to protect the installation, an unobtrusive deer fence will be installed around the perimeter of the site. CCTV cameras with infra-red lighting will be installed, where required, on the perimeter fence.
- Additional landscaping including hedgerow planting and improved biodiversity management. Limited waste will be produced and almost all elements are recyclable; and
- The operational lifetime of the proposed development is 40 years and is therefore considered to be a temporary project.

3.5. The site has been assessed for its suitability and has available grid capacity with a connection proposed within the site to the existing 132kV grid infrastructure. Following the results of recent environmental and engineering surveys, we have included changes to the red line boundary in the northern and south eastern portions of the site. The location will benefit from the existing vegetation along the highway and additional screening proposed by the Nuneham Solar Farm.

3.6. Care has been taken to retain existing trees and hedgerows where possible to retain the character of the local area, to maintain existing visual buffers and to maintain biodiversity.

3.7. Landscape mitigation proposals, include but are not limited to:

- Offsetting from the existing field boundaries and hedgerow to avoid impact on the root protection areas.
- Physical offsets to be provided between the Public Rights of Way (PROW) and the solar infrastructure in the northern fields of the site. This will retain the public access across the site alongside improvements to amenity as a result of the wider landscape planting delivered by the proposed development.
- Creation of over 2.7km of new native species-rich hedgerow lengths, accompanied with new native tree planting along hedgerow lengths, plus over 400m of enhancement to existing hedgerow
- Approximately 3.1km of new native hedgerow planting accompanied with new native in-fill tree planting edge along existing hedgerows.

End of Life Decommissioning

3.8. Compared to other power generation technologies, solar parks can be easily and economically decommissioned and removed from the site at the end of their life (40 years) with the site returned to its original form, in this instance; agricultural land. The landscaping delivered by the proposed development will be retained. Decommissioning is anticipated to take 12 months.

3.9. There are several aspects involved with the decommissioning phase. The main activities comprise:



- Removal of PV panels with them taken away for recycling.
- Removal of PV support with no supporting concrete foundations, these can easily be mechanically abstracted from the ground.
- Removal of inverters with cranes. The prefabricated concrete slab upon which they are supported can be lifted or broken up and removed.
- Removal of cable and ancillary structures.
- Removal of fencing and any ancillary associated equipment.

4. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Legislative Background

- 4.1. This chapter summarises the planning policy and guidance relevant to the development proposed.
- 4.2. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 required that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a key material consideration in the determination of planning applications and also sets out the framework of policies with which up-to-date development plans must be in accordance.

Development Plan

- 4.3. The current development plan for South Oxfordshire Council comprises the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011–2035 (2020). The local policies recognised as relevant to any subsequent application are as follows:

- Policy STRAT1 – The Overall Strategy
- Policy STRAT 4 – Strategic Development
- Policy STRAT6 – Green Belt
- Policy INF1 – Infrastructure Provision
- PolicyTRANS2 – Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility
- PolicyTRANS4 – Transport Assessments, Transport Statements and Travel Plans
- Policy TRANS5 – Consideration of Development Proposals
- Policy INF4 – Water Resource
- Policy ENV1 – Landscape and Countryside
- Policy ENV2 – Biodiversity – Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species
- Policy ENV3 – Biodiversity
- Policy ENV4 – Watercourses
- Policy ENV6 – Historic Environment
- Policy ENV7 – Listed Buildings
- Policy ENV8 – Conservation Areas
- Policy ENV9 – Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments

- Policy ENV10 – Historic Battlefields, Registered Parks and Gardens and Historic Landscapes
- Policy ENV11 – Pollution – Impact from Existing and/or Previous Land Uses on New Development (Potential Receptors of Pollution)
- Policy ENV12 – Pollution – Impact of Development on Human Health, the Natural Environment and/or Local Amenity (Potential Sources of Pollution)
- Policy EP4 – Flood Risk
- Policy EP5 – Minerals Safeguarding Areas
- Policy DES1 – Delivering High Quality Development
- Policy DES2 – Enhancing Local Character
- Policy DES3 – Design and Access Statements
- Policy DES6 – Residential Amenity
- Policy DES7 – Efficient Use of Resources
- Policy DES8 – Promoting Sustainable Design
- Policy DES9 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

4.4. Specifically, Policy DES9, relating to the renewable and low carbon energy states:

"1. The Council encourages schemes for renewable and low carbon energy generation and associated infrastructure at all scales including domestic schemes. It also encourages the incorporation of renewable and low carbon energy applications within all development. Planning applications for renewable and low carbon energy generation will be supported, provided that they do not cause a significantly adverse effect to:

- i) Landscape, both designated AONB and locally valued, biodiversity, including protected habitats and species and Conservation Target Areas;*
- ii) The historic environment, both designated and non-designated assets, including development within their settings;*
- iii) Openness of the Green Belt;*
- iv) The safe movement of traffic and pedestrians; or*
- v) Residential amenity.*

Emerging Planning Policy

- 4.5. It is acknowledged that South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are committed to prepare a Joint Local Plan. It is anticipated a Preferred Options consultation document will be published in early 2024. Given the early stage in the process, it is not considered that weight can be attributed to this plan in the decision making process.

Neighbourhood Plans

- 4.6. There are no Neighbourhood Plans affecting the application site.

National Policy

- 4.7. In June 2019, the UK became the first major economy to implement a legally binding net zero carbon emissions target by 2050. Decarbonising the power sector is integral to achieving this target and requires major investments into renewable technologies, such as solar power, which are supported by planning policy at both local and national levels.
- 4.8. The National Infrastructure Committee (NIC), official advisor to the Government on Infrastructure, has published a report (Net-Zero Opportunities for the Power Sector, March 2020) setting out the key infrastructure requirements needed to meet the UK's 2050 net-zero target, including the amount of renewable energy development that would need to be deployed. The NIC recommends that in meeting these targets, the UK's energy mix needs to be made up of around 90% renewables. The NIC recommends that across all scenarios, significant levels of solar, onshore wind and offshore wind will need to be deployed with between 129-237GW (gigawatts) of renewable energy capacity in operation by 2050. Furthermore, the British Energy Security Strategy⁴ published in April 2022 states that solar deployment will increase five-fold by 2035.
- 4.9. In the recent Government Publication 'Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan' (April 2023) it was outlined that the strategy to increase supply of low-carbon energy is dependent on enhancing our strengths on wind, solar and nuclear power generation alongside hydrogen production and carbon capture, usage and storage. Furthermore, the report outlines that the UK has huge potential for solar power, with the aim for 70GW of ground and rooftop capacity together by 2035. As such, the Government considers that there is a strong need for increased solar deployment as reflected in the latest draft of the Energy National Policy Statements.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)

- 4.10. The NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in its three dimensions; economic, social and environmental. Central to the NPPF is presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking this means (paragraph 11):
- *Approving proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
 - *Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless;*

- *The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
- *Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."*

- 4.11. Paragraph 152 of the NPPF, relating to development proposals affecting the Green Belt outlines that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 4.12. Furthermore, Paragraph 153 of the NPPF outlines that, when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 4.13. Paragraph 156 of the NPPF states that when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.
- 4.14. Paragraph 157 of the NPPF states that the planning system should support transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and should support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 4.15. Paragraph 159 of the NPPF states that new renewables development should be planned for in ways that:
- a) *avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure; and*
 - b) *can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation, and design. Any local requirements for the sustainability of buildings should reflect the Government's policy for national technical standards.*
- 4.16. Paragraph 162 outlines that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should expect new development to:
- a) *comply with any development plan policies on local requirements for decentralised energy supply unless it can be demonstrated by the applicant, having regard to the type of development involved and its design, that this is not feasible or viable; and*
 - b) *take account of landform, layout and building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption.*

4.17. Finally, Paragraph 163 states that, when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:

- a) *not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and*
- b) *approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.*

4.18. Best and most versatile land is defined within the glossary of the NPPF as "Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification."

4.19. Paragraph 180 outlines that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)

4.20. Paragraph 208 states that, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposed including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (first published March 2014)

4.21. The Government's web-based NPPG went live on 6th March 2014 and contains guidance on the planning system and has been subject to updating periodically. The web-based guidance should be read alongside the NPPF and is a material consideration in the consideration of planning applications.

4.22. Renewable and Low Carbon Energy forms one of the chapters in the NPPG. Paragraph 013 (ID: 5-013-20150327) is entitled "What are the particular planning considerations that relate to large scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms?" and sets out the following factors for consideration:

- encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;
- where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.
- that solar farms are normally temporary structure and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;

- the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare (see guidance on landscape assessment) and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;
- the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;
- the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of largescale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large-scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;
- the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;
- the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.

Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (November 2023)

- 4.23. EN-1 was designated on 17 January 2024 and sets out national policy for energy infrastructure in the UK. Its primary purpose is to be applied to decision for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, which the Proposed Development the subject of this appeal is not, although it is of a scale which is approaching the NSIP threshold. It is also confirmed this document can be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, and the extent to which the policies in the NPS are material, and to what extent, will be judged on a case-by-case basis and will depend upon the extent to which the matters are already covered by applicable planning policy.
- 4.24. EN-1 also highlights in several places that demand for electricity is likely to increase and could more than double by 2050 as large parts of transport, heating and industry decarbonise by switching from fossil fuels to low carbon electricity.
- 4.25. The consequence of this is that if demand for electricity doubles by 2050, EN-1 states that *'we will need a fourfold increase in low carbon generation....In addition, we committed in the Net Zero Strategy to take action so that by 2035, all our electricity will come from low carbon sources, subject to security of supply, whilst meeting a 40-60% increase in electricity. This means that the majority of new generating capacity needs to be low carbon'*.
- 4.26. As to the types of new generating capacity needed, EN-1 states that *'Wind and solar are the lowest cost ways of generating electricity, helping reduce costs and providing a clean and secure source of electricity supply (as they are not reliant on fuel for generation). Our analysis shows that a secure, reliable, affordable, net zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar'*.

4.27. Green Belt policy is specifically referred to in EN-1, and it advises that, in terms of the Secretary of State's decision making, very special circumstances should be approached in the following manner:

"Very special circumstances are not defined in national planning policy as it is for the individual decision maker to assess each case on its own merits and give relevant circumstances their due weight. However, when considering any planning application affecting Green Belt land, the Secretary of State should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering any application for such development, while taking account, in relation to renewable and linear infrastructure, of the extent to which its physical characteristics are such that it has limited or no impact on the fundamental purposes of Green Belt designation. Very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewables and other low carbon sources."

National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (November 2023)

4.28. EN-3 was designated on 17 January 2024 and sets out national policy for energy infrastructure in the UK.

4.29. Under the specific heading of Solar Photovoltaic Generation at Section 2.10, EN3-confirms that *'The Government has committed to sustained growth in solar capacity to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions by 2050. As such solar is a key part of the government's strategy for low-cost decarbonisation of the energy sector.'*

4.30. The government affirms that *'solar also has an important role in delivering the government's goals for greater energy independence and the British Energy Security Strategy states that government expects a five-fold increase in combined ground and rooftop solar development by 2035 (up to 70GW).'*

4.31. EN-3 further explains that solar farms are one of the most established renewable electricity technologies in the UK, the cheapest form of electricity generation, can be built quickly and with consistent reductions in the cost of materials and improvements in efficiency, are now in some cases viable to deploy subsidy-free.

UK Government Solar Strategy 2014

4.32. The strategy set out four guiding principles for the Government's strategy for solar PV. The strategy expressed the Government's support for solar projects to proceed as a cost-effective contribution to the UK carbon emission objectives, to deliver genuine carbon reductions, where appropriately sited and responding to the impacts of deployment on grid systems.

Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan (April 2023)

4.33. In the recent Government Publication 'Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan' (April 2023) it was outlined that the strategy to increase supply to low-carbon energy is dependent on enhancing our strengths on wind, solar and nuclear power generation alongside hydrogen production and carbon capture, usage and storage. Furthermore, the report outlines that the UK has huge potential for solar power, with the aim for 70GW of ground and rooftop capacity together by 2035.



- 4.34. Within this document it is detailed that the government seeks large scale ground-mounted solar deployment across the UK. It also acknowledges that solar and farming can be complementary.

5. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1. The following section of this report assesses the development proposals against the policies of the Development Plan, the NPPF and NPPG. It is considered that the key issues in the determination of the application are the principle of development, the impact upon landscape, amenity and biodiversity, highways and traffic implications and flood risk.

General Principle of Development

- 5.2. This application seeks permission for a solar photovoltaic (PV) farm on Land West of A4079, to the North-West of Nuneham Courtenay, South Oxfordshire.

The National Need for the Proposal

- 5.3. There is a clear need for the development of solar farms and other renewable energy generation, which is driven by numerous government legislation at both a local and national level in the UK.
- 5.4. The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced the first legally binding target for 2050 to reduce greenhouse gases by 80%. This was further enhanced in 2019 with the UK Government amending the Act to a target of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Electricity demand is set to increase significantly as fossil fuels are phased out. More recently the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published their latest report on the global climate, Assessment Report 6 (AR6) in August of this year (2021). The report overwhelmingly strengthens the scientific evidence of the human influence on the climate system. While there is a combination of climatic impact-drivers, fossil fuel emissions are a principal contributor to the climate crisis, so replacing gas and coal powered electricity generators with clean renewable technology is critical if we are to start to undo the decades of damage that has initiated climate change. Governments, local authorities, communities, and businesses all have a responsibility to play their part in addressing the climate emergency and this project aims to help achieve that.
- 5.5. Producing electricity with photovoltaic (PV) panels, produces no greenhouse gases during operation and uses no finite fossil-fuel resources. Where, as has been generally recognised, the current consumption of and reliance on fossil fuels is unsustainable, there is a very real need to find a viable long term alternative solution. To this end, there is greater emphasis on renewable energy sources for the production of power, with all Local Authorities being encouraged to ensure that a greater percentage of the power consumed in their areas is from these sources, thereby reducing their carbon emissions.
- 5.6. In addition, it is now widely accepted that climate change is happening and a key contributing factor are carbon emissions from the use of fossil fuels. The increased production of energy from renewable sources, such as solar PV, has very real benefits in off-set saving in carbon dioxide emissions and reducing the potential impact of greenhouse gases on climate change. It will also ensure a constant and affordable source of energy, contribute to economic stability and provide a further form of diversification to support total economies.
- 5.7. The amount of energy which can be harnessed from the sun's radiation is often underestimated. In the UK, we receive a vast amount of solar energy. In an average year we receive as much as 60% of the solar energy which is received on the equator. There is often the misconception that solar technologies can only be used within the summer months, but



the UK has a large number of clear spring, autumn and winter days, where the Sun's radiation can be harnessed, meaning that solar technologies can contribute to energy consumption for the whole year.

5.8. The provision of a broad range of energy solutions, including solar, creates a more robust energy network that is less susceptible to fluctuations in global markets for oil and gas, making the UK energy supply less carbon intensive with greater levels of resilience, security and self-sufficiency.

Social, Economic and Local Community Benefits

5.9. RES seeks to be a power for good in the communities that neighbour its projects by working openly and constructively to ensure meaningful local benefits. The proposed development would generate social, economic and local community benefits, these include but are not limited to:

- Increased renewable energy generation.
- Reduction in carbon emissions has a consequential positive effect upon public health, via the reduction in greenhouse gases and associated improvements to air quality.
- Economic benefits associated with investment and support of jobs during the construction phase of development. RES encourage contractors to source construction materials locally (i.e. within the country) and to use local transport and plant hire companies where possible, in addition to local services and amenities.
- Appropriate biodiversity and landscape enhancements via increased boundary planting and species-rich grassland.

5.10. The above outcomes associated with the scheme progressing, and associated Local Plan support for renewable energy generation, are considered to cumulatively represent very substantial benefits and as such are material consideration which weigh greatly in favour of planning permission being granted.

5.11. It is considered that the general principle of the development is acceptable. The proposed development provides a real opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the UK's renewable energy and climate change target as well as providing opportunities to enhance local economic development. The site is sustainably located as it is considered to meet the requirements of national policy.

General Principles

5.12. Policy DES9 of the Local Plan outlines a number of identified key matters of significance when assessing the impact of proposals. Specifically, it is stated that planning application for renewable and low carbon energy generation will be supported, provided that they do not cause a significantly adverse effect to:

Policy DES9 Criteria	Requirements Met
Landscape, both designated AONB and locally valued, biodiversity, including	The application site is located outside of any designated AONB and is not covered by

<p>protected habitats and species and Conservation Target Areas.</p>	<p>a local ecological designation. Landscape mitigation proposed as part of the submission with the relevant details shown on Drawing Number P21-2947_EN-100 Rev E).</p>
<p>The historic environment, both designated and non-designated assets, including development within their settings.</p>	<p>There are no designated assets located within the proposed site boundary, however the northern boundary of the proposed development site abuts the identified southern boundary of the Scheduled Monument of Romano-British pottery site, prehistoric ring-ditches and enclosures, including medieval ridge and furrow.</p> <p>It is concluded within the submitted reports that there are no significant effects on heritage assets.</p>
<p>Openness of the Green Belt.</p>	<p>The proposed development would not be visible from the nearest settlements of Nuneham Courteney, Marsh Bladon or Toot Baldon. None of the nearest residential properties, users of the other PROWS, the Oxfordshire Greenbelt Way, the Thames Path national Trail or National Cycle Route 5 would experience significant visual effects.</p>
<p>The safe movement of traffic and pedestrians.</p>	<p>The application is supported by a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) that demonstrates that safe access and egress can be achieved on the site during construction. It is acknowledged that there is a PROW running through the site and an appropriate buffer has been put in place to ensure its continued use.</p> <p>It is anticipated that there will be an increase in trips to the site during the construction period but that these will reduce during the operation of the scheme when trips will be associated with maintenance only.</p>
<p>Residential amenity.</p>	<p>This has been accounted for within the design of the scheme. Relevant studies with regard to noise and glint and glare have also been undertaken and raised no concerns for existing residential properties. In terms of</p>

	visual impact, appropriate mitigation and existing vegetation has been included to screen views of the development.
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- 5.13. It is considered that these are the main local level policies against which a development of this kind will be assessed.
- 5.14. Planning permission should therefore be granted unless adverse effects of the development outweigh these beneficial impacts. The individual policy considerations are provided below, in order to make this judgment. As this Planning Statement demonstrated, the scheme is in accordance with the key policies from within the Development Plan.
- 5.15. It is considered that the general principle of the development is acceptable. The proposed development provides a real opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the UK's renewable energy and climate change target as well as providing opportunities to enhance local economic development. The site is sustainably located as is considered to meet the requirements of national policy.

Green Belt

- 5.16. The proposed development site is located within the designated Oxford Green Belt as defined by the policies of the Local Plan.
- 5.17. Paragraph 152 of the NPPF, relating to development proposals affecting the Green Belt outlines that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 5.18. Paragraph 154 and 155 provides exceptions for development in the Green Belt and which this proposal does not fall in to. Therefore, the development of a solar farm in the Green Belt would represent inappropriate development when assessed against planning policy.
- 5.19. With regards to renewable energy development, paragraph 156 states:
- “When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.”*
- 5.20. This clearly outlines that the provision of renewable energy development can be considered as very special circumstances in the determination of an application. It is then a matter of whether the benefits of Nuneham Solar Farm significantly outweigh the impacts on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 5.21. Paragraph 138 of the NPPF identifies that the five main principles of the Green Belt are as follows:
- a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - 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

5.22. A number of aspects of the proposed development as outlined in the application will assist in achieving these benefits (including retaining the existing Public Rights of Way within the site and significant additional landscaping and planting).

5.23. The siting and scale of the proposed development would not significantly impact the openness and permanence of the Green Belt and we consider that it would not impact the purposes for inclusion within the Green Belt which are considered below.

5.24. The proposed development comprises low-level renewable energy infrastructure which is entirely enclosed by agricultural fields. The development does not contribute to urban sprawl nor does it assist in merging towns as it is not an urban form of development and is commonplace within rural areas due to size and development constraints on brownfield land. The proposal does not form an urban feature as land will still be retained for agricultural uses during operation through sheep grazing. The design enhances the characteristics of the landscape character through significant levels of new hedgerow planting (internal and at site boundaries). These landscaping measures will create new habitats. The Biodiversity Net Gain is reported in the accompanying Biodiversity Net Gains (Report Ref 7886 V2.0). The delivered net gains is significantly more than the required net gain of 10%. The total number of biodiversity units in the proposed layout post development are 85 units of area habitat, 24.83 units of hedgerow and 1.90 watercourse units. This equates to a 70.94% net gain in area habitats, a 61.48% net gain in hedgerow habitats and a 24.32% net gain in watercourse habitats, as a result of the proposed development.

5.25. As detailed within the submitted Landscape and Visual Assessment, the total extent of the landscape and visual effects would be localised and limited in nature.

5.26. With regards to the final principle of the Green Belt, ground mounted solar energy developments tend not to be located on brownfield land or in urban areas where there are usually limitations on the size of the plot which in turn creates viability issues. There is further often shadowing within urban areas preventing efficient output of energy. As part of our Site Alternatives Study (Report Ref P21-2947 R003v1), a check of the relevant Brownfield Registers has been undertaken and there are no viable sites in close proximity of the point of connection at Nuneham. Furthermore, a large majority of brownfield sites in South Oxfordshire already have full or outline planning permission for residential development. No available brownfield sites of sufficient size to accommodate the proposal were identified within the study area.

5.27. The above clarifies that the proposal does not relate or impact the 5 purposes of the Green Belt thereby the impact of the development on the Green Belt allocation is to be limited.

Very Special Circumstances

5.28. Policy STRAT6 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan states:

“To ensure that Green Belt continues to serve its key functions, it will be protected from harmful development. With its boundaries, development will be restricted to those limited types of development which are deemed appropriate by the NPPF, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”

- 5.29. As outlined above, the proposal does impact on the five principles of the Green Belt. Furthermore, the development is of temporary nature as confirmed in the Renewable Energy PPG. There will be no impact on the underlying ground quality and the 'resting' of agricultural land can lead to improved soil organic matter ensuring that when the land can be returned to agricultural use in the future. Furthermore, the landscaping delivered by the proposed development will be retained after decommissioning. As such, the proposal would not result in significant adverse impacts to the Green Belt. The benefits of the renewable energy output in satisfying, local, national and international renewable energy targets would therefore significantly outweigh the impact of the Green Belt and would satisfy the 'Very Special Circumstances' Test, this is considered in further detail below.
- 5.30. As outlined, there is a need for this type of development as promoted through a number of international, national and local targets for renewable energy across all areas of the country. Paragraph 163 of the NPPF outlines that local authorities should not require the applicant to demonstrate the need for renewable energy. It then goes on to state that the application should be approved if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Chapter 14 of the NPPF clearly substantiates the importance of renewable energy developments across the country and suitably supports the principle of development for these technologies.
- 5.31. The wider benefits of Nuneham Solar Farm have been outlined above along with the numerous supporting documents. In summary, the proposal would provide 49.9MW of clean and renewable (low carbon) energy, enough to power over 13,000 homes⁵ annually and saving an estimated 800,000⁶ tonnes of CO₂ over the lifetime of the project compared to electricity from fossil fuels like gas. The proposed 40 year operational lifetime further demonstrates that the proposed development does not form a permanent loss of the Green Belt.
- 5.32. Additional benefits identified include the economic benefits arising from the construction employment, use of local materials where practicable and local business rates arising from the scheme. The proposal will also assist with the viability and diversification of the agricultural land, to the benefit of the local economy.
- 5.33. In conclusion, the adverse impacts of the proposed development would be minimal and would not impact the 5 principles of the Green Belt. The weight to be afforded to the Green Belt allocation should only be limited. The significant benefits that come from the scheme amount to very special circumstances in overcoming the impact on the Green Belt. Further

⁵ The homes equivalent figure has been calculated by taking the predicted average annual electricity generation of the site (based on RES assessments Nuneham Solar Farm has a predicted capacity factor of 11.23%) and dividing this by the annual average electricity figures from DESNZ showing that the annual GB average domestic household consumption is 3,239 kWh (January 2024)

⁶ Carbon reduction is calculated by multiplying the anticipated average amount of electricity generated by Nuneham per year by the number of tonnes of carbon which fossil fuels would have produced to generate the same amount of electricity using DESNZ's "all non-renewable fuels" emissions statistic of 424 tonnes of carbon dioxide per GWh of electricity supplied in the [Digest of UK Energy Statistics](#) (July 2023) Table 5.1.

support is provided by the NPPF for renewable energy development and rural diversification. The proposal leads to economic, social and environmental benefits and therefore accord with the core principles of sustainable development as outlined in Paragraph 8 of the NPPF

Precedent Cases

5.34. It is considered that the below precedent cases that are relevant to the determination of this planning application for Nuneham Solar Farm. All of which are solar development of similar scale that have been found acceptable in the Green Belt.

Table 1: Precedent cases of solar development within Green Belt

Application Reference	Description of Development	Decision	Local Planning Authority
RB2022/1203	Installation and operation of a solar energy park and associated infrastructure	Committee Approval 04.08.2022	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
22/02106/FUL	Change of use of land and construction of solar PV panels (up to 28MW), associated electrical infrastructure, operational buildings, substations, lattice tower, security fencing, CCTV, access tracks, landscaping and other ancillary works,	Committee Approval 09.05.2023	North Tyneside Council
22/02599/FUL	Installation of a solar park to export up to 49.9MW (AC) electricity, including solar panels, inverter cabins, associate infrastructure and associated hard landscaping.	Delegated Approval 17.02.2023	Sevenoaks District Council
21/00394/FUL	Installation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) park generating up to 49.9 MW of electricity spread over three sites (sited either side of the A130/Canons Barn Road), comprising of ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, battery-based electricity storage containers, and One Point of Connection (POC) mast of up to 35m in height on Church Road (junction with Link House Farm), together with inverters/transformer stations, Distribution Network Operator (DNO) Substation, access and cable connection to POC mast to connect to	Appeal Approved 06.02.2023	Chelmsford City Council

Application Reference	Description of Development	Decision	Local Planning Authority
	132 kV power line, customer substation/switchgear and meter kiosk, batteries, internal buried cabling and grid connection cables, internal access tracks, security fencing and gates and CCTV cameras, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.		
21/00834/FUL	Construction and operation of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure (30MW)	Committee Approval 23.12.2021	Brentwood Borough Council
P20/S3244/FUL	The construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic farm and associated infrastructure, including inverters, substation compound, security cameras, fencing, access tracks and landscaping.	Committee Approval 26.10.2021	South Oxfordshire District Council

- 5.35. It is also considered relevant to consider the weight that the Secretary of State and Inspectors have given to the benefit of renewable energy generation in determining recent appeals.
- 5.36. At Halloughton in February 2022 (Appeal Reference APP/B3030/W/21/3279533, paragraph 55), Inspector Baird afforded ‘significant weight’ to the early and significant contribution that the proposal could make to the imperative to reduce emissions by generating 49.9 MW of electricity from a clean, renewable source.
- 5.37. In December 2022, at Langford the Secretary of State allowed a 49.9MW solar farm and considered that weighing in favour of the proposal is the production of electricity which is afforded “significant weight” (Appeal Reference APP/Y1138/W/22/3293104, paragraph 26) .
- 5.38. Also in December 2022, at Bishops Itchington, ‘substantial positive weight’ was given by Inspector Major to the provision of clean renewable energy (Appeal Ref APP/J3720/W/22/3292579, paragraph 33).
- 5.39. In Chelmsford, also allowed in February 2023, the level of renewable energy generation arising from a 49.9MW solar farm in the Green Belt ‘weighs strongly in favour of the scheme’ (Appeal Reference APP/W1525/W/22/3300222, paragraph 86), and later in the decision, that the benefits of renewable energy ‘raise substantial benefits’ in favour of the proposal (paragraph 91).

- 5.40. At New Works Lane, Telford, the Secretary of State allowed a 30MW solar farm in March 2023 and considered that significant weight should be given to the production of electricity (Appeal Reference APP/C3240/W/22/3293667, paragraph 23).
- 5.41. At Wellington Telford, the Inspector in allowing the appeal for up to 49.9MW in May 2023 afforded “substantial weight” to the clean and secure energy offer (Appeal Reference APP/C3240/W/22/3308481, paragraph 43).
- 5.42. In June 2023, a 49.9MW solar farm was allowed at Scruton, Hambleton and the Inspector afforded “substantial weight” to the renewable energy benefit of the proposal (Appeal Reference APP/G2713/W/23/3315877, paragraph 46).
- 5.43. At Crays Hill, Basildon the Inspector allowed a 25.6MW solar farm in the Green Belt in August 2023 and in so doing applied “very significant weight” to the renewable energy generation and carbon savings (Appeal Reference APP/V1505/W/23/3318171, paragraph 25).
- 5.44. In September 2023 at Sherbourne, a solar farm of about 20MW was also allowed in the Green Belt and the Inspector considered that the proposal would provide a ‘very significant environmental benefit’ given the clear support given to renewable energy development from a number of sources (Appeal Reference APP/T3725/W/23/3317247, paragraph 34).
- 5.45. In November 2023, the Inspector afforded “very significant weight” to renewable energy production at Halse Road, Greatworth in respect of a 49.9 MW solar farm (Appeal Reference APP/W2845/W/23/3315771, paragraph 122).
- 5.46. Most recently Graveley Lane, Hertfordshire the Secretary of State allowed a 49.9MW solar farm and overruled the Inspector and placed “substantial weight” on the developments contribution towards renewable energy generation (Appeal Reference APP/X1925/V/23/3323321, paragraph 18).
- 5.47. In reviewing these appeal decisions, there is very clearly a consistent approach from the Secretary of State and appointed inspectors in determining solar farm appeals over the last two years that either ‘significant’ or ‘substantial’ weight should be given to this benefit.

Conclusion

- 5.48. The site is located within the Oxfordshire Green Belt parcel. It is considered with regards to the sensitive design of the proposed development and the additional landscape mitigation proposed that the actual perceived extent of any harm to the Green Belt is limited, especially in future years as the landscape mitigation develops. This harm should therefore be weighed accordingly alongside the benefits of the proposals, as set out in the wider analysis of the ‘very special circumstances’.
- 5.49. Current Case Law clearly outlines that the provision of renewable energy development can be considered as very special circumstances in the determination of an application. Overall, it is considered that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of the proposal in providing significant generation of clean renewable electricity and carbon displacement. This amounts to a very special circumstance which outweighs the limited impact to the openness of the Green Belt in line with the NPPF.

Agricultural Land Classification

- 5.50. The site in its current use comprises agricultural land. The NPPF outlines that planning policies and decision should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 5.51. Furthermore, Footnote 62 states, *“Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside the other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate.”*
- 5.52. Policy DES7 of the Local Plan states that new development is required to make provision for the effective use and protection of natural resources where applicable, including:
- “vii) avoiding the development of the best and most versatile agricultural land, unless it is demonstrated to be the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives, by first using areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.”*
- 5.53. The accompanying ES Chapter and agricultural land classification report appendices supports this application. As discussed in the accompanying Design and Access Statement, following receipt of the initial survey, the red line boundary and developable area to remove any areas of land considered to form best and most versatile (BMV) land from the scheme. As such, the red line boundary comprises approximately 1 hectare of Grade 2, 1 hectare of Grade 3a and the remaining 55 hectares of Grade 3b.
- 5.54. It is accepted that the proposed development will reduce the arable production when compared to the current use. However, the diversification of the existing farm business will not preclude its use for grazing the site with sheep and therefore retaining agricultural practices alongside solar energy generation. The proposed development will reduce intensive cultivation practices and move towards the establishment of biodiversity or pollinating areas for the duration of the scheme.
- 5.55. As identified within the Site Alternatives Study (Report Ref P21-2947 R003v1), the use of agricultural land to host to proposed development would be unavoidable. As such, this form of development is, with appropriate management, a temporary and reversible proposal.
- 5.56. In a recent Appeal (APP/G2713/W/23/3315887) the Inspector acknowledged that the appeal application would change the use of the land for a period of 40 years. The Inspector acknowledged that apart from the small areas for the fixed infrastructure, the majority of the land would still be used for some agricultural purposes during the 40 year period and that the intention would be returned fully to agricultural use at the end. It was further stated, *“moreover, I am satisfied from the evidence before me that resting the land from intensive agriculture would be likely to improve soil health by increasing the organic matter in the soil and improving soil structure and drainage, even if a return to arable farming would then start to reverse this improvement.”*
- 5.57. The Inspector concluded that, “there would be nothing in planning terms to prevent the farmers using the fields that form the appeal site for the grazing of sheep at present or even leaving them fallow. Given this, the fact that the proposal would limit the ability to carry out

any arable farming does not, in my opinion, mean that it results in the loss of agricultural land when it can still be used for other agricultural uses. Furthermore, current government schemes actually encourage farmers to take land out of production and put it to grass, meadows, or trees for carbon capture."

- 5.58. When considering the benefits arising from solar development, the Inspector stipulated, "In recent years both the Government and the local council have declared an Environmental and Climate Change Emergency. Various recent government publications have highlighted the need to significantly increase generation from onshore wind and solar energy production, as it seeks to ensure that by 2035 all our electricity will come from low carbon sourced. To achieve this ambitious target, it is clear that considerable growth in large scale solar farms will be necessary and this cannot be achieved solely by the use of brownfield land."
- 5.59. As such, whilst the proposed development will result in the temporary loss of agricultural land, this does not comprise land categorised as being best and most versatile (BMV). When considered against the other significant benefits associated with the development, the planning balance makes the harm acceptable in planning terms.
- 5.60. It is therefore considered that the proposed development is in accordance with the relevant national policy and Policy DES7 of the Local Plan.

Landscape and Visual Amenity

- 5.61. The site lies outside of any nationally designated landscape (National Parks, AONBs) and there are no local level landscape designations identified in the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan.
- 5.62. Policy ENV1, Part 2 of the Local Plan states that South Oxfordshire's landscape, countryside and rural areas will be protected against harmful development. Development will only be permitted where it protects and, where possible enhances, features that contribute to the to the nature and quality of South Oxfordshire's landscapes, in particular:
- i. *Trees (including individual trees, groups of trees and woodlands), hedgerows and field boundaries;*
 - ii. *Irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland.*
 - iii. *The landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames, its tributaries and flood plains;*
 - iv. *Other watercourse and water bodies;*
 - v. *The landscape setting of settlements or the special character and landscape setting of oxford;*
 - vi. *Topographical features;*
 - vii. *Areas or features of cultural and historic value;*
 - viii. *Important views and visually sensitive skylines; and*

ix. *Aesthetic and perceptual factors such as tranquillity, wildness, intactness, rarity and enclosure.*"

5.63. Furthermore, Part 4 of this policy states: *"The Council will seek the retention of important hedgerows. Where retention is not possible and a proposal seeks the removal of a hedgerow, the Council will require compensatory planting with a mixture of native hedgerow species."*

5.64. A Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) has been prepared to accompany this planning application and confirms that the scheme can be effectively integrated and assimilated into the surrounding landscape with the adverse effects highly localised to the immediate environs only.

5.65. The LVA outlines that the proposed landscape mitigation forms an integral part of the proposals. Overall, it is concluded the total extent of the landscape and visual effects would be localised and limited in nature and, on balance, the development can be accommodated without undue harm to the character and visual amenity of the landscape.

5.66. The LVA also considers that potential for cumulative landscape and visual effects. In particular, it is noted that in the vicinity of the site, on the opposite side of the A7074 immediately east, there is an approved solar farm, known as South Oxfordshire Solar Farm (Application Reference P20/S4360/FUL), which provides 45MW of renewable energy across an overall area of 123ha. It is considered that the potential for significant cumulative effects would be limited to that part of the landscape where views of both scheme would be available and this is very limited.

5.67. It is therefore considered that the proposed development is consistent with the requirements of Policy EN1 of the Local Plan.

Trees and Landscaping

5.68. The proposed development has been designed to retain existing trees and hedgerows on site, only extending existing gaps in the hedgerows for the purpose of construction access. The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment that concludes that the proposals development is not anticipated to result in any significant long-term negative arboricultural impacts. Perimeter fencing will be installed and protect retained trees and woodland during the construction phase.

Ecology and Biodiversity

5.69. The site is not identified as being located within a designated area for ecology. The closest SSSI (Littlemore Railway Cutting) is located over 2km to the north of the site. It is also noted that Conservation Target Area is located to the west.

5.70. The NPPF also identified that planning policy should identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable gains for biodiversity.

5.71. Policy ENV3 of the Local Plan states:

"1. Development that will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in the district will be supported. All development should provide a net gain in biodiversity where possible. As a minimum , the should be no net loss of biodiversity. All proposals should be supported by

evidence to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain using a recognised biodiversity accounting metric.

...

3. Planning permission will only be granted if impact on biodiversity can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated fully."

- 5.72. The application is supported by an ES Ecology Chapter (Chapter 7) and Net Gain Report (Ref 7886 V2.0). This report summarises the potential ecological constraints to the development. This report concludes that with the successful implementation of the mitigation measures, any adverse effects upon the important ecological features identified will be reduced to a non-significant level.
- 5.73. The Landscape Masterplan (Drawing No P21-2947_EN-100 Rev E) shows the following enhancements including, but not limited to:
- Retention, protection and enhancement of existing trees, hedgerows and woodland with new native tree and hedgerow species where appropriate.
 - Provision of new lengths of native hedgerows, some with native trees, surrounding the Proposed Development;
 - Provision of scattered tree planting adjacent to existing hedgerows;
 - Enhancement of site boundary margins, through proposed species rich grassland in line with ecological requirements;
 - Enhancement of areas underneath solar panels with a species rich grassland suitable for grazing livestock;
 - Existing and proposed native hedgerows managed to a height of 4m or over; and
 - Ongoing landscape management of planting during the lifetime of the solar farm.
- 5.74. The supporting ecological appraisal outlines the biodiversity net gains that can be achieved on site which are significantly more than the required net gains of 10%. The total number of biodiversity units in the proposed layout post development are 85 units of area habitat, 24.83 units of hedgerow and 1.90 watercourse units. This equates to a 70.94% net gain in area habitats, a 61.48% net gain in hedgerow habitats and a 24.32% net gain in watercourse habitats, as a result of the proposed development.
- 5.75. The details of the habitat creation and ongoing management will be set out in a Landscape and Ecology Management (LEMP). This will set out the method used for the habitat creation, their subsequent management and monitoring and how corrective action will be taken. Confirmation of the LEMP is proposed to be subject of a suitable planning condition.
- 5.76. Appropriate offsets from existing features in site have been reflected within the design of the scheme. It is considered that necessary mitigation has been reflected in the scheme.

Where necessary a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) can be conditioned to any planning consent.

5.77. As such, it is demonstrated that the scheme complies with Policy ENV3 of the Local Plan.

Heritage and Archaeology

5.78. There are no designated assets located within the proposed site boundary, however the northern boundary of the proposed development site abuts the identified southern boundary of the Scheduled Monument of Romano-British pottery site, prehistoric ring-ditches and enclosures, including medieval ridge and furrow.

5.79. Located approx. 220m northwest of the site boundary are two grade II listed Lower Farmhouse and Lower Farmhouse Barn Range Approximately 20 metres to East. Located 400m to the south of the site boundary is the Conservation Area of Nuneham Courtenay, a Conservation Area which contains 25 grade II listed buildings and 700m south of the southern boundary of the proposed development is the grade I Registered Park and Garden of Nuneham Courtenay which contains a large number of listed buildings including the grade I and scheduled Carfax Conduit, the grade I Nuneham Courtenay and the grade II* Church of All Saints.

5.80. Policy ENV6 of the Local Plan outlines the approach to the Historic Environment. This policy defines heritage assets including, statutorily designated Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings or structures, Conservation Areas Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields, archaeology of national and local interest and non-designated buildings, structures or historic landscapes that contribute to local historic and architectural interest of the district's historic environment, and also includes those heritage assets listed by the Oxfordshire Historic Environmental Record. Furthermore, it is outlined that new development should be sensitively designed and should not cause harm to the historic environment.

5.81. With specific regard to Listed Buildings, Policy ENV7 outlines at Part 1, that:

"Proposals for development, including change of use, that involve any alterations of, addition to or partial demolition of a listed building or within the curtilage of, or affecting the setting of a listed building will be expected to:

- i) Conserve, enhance or better reveal those elements which contribute to the heritage significance and/or its setting;*
- ii) Respect any features of special architectural or historic interest, including, where relevant, the historic curtilage or context, such as burgage plots, or its value within a group and/ or its setting, such as the importance of a street frontage or traditional shopfronts; and*
- iii) Be sympathetic to the listed building and its setting in terms of its siting, size, scale, height, alignment, materials and finishes (including colour and texture), design and form, in order to retain the special interest that justifies its designation through appropriate design, with regard to the South Oxfordshire Design Guide."*

5.82. Finally, Policy ENV9 relates to archaeology and scheduled monuments. Part 1 of this policy outlines that development must protect the site and setting of Scheduled Monuments or nationally important designated or undesignated archaeological remains. Furthermore,

applicants will be expected to undertake an assessment of appropriate detail to determine whether the development site is known to, or is likely to, contain archaeological remains. Proposals must show the development proposals have had regard to any such remains.

- 5.83. The application is supported by an ES Heritage Chapter (Chapter 8) and associated reports which provide information with regards to the significance of the historic environment and archaeological resource on the site. The report assesses the implications of the scheme on both archaeological potential and built heritage.
- 5.84. As such, it is demonstrated that the scheme complies with Policy ENV6 and ENV7 Part 1 of the Local Plan.

Highways and Transport

- 5.85. During the construction phase, delivery of materials and access will be taken via the A4074. This route has been identified to minimise traffic disruption during construction by avoiding local villages and is supported by an access strategy in consultation with Oxfordshire Highways.
- 5.86. Whilst it is acknowledged that there will be an increase in highway movement during the construction period, it is not anticipated that outside of this time, the proposed development will accrue a high number of trips.
- 5.87. A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been submitted in support of the application. This document sets out the framework for managing movement of traffic associated with the proposed development in order to mitigate against the effects of traffic travelling to and from the site during the construction period. Insert additional details.
- 5.88. During the operation of the proposed development, access to the solar farm will be via the A4074 to the east of the site.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 5.89. Policy EP4 states that the risk and impact of flooding will be minimised through:
- i) *Directing new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding;*
 - ii) *Ensuring that all new development addresses the effective management of all sources of flood risk;*
 - iii) *Ensuring that development does not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere; and*
 - iv) *Ensuring wider environmental benefits of development in relation to flood risk.*
- 5.90. The NPPF outlines at paragraph 173 when determining applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Where appropriate, applications should be supported by a site-specific flood risk assessment.
- 5.91. The site is located within Flood Zone 1, an area identified as being at lowest risk of flooding. Mitigation measures are proposed to help protect the proposed development from surface

water flooding over its lifetime. Mitigation measures include raising the lowest edge of proposed solar panels above proposed flood depths and ensuring vulnerable infrastructure is sequentially located in areas of lowest risk.

- 5.92. The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment (Ref R001v3_IN). It is important to note that although the panels will deflect precipitation, the panels will not increase the impermeable area of the site. The site is not considered to be at significant risk of flooding from any source and access and egress is not predicted to be impeded during an extreme flood event.
- 5.93. In terms of the drainage strategy for the site, it is proposed to retain the existing agricultural drains within the site allowing the site to drain naturally. All access tracks will be permeable and constructed out of gravel or grass reinforcement or would simply be mown path for vehicles to gain access to panels for maintenance. The submitted surface water strategy has been developed to ensure the proposed development does not increase surface water runoff rates and associated flood risk on site and elsewhere.
- 5.94. It is therefore considered that the proposals are in accordance with the relevant requirements of the NPPF and Policy EP4 of the Local Plan.

Noise

- 5.95. Policy ENV12 states at Part 1 that, *“development proposals should be located in sustainable locations and should be designed to ensure that they will not result in significant adverse impacts on human health, the natural environment and/or the amenity of neighbouring uses.”*
- 5.96. Part 3 of this policy further outlines that, *“the consideration of the merits of development proposals will be balanced against the adverse impact on human health, the natural environment and/or local amenity, including the following factors: noise or vibration.”*
- 5.97. The proposed development has sought to locate inverters and the substation at a sufficient distance from the nearest residential receptors. Background noise surveys were undertaken to monitor the existing levels at the nearest noise sensitive receptors. An assessment of the acoustic impact of the proposed development has been undertaken in accordance with BS 4142:2014+A1:2019. At all times during the operation of the proposed development, predicted noise impact is low at residential properties.
- 5.98. Overall, there are no adverse impacts predicted to occur at the nearest residential receptors and is therefore, the proposed development is in accordance with the requirements of Policy ENV12 of the Local Plan.

Other Matters

Glint and Glare

- 5.99. The extent to which the proposed development will have an impact on light sensitive receptors have been assessed within a Glint and Glare report (Ref 11128A). Generally, solar photovoltaic (PV) systems are constructed of dark, light-absorbing material designed to maximise light absorption and minimises reflection.

5.100. This report concludes that there will be no residual glare impacts of the proposed development on residential receptors and road infrastructure receptors. Furthermore, there are no significant impacts upon activity associated with the identified airfields.

Crime Prevention

5.101. RES Ltd will be following the necessary national guidance to ensure the security of the future development site and the infrastructure located within the site's boundary.

5.102. The level of security provided by the proposed fencing is considered generally acceptable and need to be balanced with visual considerations. It is considered that if anything more substantial was to be installed this would not be acceptable visually.

5.103. The CCTV system proposed (as detailed on Figure 13 -04531-RES-SEC-DR-PT-003 Rev 1) will be capable of recording clear images that will meet the standards as set out in the Home Office Publication 28/09 CCTV Operational Requirement Manual 2009 as well as the UK Police Requirement for Digital CCTV Systems 09/05. As such, it is considered that scheme meets the relevant national standards and can be maintained in a manner that will ensure the security of the scheme across the lifetime of the development.

6. PLANNING BALANCE

6.1. To summarise, the above planning assessment has demonstrated the following:

- Notwithstanding the location within the Green Belt, this planning application is in broad compliance with the Development Plan and national planning policy and guidance. Policy compliance strongly support planning permission being granted;
- The development and operation of the solar farm would give rise to a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits which amount to a very substantial weight in favour of planning permission being granted (against what are limited effects);
- The impacts associated with the development at this location are limited, the impacts are suitably mitigated, and the proposal is in compliance with relevant issue specific planning policies in the Development Plan, so do not weight against the development;
- The Site Alternatives Study (Ref R003v1) confirms that there are no alternative available sites which could accommodate the proposals within the study area.

6.2. Whilst it is accepted that the proposal will result in changes to the local environment, such as in terms of visual impact, those changes are not such that would constitute a breach of the policies contained within the Development Plan. This is also the case where any identified harm can be addressed by way of a planning condition, such as matters of landscaping, ecological mitigation and enhancement. This application, as summarised by the planning statement, has demonstrated accordance with policy and is consequently in accordance with guidance contained within the NPPF and NPPG.

6.3. Notwithstanding this accordance with the development, the change to the local environment could be perceived as being harmful, such as impacts upon the Green Belt. This statement has set out the benefits/very special circumstances of the proposal and these are substantial in their weight (particularly in combatting climate change and meeting ambitious targets for renewable energy production). As such, those benefits can be regarded as further supporting the acceptability of Nuneham Solar Farm against the Development Plan or should a more pessimistic view be taken as being capable of outweighing any conflict with the Development Plan (which we do not consider to be).

6.4. The benefits of a solar scheme of this scale can be listed as, but not limited to:

- Increased renewable energy generation, equivalent to provide electricity to assist towards reducing CO₂ emissions per annum.
- Economic benefits associated with investment and support for on-site employment during the construction period and with associated management and maintenance of the scheme.
- Appropriate biodiversity and landscape enhancement via increased boundary planting and species-rich grassland resulting in a gain in biodiversity across the site.
- Reduction in carbon emission has a consequential positive effect upon public health and community benefits, via the reduction in greenhouse gases.

- 6.5. In consideration of compliance with the Development Plan and other planning policy requirements, the significant benefits/very special circumstances associated with the Proposed Development and limited adverse effects, it is clear that this development is, on balance, acceptable in planning terms.
- 6.6. The Proposed Development has been shown to achieve the main objectives of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic) without causing undue detriment to any of these matters. The presumption in favour sustainable development set out in the NPPF there applies here. As the NPPF directs, in such circumstances and where the application complies with the Development Plan, the application should be approved without delay.



7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 7.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of RES Ltd in support of the accompanying application for full planning permission for a solar farm on land at Nuneham Solar Farm.
- 7.2. The proposed development would involve the construction of a ground mounted solar farm with associated works. The solar farm will have a capacity of 49.9MW.
- 7.3. The development supports the UK Government's intention to move to a low carbon economy, which represents a substantial benefit. The impacts of the proposal have been shown to be acceptable and, where necessary mitigation measures have been set out to reduce potential impacts of the proposed development.
- 7.4. The significant benefits/very special circumstances associated with this proposal, primarily through the generation of renewable energy to provide low carbon electricity and a valuable contribution towards meeting the challenging obligations of the Government regarding renewable energy generation, and also in the form of economic investment and ecological and landscape enhancements, are factors which weigh heavily in favour of this development.
- 7.5. This statement therefore demonstrates that, upon considering the following matters, this proposal, on balance falls well within the scope of acceptability:
- Broad compliance with the Development Plan and national planning policy guidance.
 - The significant benefits associated with the scheme; and
 - The relatively benign impacts associated with the development.
- 7.6. Accordingly, this proposal represents sustainable development and, as such, this planning application should be approved without delay.

Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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