5 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 This chapter has been prepared by Pegasus, and a Chartered Landscape Architect. This Supplementary Environmental Information**, Revision B, May 2023** (**SEI, Rev B, May 2023**) chapter assesses the potential effects of the proposed solar development on the existing landscape character, landscape components and visual amenity and should be read in conjunction with other chapters that form the ES; it supersedes Chapter 5: Landscape and Visual Impact of the May 2021 ES **and the SEI prepared in December 2021** as previously submitted.

5.1.2 **For clarity, any changes to the previous judgements and analysis are shown as bold text in the main chapter text which reflects the assessment set out in the relevant appendices. Noting that figure and appendices references, headings, section references and quoted text is already shown in bold.**

5.1.3 **This SEI (Rev B, May 2023) has been prepared to reflect the amendments to the proposals, as illustrated in the Landscape Strategy (Rev E). In summary the minor modifications relate to:**

- **the creation of a new permissive footpath route on land to the west of the site as an alternative route to the retained MacMillan Way. The alternative route will be within the same land ownership as the site running close to the alignment of the existing MacMillan Way but located on the western side of an existing hedgerow;**
- **planting of a new hedgerow along the southern boundary of the site alongside the existing PRoW S29/20;**
- **creation of a biodiversity enhancement area to the north of the site on the triangular parcel of land between the route of the existing MacMillian Way and the new permissive footpath route proposed.**

5.1.4 **The route of the new permissive footpath is shown on Planning Drawing P007005_09_Footpath (Rev C) and the revised Landscape Strategy drawing ref P20-0981_10 (Rev E).**

5.1.5 **This SEI (Rev B, May 2023) should be read in conjunction with the following updated appendices and figures:**

- **Landscape and Visual Impact Methodology (replacing the previous Appendix 5.1)**
- **Landscape Effects Summary Table (replacing the previous Appendix 5.5 and 5.5a)**
- **Visual Effects Summary Table (replacing the previous Appendix 5.6 and 5.6a)**
- **Landscape Strategy (Rev E) (replacing the previous Figure 3.4 and 3.4a)**
- **Photoviews (replacing Figure 5.4)**

5.1.6 **This SEI (Rev B, May 2023) also addresses some inconsistencies in the previous LVIA analysis. Table 5.1 presented in the previous versions of the ES was inconsistent with that presented in Appendix 5.1, and as a result, some of the assessment findings are inconsistent with the methodology in Appendix 5.1. This SEI (Rev B, June 2023) applies the methodology set out in Appendix 5.1 and therefore table 11 in Appendix 5.1 is also duplicated in this chapter. Based on**

this methodology the assessment has been reviewed and updated where appropriate based on the professional judgement of Andrew Cook. (The previous assessment was undertaken by Alison Smith).

5.1.7 **As this EIA development it is appropriate to identify which landscape and visual effects are deemed to be significant. These are clearly identified in the Methodology in Appendix 5.1, noting that any major degree of effect is considered significant whereas all other lower degrees of effect are considered not significant.**

5.1.8 The main objectives of the assessment are as follows:

- Identify, evaluate and describe the current landscape character of the site and its surroundings, and any notable individual landscape elements within the site;
- Determine the sensitivity of the landscape to the type of development proposed;
- Identify potential visual receptors (i.e., people who would be able to see the development) and representative viewpoints, and evaluate their sensitivity to the type of changes proposed;
- Identify and describe any likely effects of the development in so far as they affect landscape elements, landscape character and visual receptors;
- Evaluate the magnitude of change and its significance;
- Identify and integrate any mitigation measures that may help in offsetting or reducing adverse effects; and
- Assess the residual effects upon the identified landscape and visual receptors.

5.1.9 An initial desk-top study was carried out to review published information relating to the Application Site, including planning policy of relevance to landscape and visual matters, landscape designations, published landscape character assessments and the accompanying guidance. A detailed landscape and visual survey, including photography of winter views, was undertaken in January 2021 to review the findings of the desk-top study and to determine the extent of the visual influence of the Application Site. A further site visit was conducted in April 2021 to assess potential cumulative landscape and visual effects.

5.1.10 As described at **Chapter 1 of the ES**, consultation responses regarding the LVIA have been received from Dorset Council, Dorset AONB Partnership, and Natural England. Subsequently, a meeting was held with the above bodies, and it was agreed by all parties that further information would be prepared by the applicant comprising mapping amendments, additional viewpoint assessment/photography, and additional photomontage preparation. Additional site visits were conducted on 13th and 14th October 2021.

5.1.11 This chapter is to be read in conjunction with the supporting figures and appendices as listed in **Contents**.

5.2 ASSESSMENT APPROACH

Methodology

Guidance

5.2.1 The assessment has been undertaken with regard to current best practice, as outlined within published guidance:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (3rd edition) - Landscape Institute/ Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013);
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment - Natural England (2014);
- Visual Representation of Development Proposals – Landscape Institute, Technical Guidance Note 06/19 (TGN06/19); and
- GLVIA Webinar Q&As – Landscape Institute, Technical Information Note 01/21 (TIN 01/21).

5.2.2 A detailed LVIA methodology is presented in **Appendix 5.1 (updated May 2023):** of the ES.

Assessment of Significance

5.2.3 The assessment of significance is based on the methodology described at **ES Chapter 2: Assessment Methodology** and criteria specific to landscape and visual assessment as presented in **Appendix 5.1 (updated May 2023)** of the ES.

5.2.4 The scale of effects is derived from the interaction of the receptor sensitivity and magnitude of change as detailed in the matrix set out in **Table 5.1** and in the ES at **Appendix 5.1 (updated May 2023)**.

5.2.5 **As stated in the introduction it is noted that the Landscape and Visual Effects Significance Matrix table included in the previous version of the ES chapter included an incorrect table within Chapter 5 at Table 5.1. The correct matrix table is included as Appendix 5.1 t to this report and replicated below.**

Table 5.1: Landscape and Visual Effects Significance Matrix

		Sensitivity		
		HIGH	**MEDIUM**	**LOW**
Magnitude of Change	**HIGH**	Major	Major	Moderate
	MEDIUM	Major	Moderate	Minor
	LOW	Moderate	Minor	Minor
	NEGLIGIBLE	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

Nature of Effects

5.2.6 GLVIA3 includes an entry that states "**effects can be described as positive or negative (or in some cases neutral) in their consequences for views and visual amenity**." GLVIA3 does not, however, state how negative or positive effects should be assessed, and this therefore becomes a matter of subjective judgement rather than reasoned criteria. Due to inconsistencies with the assessment of negative or positive effects a precautionary approach is applied to this LVIA that assumes all landscape and visual effects are considered to be negative or adverse unless otherwise stated.

5.2.7 **Those effects assessed as major are considered significant in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) terms, with lower degrees of effect being not significant.**

Legislative and Policy Framework

5.2.8 The purpose of this section is to provide a review of national and local planning policy relating to landscape and visual matters. Planning policy in general is dealt with in the **Planning Statement** that accompanies the planning application, which provides a detailed description of all relevant policies contained within the Development Plan.

5.2.9 The relevant landscape planning policies are detailed within the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Policy Guidance; West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan; Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019 – 2025; and Guidance for Large Scale Solar PV Arrays in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (February 2011).

National Planning Context

5.2.10 The revised NPPF was revised on 20th July 2021 and replaces the previous NPPF published in March 2012, revised in July 2018 and updated in February 2019. It provides one concise document which sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The NPPF promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is defined as "**meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**" (Paragraph 7), providing it is in accordance with the relevant up-to-date Local Plan, as well as policies set out in the NPPF.

5.2.11 A key environmental objective is outlined as "protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land".

5.2.12 The NPPF sets out the governments planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied, at paragraph 10 advises that:

> **"So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development."**

5.2.13 Section 12, Achieving well-designed places, paragraph 127 on page 38 states that:

> **"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:**
>
> **...**
>
> **b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;**
>
> **c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not**

> **preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);**
>
> **d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit…"**

5.2.14 Section 14 Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change paragraph 154 states:

> **"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."**

5.2.15 Section 15, Conserving and enhancing the natural environment, paragraph 170 on page 49 states 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);**
>
> **b) 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, and of trees and woodland…**
>
> **d) minimising impacts and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures…**
>
> **f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate."**

5.2.16 Section 15, Conserving and enhancing the natural environment, paragraph 171 on page 49 states that:

> **"Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies of this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green**

> **infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries."**

5.2.17 Paragraph 172 advises that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest; this planning balance is discussed further in the **Planning Statement** that accompanies the planning application.

5.2.18 Designations within, or close to the Application Site are illustrated at **Figure 3.2: Environmental Designations Plan**.

Planning Practice Guidance

5.2.19 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides further advice to the NPPF in relation to developments. The section 'Design' refers to the local character in townscape and landscape **"...reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, local man-made and natural heritage and culture."** It also refers to landscape features such as landform but also views in and out. The section 'Natural Environment' also refers to landscape elements and landscape character putting more emphasis on protected trees and landscapes such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Local Planning Context

5.2.20 Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning decisions should be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Application Site is within the administrative boundaries of Dorset Council.

West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan (Adopted October 2015)

5.2.21 Dorset Council (the 'Council') is the determining local planning authority. The statutory Development Plan comprises the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan (Adopted October 2015), which provides a planning strategy for the area from 2011 to up to 2031 (see the **Planning Statement** that accompanies the planning application).

5.2.22 The proposed development is located in open countryside, outside of defined settlement boundaries. Policy SUS 2 Distribution of Development seeks to strictly control / restrict development located in open countryside, outside of those exceptions listed in Part III of this policy. Proposals for the generation of renewable energy are listed under Part III as one of the uses / exception categories that are considered compatible with a countryside location.

5.2.23 The Application Site lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; it is not subject to any other statutory or non-statutory landscape designations (see **Figure 3.2**). The proposed development has a been reviewed against the online policies map[1] as well as relevant development management policies. Local policies with relevance to landscape and visual resources are summarised in **Table 5.2** below.

Table 5.2 Local plan policies with relevance to Landscape and Visual

1 Available at https://mapping.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/map

Policy	Policy text
ENV 1. LANDSCAPE, SEASCAPE AND SITES OF GEOLOGICAL INTEREST	This policy states that: *"i) The plan area's exceptional landscapes and seascapes and geological interest will be protected, taking into account the objectives of the Dorset AONB Management Plan and World Heritage Site Management Plan. Development which would harm the character, special qualities or natural beauty of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Beauty or Heritage Coast, including their characteristic landscape quality and diversity, uninterrupted panoramic views, individual landmarks, and sense of tranquillity and remoteness, will not be permitted.* *ii) Development should be located and designed so that it does not detract from and, where reasonable, enhances the local landscape character. Proposals that conserve, enhance and restore locally distinctive landscape features will be encouraged. Where proposals relate to sites where existing development is of visually poor quality, opportunities should be taken to secure visual enhancements. Development that significantly adversely affects the character or visual quality of the local landscape or seascape will not be permitted.* *iii) Appropriate measures will be required to moderate the adverse effects of development on the landscape and seascape…"*
ENV 10. THE LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE SETTING	This policy states that: *"• All development proposals should contribute positively to the maintenance and enhancement of local identity and distinctiveness. Development should be informed by the character of the site and its surroundings.* *• Development will provide for the future retention and protection of trees and other features that contribute to an area's distinctive character. Such features may not always be designated or otherwise formally recognised.* *• Development should only be permitted where it provides sufficient hard and soft landscaping to successfully integrate with the character of the site and its surrounding area.* *• Opportunities to incorporate features that would enhance local character, including public art, or that relate to the historical, ecological or geological interest of a site, should be taken where appropriate."*
COM11. RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT	This policy states that: *"Proposals for generating heat or electricity from renewable energy sources (other than wind energy) will be allowed wherever possible providing that the benefits of the development, such as the contribution towards renewable energy targets, significantly outweigh any harm. In addition, permission will only be granted provided:* *• any adverse impacts on the local landscape, townscape or areas of historical interest can be satisfactorily assimilated;* *• the proposal minimises harm to residential amenity by virtue of noise, vibration, overshadowing, flicker, or other detrimental emissions, during construction, its operation and decommissioning;* *• adverse impacts upon designated wildlife sites, nature conservation interests, and biodiversity are satisfactorily mitigated*."

5.2.24 The supporting text of Policy 10 at Para 2.5.6 states that:

> **"The design and layout of proposals should have regard to the landscape and townscape setting of the site and effectively integrate new development (including any servicing or infrastructure requirements) into its surroundings. Development proposals should provide for the retention of existing trees and any other features of merit where their removal would harm the character and enjoyment of the site or surrounding area. An allowance should be made for any likely future growth of natural features and trees. To protect natural features in residential developments, these should be incorporated into the public domain rather than private gardens. Trees to be retained should be appropriately protected throughout construction. If the loss of trees is unavoidable, replacement trees of equivalent landscape, amenity and wildlife value should be planted and maintained. Where new planting is needed, native species that are indigenous to the locality are usually preferred, to be in keeping with the local landscape character and provide greater wildlife benefit. Any proposed planting schemes will be expected to commence no later than the next available planting season following implementation of the development. Details and method statements for achieving this should be submitted as part of a design statement or landscape plan."**

5.2.25 Details of the existing tree and hedgerow retention and proposed native hedgerow and grassland seed mixes are presented on **Figure 3.4: Landscape Planting Plan** and at **Appendix 3.3: Landscape and Environmental Management Plan (LEMP)**. A **Design and Access Statement** also accompanies the planning application.

Dorset AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2025

5.2.26 The Dorset AONB Management Plan (the 'Management Plan') sets out the 'Special Qualities' of the Dorset AONB as:

- Contrast and diversity
- Wildlife of national and international significance
- A living textbook and historical record of rural England
- A rich legacy of cultural associations

5.2.27 Planning for landscape quality is described at section 9.3 of the Management Plan, with objectives and policies (C1, C2, C3, and C4) set out at 9.3.4.

5.2.28 Policy C1: The AONB and its setting is conserved and enhanced by good planning and development. The following supporting paragraphs are of relevance to the proposed development:

> **"a. Support development that conserves and enhances the AONB, ensuring sensitive siting and design respects local character. Development that does not conserve and enhance the AONB will only be supported if it is necessary and in the public interest. Major development decisions need to include detailed consideration of relevant exceptional circumstances.**
>
> **b. The conservation, enhancement and creation/restoration of appropriate landscape features such as landmarks, artworks, boundary features, tree clumps etc, will be regarded favourably.**

> **There should be a net gain in terms of the landscape and its constituent elements.**
>
> **c. … When the landscape and visual effects of a development cannot be fully addressed through primary design measures, appropriate and robust secondary mitigation measures that can be delivered, enforced and maintained will be required.**
>
> **d. Developments will be required to make a positive contribution to the overall green infrastructure and ecological networks. All aspects of green infrastructure, e.g. sustainable drainage, also require good design that respects local character and must also make an appropriate contribution to landscape ecology. The net result of these contributions should be landscape gain…**
>
> **h. The landward and seaward setting of the AONB will be planned and managed in a manner that conserves and enhances the character and appearance of the AONB. Views into and out of the AONB and non-visual effects, such as noise and wider environmental impacts, will be appropriately assessed."**

5.2.29 Policy C2: Landscape assessment and monitoring is effective and supports good decision-making. The following supporting paragraphs are of relevance to the proposed development:

> **"a. Proposals affecting the AONB will be assessed to a high standard.**
>
> **b. Landscape and seascape character assessment will be used to consider the effects of proposals on the character and appearance of the AONB…**
>
> **d. The key test of a proposal against the statutory purpose of the AONB will be its ability to demonstrate that the proposed change would conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty…**
>
> **e. The conservation and enhancement of the AONB's special qualities will be a significant consideration in the planning balance.**
>
> **f. Proposals that are harmful to the character and appearance of the area will not be permitted unless there are benefits that clearly outweigh the significant protection afforded to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. Where impacts cannot be mitigated, planning gain and compensatory measures will be considered…"**

5.2.30 Policy C3: Necessary development is supported; the following supporting paragraphs are of relevance to the proposed development:

> **"a. Support appropriate farm diversification schemes, particularly where these contribute to the conservation, enhancement and sustainable development of the AONB…**
>
> **f. Support renewable energy production where compatible with the objectives of AONB designation…"**

5.2.31 Policy C4: Development which has negative effects on the natural beauty of the AONB, its special qualities, ecosystem flows, and natural processes is avoided. The following supporting paragraphs are of relevance to the proposed development:

> **"a. Remove existing and avoid creating new features which are detrimental to landscape character, tranquillity, and the AONB's special qualities…**
>
> **c. Protect and where possible enhance the quality of views into, within and out of the AONB.**
>
> **d. Protect the pattern of landscape features, including settlements, that underpin local identity.**
>
> **e. Avoid and reduce the impacts of development on biodiversity. Require development to follow the hierarchy of avoid, mitigate and compensate and to achieve a net gain for biodiversity…"**

Guidance for Large Scale Solar PV Arrays (2011)

5.2.32 The Dorset AONB Partnership Board approved the 'Guidance for Large Scale Solar Arrays in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' in February 2011. The Guidance was prepared in response to enquiries for such schemes and was written in the context of the prevailing planning policy which have since been superseded and government subsidies have been withdrawn; the Guidance has not been formally adopted as policy by the Local Planning Authorities (LPA) that comprise the AONB Partnership.

5.2.33 The preamble states that such applications will be subject to rigorous examination and any applications for large scale solar will be expected to clearly demonstrate that the objectives of the designation will not be compromised by the development. The preamble also recognises that large scale solar can make a valuable contribution to renewable energy production.

5.2.34 The Guidance sets out the context for considering large scale solar development and accompanying information presented in an Environmental Impact Assessment (if deemed so by the LPA) and a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to be prepared in accordance with best practice guidelines. The requirement for cumulative impact assessment of proposed solar PV arrays in combination with existing and approved energy development should also be provided.

5.2.35 With regard to mitigation and enhancement it states:

> **"mitigation measures should be considered as an integral part of the development; they should adequately offset any adverse landscape and visual effects and be appropriate to the local landscape character. The mitigation and reduction of some adverse impacts can be achieved through considered detail design…"**

5.2.36 It continues:

> **"Enhancements should be linked to mitigation measures where appropriate and should seek to maintain and improve the value and condition of the landscape and contribute to local distinctiveness. For example the development of Solar PV facilities offer the potential to create sites of local or regional ecological interest, particularly where land is removed from intensive agricultural production. Developers will be expected to**

> **maximise the ecological potential offered by such circumstances by;**
>
> **Avoiding areas of ecological importance or sensitivity;**
>
> **Encouraging and promoting a diverse range of habitats, such as wildflower meadows, within such facilities;**
>
> **Designing and adapting built structures, such as control buildings, to encourage and promote access by nesting, roosting or hibernating animals such as bats."**

5.2.37 The need of a considered scheme of management beneath the solar panels is also described, noting that grazing by sheep, chickens or geese should be acceptable. Whilst the now withdrawn Feed in Tariff period of 25 years is mentioned, it still stands that the:

> **"...developments should normally be regarded as temporary and hence the need for 'reversibility', and the ability for all structures to be removed and the land returned to its original use. A restoration strategy should demonstrate how the site will be returned to a state that is in keeping with local character and in good condition."**

5.2.38 The Guidance then sets out a series of design considerations for elements of the development that should be clearly indicated in the planning application and LVIA:

- Ground Works – significant alteration of the existing landform will not be encouraged.
- Access Tracks – Installation and use of access tracks to be kept to an absolute minimum.
- Security Fencing and CCTV – Any necessary security measures should be of minimal landscape and visual impact. Consideration should be given for the minimal length and height of security fencing, natural features such as hedgerows should be used to assist in site security and/or screen security fencing.
- Lighting – Any necessary lighting should be kept to a minimum.
- Ground Anchors – Due to the temporary nature of the development, trenching and foundations such as concrete should be avoided to assist the restoration of the site once the installation is removed. Solar PV arrays should be installed using 'pile' driven or screw foundations and capable of easy removal.
- Tracking – Static solar PV arrays do not move and are less expensive and easier to maintain however they are not as efficient as "Trackers".
- Reflection – Solar panels are designed to absorb, not reflect, irradiation. However, the sensitivities associated with glare, and the landscape/visual impact, and the impact on aircraft and wildlife safety should not be underestimated. The cumulative reflective quality of all materials used in the construction of solar farms, to include PV panels, frames and supports, should be assessed.

Compliance with Planning Policy and Guidance

5.2.39 The proposed development is to be located within the Dorset AONB which is a valued landscape (NPPF paragraph 170a). Great weight should be given to conserving and

enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB which is afforded the highest status of protection in the hierarchy of landscape designations (NPPF paragraph 172).

5.2.40 The primary purpose of the AONB status to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty is reiterated in regional and local planning policy (Dorset AONB Management Plan policies C1, C2, C3 and C4; Local Plan policies ENV1, ENV10 and COM11). These policies do however recognise that in exceptional circumstances, some development that may not fully achieve these aims may still proceed if it is necessary and in the public interest.

5.2.41 The proposed development has been sensitively sited and designed by locating the development in such a position where the number of potential receptors is limited; where views of the full extent of the solar arrays are minimised; by limiting the proposed height of development; by maintaining PROW on existing alignments in protected corridors; by retention and enhancement of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees that screen the site and maintain field patterns that contribute to local character; by establishing grassland, a wildflower meadow, and nature conservation features for the lifetime of the proposed development; and by managing existing and proposed hedgerows, trees, grassland and meadow in such a way as to make a positive contribution to the overall green infrastructure and ecological networks of this part of the AONB.

5.2.42 With respect to Special Qualities of the AONB, the first Special Quality 'Contrast and diversity' is of particular relevance to this LVIA. Some of the features that comprise this Special Quality were emphasised by the Dorset Council's Senior Landscape Architect (DCSLA) Consultation Comments of 14th September 2020 (**Appendix 5.2**) in the context of the proposed development, namely:

- **"…Uninterrupted panoramic views to appreciate the complex pattern and textures of the surrounding landscapes…**
- **Tranquillity and remoteness…**
- **Undeveloped rural character…."**

5.2.43 The proposed development will introduce a new element in to the landscape and would be visible in whole or part from a limited area of the AONB in proximity to the application site, affecting receptors that include a limited number of residential properties, and limited extents of public rights of way, Open Access Land, and roads. Overall, the existing features of the landscape and views will prevail as it has been sited and restricted in elevation and height so as to maintain uninterrupted panoramic views within the AONB.

5.2.44 The solar farm would represent development within a rural setting that affects tranquillity, but this effect would be very localised and limited to visual perceptions as the proposed operational development would not generate any noise, air or odour emissions.

5.2.45 Dorset AONB 'Guidelines for Large Scale Solar PV Arrays' notes the following which would be delivered by the proposed development **"…the development of Solar PV facilities offer the potential to create sites of local or regional ecological interest, particularly where land is removed from intensive agricultural production…**"

5.2.46 In the context of the AONB as a whole, the proposed development would have a relatively localised and time-limited effect upon the landscape. Overall, it is considered that the effects on views and landscape character arising from the Proposed Development may be **adverse** during the lifetime of the scheme; this effect has been minimised by careful siting and design of the development and through proposed mitigation and management measures. The proposed development would however retain existing landscape pattern, scale, structure and characteristic features, and importantly, it is fully reversible (apart from the DNO substation) and so would not adversely affect the landscape character of the AONB in perpetuity.

5.2.47 These limited effects are to be considered and weighed in the context of planning policy and sustainable energy generation and public benefits arising from the proposed development; that balance is beyond the scope of the LVIA and is discussed in the **Planning Statement** that accompanies the planning application.

5.2.48 The significance of the localised effects upon the landscape character and visual amenity of the AONB are described and assessed in the LVIA.

Consultations

5.2.49 The proposed development has been subject to pre-application consultation with Dorset Council, and a consultation response was subsequently received from Dorset Council's Senior Landscape Architect DCSLA dated 14th September 2020 and included at **Appendix 5.2**. Ongoing correspondence with the DCSLA has included identification and agreement of representative viewpoints to be assessed by the LVIA.

Scoping Criteria

5.2.50 The proposed development has been subject to Screening under the EIA Regulations as described at paragraph 1.2.4 of **ES Chapter 1: Introduction**. Dorset Council concluded in its Opinion that the proposed development has the potential for significant landscape and visual effects on the Dorset AONB and so an ES was required that assesses landscape and visual effects. The above consultations have been used to guide the scope of the EIA and LVIA which considers the following potential effects:

- Construction Phase – landscape elements and features;
- Construction Phase – character of the local landscape;
- Construction Phase – night-time character;
- Construction Phase – change in views (3 months);
- Operational Phase – landscape elements and features;
- Operational Phase – character of the local landscape;
- Operational Phase – night-time character;
- Operational Phase – change in views at Year 1 and Year 15, particularly as experienced by users of nearby Public Rights of Way (PROW) and existing residential properties within the vicinity of the Application Site; and
- Cumulative Effects.

Limitations to the Assessment

5.2.51 In undertaking the landscape and visual assessment in relation to the Proposed Development, there are limitations and constraints affecting the outputs from this work. These include:

- The baseline assessment has been based on information readily available at the time of undertaking the assessment.
- The ZTV does not demonstrate absolute visibility and is therefore refined through field work with the assessed potential visibility of the Development;
- During site visits, weather conditions, the time of day and seasonal factors have influenced the visual assessment and photographic record of the site. Every effort has been made to ensure that the photographs and their locations are representative of the variety of receptors and views from a range of distances and directions as appropriate.
- The assessment of operational effects at Year 1 assumes winter conditions, unless otherwise stated. Winter baseline views (Viewpoints) illustrating

deciduous trees out of leaf, were recorded in January 2021. The assessment of residual effects at Year 15 assumes summer conditions.

- Access to assess the predicted visual effects from private individual properties outside the Application Site has not been obtained. As a result, the assessment of likely effects of residential areas has been made from vantage points with representative views taken from the nearest available public viewpoint. GLVIA 3 (Paragraph 6.17) suggests that effects of development on visual amenity are dealt with separately from the LVIA as a 'Residential Amenity Assessment'. This level of assessment is not appropriate in the context of the proposed development and its setting and has not been part of the scope of this chapter.

5.2.52 The assessed development at Year 1 is based on the drawings that accompany the EIA as presented at **ES Chapter 3: Application Site and Proposed Development**, **Figures 3.1-3.4**. The development at Year 15 is assessed on the assumption that the Proposed Development is delivered in line with these drawings and estimated conservative growth of existing and proposed mitigation planting.

5.2.53 The focus of this chapter is on landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development; however, whilst effects on cultural heritage and ecology are beyond the scope of this chapter, heritage assets and nature conservation designations in the study area are shown on **Figure 3.2**. The planning application is accompanied by a **Heritage Statement** and an **Ecological Assessment Report with Biodiversity Management Plan**.

5.3 BASELINE CONDITIONS

Site Description and Context

5.3.1 This section identifies and describes the existing landscape features, and landscape and visual resource found within and around the Application Site. This study helps to gain an understanding of what makes the landscape distinctive, what its important components or characteristics are, and how it is changing prior to the introduction of the Proposed Development. The baseline study is instrumental in identification of the landscape receptors and visual receptors / views to be assessed. This chapter should be read in conjunction with the site description and context as set out in **Chapter 3** of the ES.

Landscape Elements and Features

Landscape and Environmental Designations

5.3.2 The Site lies within the Dorset Downs AONB; it is not subject to any other statutory or non-statutory landscape or environmental designations, (refer to **Figure 1.1 Site Location** and **Figure 3.2: Environmental Designations Plan**).

5.3.3 With regard to nearby heritage designations, there are no Conservation Areas or Scheduled Monuments within 1km of the Site. Three Grade II and one Grade II* Listed buildings occur within Cruxton, the closest of which is c.620m to the north of the Site.

Topography and Land Form

5.3.4 The chalk plateau of the Dorset Downs has been heavily incised and weathered to form a complex undulating topography of dry combes and valleys, with occasional

watercourses (see **Figure 5.1: Topography Plan**). The Site lies on the western watershed of the River Frome with spurs of incised land oriented toward the River. A series of four ridges fan out from high ground to the southwest of the Site (at c.225m AOD, c.2.8km away) toward the Frome Valley, of which the Site occupies one of these intermediate spurs at c.184m AOD to 140m AOD (see **Appendix 3.1: Topographic Survey**). The highest level of the intermediate spur to the north is c.185m AOD, and those to the south are at c.180m to c.175m AOD.

5.3.5 Landform to the east of the River Frome broadly mirrors that to the west, but the higher ground forms a series of narrower ridgelines between the River Frome, Sydling Water, and Sydling Water and the River Cerne. The A37 tends to follow the ridgeline immediately to the east of the River Frome, rising to Break Heart Hill at 233m AOD about 2km to the northeast of Maiden Newton.

5.3.6 The topography and land form are of medium value and susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a medium sensitivity overall.

Land Use and Land Cover

5.3.7 The Site occupies the majority of two unevenly shaped, but geometric agricultural fields bound by straight hedgerows and arranged in a northeast-southwest orientation on a northeast to east-facing slope. The northern field is broadly rectilinear, save for a missing 'notch' in the northeast corner. It measures approximately 340m east-west, and between 270m and 167m north-south. The southern field is of a geometric but irregular shape, narrowing diagonally from c.280m east-west in its northern fifth, to c.126m east-west in its southern two-fifths; it measures approximately 530m north-south.

5.3.8 At the time of survey, the lower lying, more steeply sloping northern field is laid to pasture and has historically been used for game rearing with temporary shelters and pens; the higher, gently sloping southern field is in arable use. The fields are medium in scale and field boundaries are (including the boundary that divides the two fields) formed of native hedgerows (see **Appendix 3.2: Arboricultural Survey Report**); frequent hedgerow trees lie along the eastern boundary. A small rectangular copse lies adjacent to the eastern part of the northern boundary, and a small copse at the southern end of the western boundary encircles the site of the former Grove's Barn (Grove's Barn Copse).

5.3.9 Land outside of the settlements along the eastern and western flanks of the Frome valley beyond the Site are in mixed agricultural use, creating a mosaic of pasture and arable. Field sizes range from small to medium scale and are generally rectilinear, although more organic, curvilinear field shapes occur in response to steeper land and/or watercourses. Field boundaries are predominantly enclosed by hedgerows, which often contain a scattering of hedgerow trees. Frequent steep-sided incised dry combes occur, defined or subdivided by post-and-wire fencing to control grazing livestock; this steep-sided land is frequently designated as Open Access Land.

5.3.10 Tree cover is present around or associated with the settlements and isolated properties to provide shelter.

5.3.11 Woodland on the high ground in the immediate vicinity of the Site tends to be restricted to hangers to the west (in the vicinity of Chammen's Hill, Blanchard's Plantation, Collin's Wood), east/northeast (Maiden Newton Coppice/Parson's Coppice, Hog Cliff Bottom), and south (Notton Bottom, Lanchard's Plantation). Intermittent riparian tree belts occur along the floor of the Frome Valley to the northeast. Larger woodlands and commercial forestry plantations (south of Roman Road and Wynford Wood area) occupy high ground to the southwest. No Ancient Woodland occurs within 1km of the Site (refer to **Figure 3.2**).

5.3.12 Within the landscape surrounding the Site well-established hedgerows are common enclosing the generally rectilinear fields or reflecting notable changes in landform.

5.3.13 The quality and condition of the land use **and land cover** is good and considered to be of medium value and susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a medium sensitivity overall.

5.3.14 The quality and condition of the trees and hedgerows is fair to good, and they are considered to be of medium value and susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a medium sensitivity overall.

Settlements, Built Form and Infrastructure

5.3.15 Dorchester forms the nearest principal settlement about 8km to the southeast. Clustered or linear villages and hamlets lie along the A356 Dorchester to Crewkerne road and the A37 Dorchester to Yeovil road which tend to follow the floor of the Frome Valley bottom or the ridgelines to the either side; a Great Western rail line known as the 'Heart of Wessex Line' also follows the Frome Valley, linking Castle Carey and Weymouth.

5.3.16 Maiden Newton is c.1.5km to the north, Cruxton is c.500m to the north-northeast, Notton is c.1km to the northeast, Frampton is c.2.1km to the east, and Stratton is c.4.9km to the southeast. Settlement is sparse beyond the Frome Valley comprising isolated farmsteads and hamlets that are scattered across the landscape, including Frome Vauchurch Farm to the north, Hog Cliff Farm 2.5km to the northeast, Hyde Crook 2.3km to the east (including large-scale intensive piggeries with associated tall silos, 1.2km and 1.8km), Notton Hill Barn (280m) and Longlands Farm (including 20m high telecoms tower, 1.8km) to the southeast, and Greenford Farm 700m to the west.

5.3.17 Built form within the Site comprises a semi-derelict open sided barn adjacent to the access track to the northwest, and temporary game rearing shelters that are moved around the farm.

5.3.18 Elsewhere beyond the main roads and infrastructure, the landscape surrounding the Site is crossed by multiple minor and single-track roads.

5.3.19 The field to the north of the Site is crossed by an overhead power line (OHL) supported on wooden poles which connects to an extensive network that criss-crosses the surrounding countryside. Large scale 400kV electricity pylons traverse the landscape c. 3.5km to the south of the Site, north of the A35 Dorchester to Axminster road.

5.3.20 Maiden Newton Sewage Treatment Works is set within Longcombe Botton to the southeast of the settlement adjacent to the railway line and an agricultural machinery storage yard.

5.3.21 The quality and condition of built form within the Site poor and is considered to be of low value and susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a low sensitivity overall.

Public Rights of Way and Open Access Land

5.3.22 Two Public Rights of Way (PRoW) which form part of the Macmillan Way long distance promoted footpath are located within the fields within which the Site lies but would be outside of the Site boundary as illustrated on **ES Figure 3.1** and **Landscape Strategy (Rev E)**. PRoW footpath S29/19 runs parallel and outside of the western Site boundary, from Cruxton Farm, extending south beyond the Site toward bridleway S61/4; footpath S29/20 connects to S29/19 to the southwest of the Site and runs parallel and outside of the southern boundary toward Notton Hill Barn to the southeast.

5.3.23 The presence of promoted PROW within or in close proximity to the Site, their quality and condition is good, and they are considered to be of high value and susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a high sensitivity overall.

5.3.24 There is a comprehensive network of PRoW across the landscape surrounding the Site comprising a combination of footpaths, bridleways and other routes that connect the various villages, hamlets and farmsteads. In addition to the Macmillan Way, promoted long distance footpath include the Wessex Ridgeway and Hardy Way to the north of Maiden Newton, and the Jubilee Trail to the west of Greenford Lane.

5.3.25 Frequent pockets of Open Access Land (OAL) to which there is a public right of access without being restricted to defined paths, occur across the landscape, primarily occupying steep-sided dry combes and hangers that are fenced and grazed by sheep or cattle. The closest of these to the Site include Notton Bottom 480m to the east, and land east of Greenford Farm 290m to the west. Hog Cliff Nature Reserve (2.0km), Hog Cliff Bottom (1.3km), Langcombe Bottom (1.5km), Castle Hill (4.0km) east of the River Frome, and other unnamed OAL occurs to the east and northeast of Maiden Newton (distance from the Site varies from 1.8km, 2.3km, 2.6km 2.9km, to 3.8km).

Watercourses and Drainage

5.3.26 The River Frome forms the primary watercourse in the vicinity of the Site, flowing northwest to southeast, northeast of the Site. Tributaries of the Frome include Toller Brook (1.9km)/River Hooke (4.1km) to the north; Sydling Water (3.3km) and the River Cerne (6.3km) to the east of the A37; an unnamed watercourse that flows eastward from Compton Valence to the south; and unnamed watercourse 1.6km to the west (which flows through Wynford Eagle).

5.3.27 There are no water bodies or watercourses within or adjacent to the Site; the susceptibility and sensitivity of water bodies and watercourse is therefore considered to be of low sensitivity to the Proposed Development.

Landscape Character and Designations

5.3.28 It is accepted that there may be some localised variations in characteristics and transitional zones within and identified LCA. The location and extent of identified LCAs is illustrated on **Figure 5.3: Landscape Character Plan**, which is overlaid with the screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) to identify the LCAs that have potential visibility (potential indirect effect) with the operational solar farm area. The landscape character assessment, presented in **Section 5.4** provides further information and evidence, where necessary.

National Character Areas of England

5.3.29 The National Character Area (NCA) profiles, produced by Natural England, provide a broad range of information including an outline of the key characteristics of a given area, description of the ecosystem services provided and how these relate to people, wildlife and the economy, and an array of opportunities for positive environmental change.

5.3.30 The Application Site and study area is within NCA 134: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase (**Appendix 5.3: NCA134 Extracts**).

NCA 134 Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase

5.3.31 Key characteristics considered relevant to this Site and appraisal include (NCA134, page 6):

- **"North-west to south-east transition through dramatic scarps, plateaux, rolling chalk upland, and a gentle but expansive dip slope – all dissected by often steep-sided, sheltered valleys and coombes…**
- **Semi-natural ancient woodlands, with large coups of hazel coppice, and the deer parks of Cranborne Chase, clothe the undulations of the dip slope. Prominent planted shelterbelts and hill-top clumps of beech, oak and ash emphasise and reinforce the simple but expansive geometry of the high downland…**
- **Very large fields, resulting from the enclosure of downland for sheep and corn that took place between the 16th and 19th centuries. Changes during the 20th century have resulted in an intensively arable agricultural landscape.**
- **An intimate and older (often medieval in origin) enclosed, mixed-farming landscape of smaller, often hedgerow-bounded fields is found in the valleys and combes, and around the formally landscaped estate parklands…**
- **Isolated farmsteads punctuate the highest downland areas, contrasting with closely spaced, linear villages and hamlets close to water along the valley bottoms or at the foot of the combes and scarp, along the springline."**

5.3.32 Relevant landscape opportunities for NCA 134 include (NCA 134, page 43):

- **"Ensure that the essential character of the landforms and processes underpinning the character of this NCA are protected from developments and/or land use changes that will compromise their contribution to the landscape.**
- **Manage and, where necessary, restore the existing suite of semi-natural calcareous grasslands and the important associated habitats found within and around them. Increase the resilience of these sites to environmental changes by creating new semi-natural calcareous grasslands (and associated habitats) that extend, buffer and link them…**
- **Work with land managers to better understand and manage the soils of the NCA. Seek to enhance their structure and organic content where this has been damaged or degraded, devise practical solutions to issues such as compaction, erosion and run-off…**
- **Work with the protected landscapes of the Dorset AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB to help meet the ambitions of their management plans."**

5.3.33 As noted, this NCA covers an extensive geographical area averaging c. 20km width that extends c.70km length (i.e., c.1,400 sq.km) from Bridport in Dorset to Salisbury in Wiltshire. The study area displays some, but not all of the defining characteristics of NCA134, such as dramatic landform and the upland plateau with steep sided valleys and coombes; prominent hill top woodlands; hedgerow-enclosed fields in mixed agricultural use; and isolated farmsteads contrasting with linear villages.

5.3.34 The overall value is considered to be high. A high susceptibility has been assessed due to the Application Site being within the AONB, resulting in a high sensitivity although a very small area would potentially be affected.

Dorset AONB Landscape Character Assessment

5.3.35 The Dorset AONB Landscape Character Assessment Map is published online by Dorset AONB Partnership at https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/resources/landscape-character-assessment/ and draws in part on the earlier Dorset LCA 2009. The Dorset AONB Partnership comprises c.20 statutory and non-statutory bodies.

5.3.36 The Dorset AONB LCA identifies the Site and study area as falling wholly within Chalk Upland and Valleys - Upper Frome Valley - Chalk Valley & Downland landscape character type (LCT). Key characteristics include:

- **"A series of broad, undulating valleys with associated chalk streams with surrounding expansive open uplands**
- **Fine panoramic views afforded by distinct linear ridgelines running through the area, enabling appreciation of the structure of the farmed downland**
- **Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk with outcrops of greensand**
- **Shallow valley slopes with patches of acid and neutral grassland and many small broadleaved woodlands and relic hazel coppice**
- **Clear chalk streams with floodplains supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, cress beds and rough damp meadows and rush pasture**
- **Winding rural lanes with dense hedge banks along the valley floor with a series of scattered clustered and linear villages and hamlets of stone, brick and flint, thatch and cob, which along with parkland landscapes with veteran trees, railings, flint walls and country houses along the valley floors, contribute to the area's rich historic and built heritage**
- **Smaller scale pastures and fields patterns on valley floors with species rich dense hedgerows, small broadleaved woodlands and hedgerow trees**
- **Large, straight-sided arable and pastoral fields of late 18th/early 19th century enclosures with trimmed hazel hedgerows, with post & wire on chalk uplands**
- **Undeveloped rural character, with a sense of seclusion and tranquillity. Modern development and intrusive features have limited impact and the area has largely maintained its dark night skies and traditional character, although modern farming practices and development have affected parts of the area."**

5.3.37 Landscape Guidelines are stated as:

> **"The overall management aim should be to conserve the strong pattern of existing features, whilst restoring woodlands and meadows, chalk grasslands and boundary features. To maintain undeveloped rural character, careful consideration should be given to the design of developments such as settlement extensions and large agricultural barns. Sensitive siting and tailored landscaping measure should be pursued. Indirect effects arising from farm diversification and intensification should be considered, particularly where widespread changes to landscape management may arise."**

5.3.38 Stated planning guidelines of relevance to the Site and proposed development include:

- **"Conserve and enhance the distinctive undeveloped character of the open downland landscape and the long ranging views especially from roads, Rights of Ways and key viewpoints…**
- **Ensure farm diversification projects do not have a negative impact of local character…**
- **Ensure new agricultural dwellings, barns and structures enhance the local character, are located to reduce their impact on open views and adopt design measures to reduce their perceived scale. Encourage the restoration of traditional barns and farm buildings and consider the replacement of lower quality structures when planning for expansion…**
- **Ensure appropriate siting and design for essential infrastructure, such as water and electricity, integrating any required developments into the rural landscape, securing appropriate mitigation and delivering visual enhancements where possible…"**

5.3.39 The LCT is described as having a strong landscape character that is in good condition and stable; it is therefore considered to be in good condition and is within the Dorset AONB. The value overall is considered to be high. A high susceptibility has been assessed due to the Application Site being within the AONB, resulting in a high sensitivity.

5.3.40 Three other LCAs identified within the Dorset AONB Landscape Character Assessment that, as illustrated on Figure 5.2, have potential intervisibility with the Application Site include:

- Cerne and Sydling Valley – Chalk Valley and Downland;
- Dorchester Downs – Open Chalk Downland; and
- Frome Valley Pasture - Valley Pasture.

5.3.41 Each of these LCAs has been reviewed during site survey work (see 5.1.3) and no intervisibility was identified due to intervening vegetation (including the boundary trees and hedgerows of the Application Site) and/or built structures, and so they are not considered further in this assessment.

Dorset Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

5.3.42 The Dorset Landscape Character Assessment published in 2009 describes the county-wide landscape character and has been used in part to inform the Dorset AONB LCA. Dorset LCA 2009 mapping and supporting information can be accessed via the LPA website: https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/countryside-coast-parks/the-dorset-landscape/the-dorset-landscape.aspx

5.3.43 The study area within which the Site lies is dominated by the Chalk Valley and Downland landscape type (LT) that forms a broad belt running across the county between the heathland basin to the southeast and the vale landscapes to the northwest, forming part of the wider chalk landscape of Wessex. The Frome valley floor within the study area is characterised as Chalk River Valley Floor landscape type (although no descriptor could be found for this landscape type on the website). This LT covers broadly the same geographical area and possesses the same characteristics as the Upper Frome Valley - Chalk Valley & Downland landscape character type (LCT) described in the Dorset AONB LCA as discussed above.

5.3.44 Key characteristics of the Chalk Valley and Downland LT are stated as:

- **""extensive and uniform area of chalk covering a large part of the county.**

- **visually dominant with open views from expansive elevated areas.**
- **smaller scale pattern of fields and winding ribbons of trees along the valley floors creates a more sheltered and secluded character.**
- **distinctive north south aligned valleys each with its own unique character.**
- **chalk streams, semi natural chalk grasslands and ancient woodland are all key habitats.**
- **large arable fields subdivided by low, thin and straight hedges.**
- **historic now disused water meadows are key features.**
- **distinctive settlements of stone, brick and flint in linear form along the valley floors.**
- **roads typically follow valley floors or on elevated ridges along old straight Roman alignments.**
- **important old boundary features such as railings and walls."**

5.3.45 The management Objectives are stated as:

> **"The overall management objective for the Chalk Valley and Downland Landscape Type should be to conserve the strong settlement pattern, whilst restoring woodlands and meadows, chalk grasslands and important boundary features."**

5.3.46 The majority of the stated land management objectives target the valley floors and remnant parklands however, the following is of relevance to Proposed Development:

- **"...enhance management of existing chalk grasslands and, where important woodland edges will not be affected (along the valley floor and settlements), encourage reversion back to chalk grassland where remaining areas could be linked up..."**

5.3.47 The condition, value and sensitivity of this Chalk Valley and Downland LT is not stated in the online Dorset LCA. However, in keeping with the similarities shared with the Dorset AONB Upper Frome Valley - Chalk Valley & Downland LCT, it is afforded the same value, sensitivity and susceptibility for the purposes of this LVIA; the value overall is considered to be high, with a high susceptibility due to the Application Site being within the AONB, resulting in a high sensitivity.

5.3.48 Three other Landscape Types identified I the Dorset Landscape Character Assessment that, as illustrated on **Figure 5.2**, have potential intervisibility with the Application Site include:

- 5: Valley Pasture;
- 12: Open Chalk Downland; and
- 22: Chalk River Valley Floor.

5.3.49 Each of these LTs has been reviewed during site survey work (see 5.1.3) and no intervisibility was identified due to intervening vegetation (including the boundary trees and hedgerows of the Application Site) and/or built structures, and so they are not considered further in this assessment.

Landscape Character of the Site

5.3.50 The published national, county, district and local landscape character assessments provide a general impression of landscape character of the Application Site

and the surrounding area. The following looks at the character, including elements and features of the Application Site. The local and wider landscape elements and features as described at **paragraphs 5.3.2 to 5.3.27** above contribute to the landscape character of the site.

5.3.51 Reference to online aerial photography and Ordnance Survey mapping shows ongoing changes in the Site and study area landscape scale and pattern over time. Within the Site, internal hedgerows have been incrementally removed to create two medium-size parcels suitable for modern agriculture; the current arrangement has been in place for over 20 years. The small copse to the northeast of the Site has been expanded to its current size within this timescale.

5.3.52 The Site lies within two medium-size geometric fields oriented generally perpendicular to the River Frome and enclosed by hedgerows and/trees that are in keeping with the mosaic of small and medium sized fields along the flanks of the Frome valley.

5.3.53 Existing landform and field boundary vegetation limits the extent of views to the east (in part, from the southern parcel), south, west and northwest; expansive views are gained to the north and, in part east (from the northern parcel), due to elevation and falling landform 'funnelled' by the boundary vegetation. Overall, the landscape scale of the Application Site is medium, set in the wider medium to large-scale landscape.

5.3.54 There are no remarkable or distinctive features within the Site, and landscape character of the site is, of itself, unremarkable comprising sloping agricultural land on the edge of the plateau.

Night Time Character

5.3.55 A qualitative visual assessment of sky glow, glare and light intrusion has been conducted with reference to Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP) Guidance Notes for the reduction of Obtrusive Light GN01 (2011) and Night Lights mapping published by the Campaign for Rural England (CPRE) website (https://nightblight.cpre.org.uk/maps/), to review existing light sources and their influence upon night time landscape character in terms of location and extent, type, and effects.

5.3.56 The assessment showed that dusk and night-time landscape character within the wider study area is influenced by existing sky glow above Dorchester to the southeast (CPRE night light radiance 16-21 NanoWatts/cm2/sr), to a lesser degree by Bridport to the southwest (CPRE night light radiance 8-16 NanoWatts/cm2/sr), and more locally by Maiden Newton and Grimstone (each, (CPRE night light radiance 2-4 NanoWatts/cm2/sr) arising from highway and building lighting. The landscapes beyond settlements near the Application Site are characteristically darker landscapes, with small clusters of street lights and domestic lighting indicating the settlements of Notton and Frampton along the floor of the Frome valley. Elsewhere, occasional isolated lights indicate a dwelling, farmstead or hamlet on the flanks and ridges of the Frome Valley and chalk plateau. Transitory vehicle lighting along the roads and lanes is intermittent and low-key. Overall, the areas outside the settlements and highway corridors, including the Application Site, are dark/darkest night skies (CPRE night light radiance <0.25 to 0.5 NanoWatts/cm2/sr).

5.3.57 There are no significant sources of light locally around and within the Application Site such as street lighting that contribute to sky glow, but domestic and task lighting occurs at Cruxton Farm, Notton Hill Farm and Greenford Farm. Hedgerows and woodland blocks around and within the periphery of the Application Site provide a 'curtain' that would prevent direct effects of light trespass onto adjacent land and the wider countryside to the west and south.

Sensitivity of Landscape Character

5.3.58 The Application Site is unremarkable and consists of arable and agricultural grassland with hedgerow boundaries enclosing and subdividing two geometric fields of varying width; frequent mature hedgerow trees occur along the eastern boundary. The Application Site displays an overall fair to good landscape quality and condition. The value of the designated Application Site landscape character is considered to be **high**. The Application Site character is representative of the Chalk Valley and Downland as identified in the Dorset Landscape Character Assessment. The night-time character is that of dark skies punctuated by lighting associated with isolated clusters of development and roads, partly influenced by sky glow associated with Dorchester and Maiden Newton. The susceptibility of the landscape character to accommodate the type of development proposed is assessed as **high**; the combined value and susceptibility result in a **high** sensitivity.

Landscape Designations

5.3.59 With reference to the Environmental Designations Plan at **Figure 3.2a**, the Application Site lies within the Dorset AONB but is not subject to any other statutory or non-statutory landscape or environmental designations.

5.3.60 A description of the landscape features and character, sensitivity and predicted effects is presented in **Appendix 5.5b: Landscape Summary of Effects –** and **Appendix 5.6b: Visual Summary of Effects**.

Visual Receptors

5.3.61 The approximate visibility of the site as existing has been determined through preparation of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) plan and topographical analysis, and the actual extent of visibility checked in the field to identify and take account of the localised screening effect of buildings, walls, fences, trees, hedgerows and banks. The screened ZTV plan is based upon the proposed development height (2.6m AGL). The ZTV represents the so-called 'screened' ZTV whereby existing built form and substantial blocks of vegetation are assigned certain heights and used to model a more realistic representation of the theoretical visibility. It is worth reiterating that small building groups or isolated buildings, small areas of woodland, tree belts, isolated buildings, trees and hedgerows (including the Application Site boundaries) are not accounted for and therefore such ZTVs still represent a theoretical visibility as unmapped features can control or prevent views locally.

5.3.62 Representative viewpoints within the area surrounding the Application Site have been identified (**Figure 5.3: Zone of Theoretical Visibility and Viewpoint Location Plan**) and agreed in consultation with Dorset Council's Senior Landscape Architect. Additional viewpoints were added at the suggestion of the DCSLA prior to conducting three site visits on 8th, 15th and 22nd January 2021 to assess the nature of the view, the potential extent of the site that is visible, and to capture photographs from the 19 provisional viewpoints in favourable weather and light conditions.

5.3.63 The captured photo views were then shared electronically with the DCSLA enabling six of the provisional viewpoints to be scoped-out of the LVIA due to the local screening effects of intermediate landform and/or vegetation. At the request of the DCSLA, one further viewpoint, Fore Hill at the intersection of two PROWs (bridleways S29/8 and S29/12), was added in preference to the Wessex Ridgeway due to the elevation, closer proximity and potential openness of view. The potential for alternative viewpoints was also investigated along Longlands Farm lane between the farm and Lambert's Plantation during a further site visit on 9th February 2021; no alternative vantage points were identified due to the dense, well-maintained hedgerow along the north side of the lane, and therefore

this viewpoint has also been scoped out. The viewpoints scoped-out of the visual assessment in agreement with the DCSLA include:

- Bridleway S29/8/Footpath S29/6, Wessex Ridgeway;
- A37 north and south-bound laybys at Hog Cliff Hill;
- Footpath S23/3 north of The Grange/east of Greenford Lane;
- Bridleway S18/8, north of Roman Road;
- Footpath S29/20 (Macmillan Way) at Notton Hill Barn;
- Bridleway S29/17, Notton Bottom; and
- Longlands Farm lane, west of Lambert's Plantation.

5.3.64 The 14 agreed representative viewpoints demonstrate the relative visibility of the site (and existing features or development on it) and its relationship with the surrounding landscape and built forms. These Viewpoints are not intended to cover every possible view of the site, but rather they are representative of a range of receptor types at varying distances and orientations to the Site. The selection of the key viewpoints is based on the following criteria:

- The requirement to provide an even spread of representative viewpoints within the visual envelope;
- The requirement to provide representative viewpoints that consider a human's normal field of vision (i.e. panoramic views);
- From locations which represent a range of close (local views), middle, and long-distance views; and
- Whilst private views are relevant, public viewpoints, i.e. from roads and public rights of way and other areas of open public access, are selected since they tend to have a higher incidence of receptors affected.

5.3.65 As described at ES Chapter 1 and paragraph 5.1.4 (above), additional viewpoints were identified for assessment following further consultation with Dorset Council, Dorset AONB Partnership, and Natural England. Eleven additional viewpoints have been assessed, giving a total of 25 representative viewpoints.

5.3.66 The visibility of the Application Site is predominantly influenced by landform, the extent and type of vegetation cover, and built elements within the surrounding landscape. In order to refine and establish the approximate extent from which the Site is visible, field work was undertaken from publicly accessible viewpoints within the Site and surrounding landscape, such as roads and PRoW.

5.3.67 The theoretical extent of where views may be gained from is shaded yellow on the ZTV, however, the actual extent of the visibility of the Proposed Development is likely to be smaller than this shaded area. Whilst the ZTV suggests that views may be gained toward the Application Site from all directions, field survey has shown that vegetation along the western, southern and in part, eastern boundaries restrict views to/from those directions. The ZTV shows that the sloping nature of the northern Application Site parcel and its position on the western flank of the Frome Valley would enable middle and long-distance views of the low-level features of the Proposed Development from certain vantage points in an arc from the north through to the east (see **Figure 5.3**).

5.3.68 The description of the 25 representative individual baseline views and sensitivity of associated visual receptors is discussed in detail at **Figure 5.4 Context Baseline Views**, **Appendix 5.4: Visualisations Methodology, Figure 5.5a Photomontages** and the Summary of Effects tables at **Appendices 5.5b and 5.6b**. Fourteen of the representative viewpoints have been selected for the preparation of photomontages. The following text provides a summary of visual amenity.

Residents/Local Community

5.3.69 In accordance with accepted best practice, this assessment does not assess visual amenity from individual properties, therefore views have been assessed from the nearest publicly accessible viewpoint.

5.3.70 There is very limited potential for residential properties to gain views of the Site due to a combination of the nature of the ribbon development along the Frome Valley, few isolated properties and farmsteads, landform and intervening vegetation. No potential close, medium or distant views were identified during desk studies and field surveys from residential properties at or in the following settlements toward the operational solar farm area:

- North - Cruxton, Cruxton Farm, Lower Vauchurch, Little Cruxton, Maiden Newton, Tollerford, Cattistock;
- East - Notton, Notton Farm, Crockway Farm, Hyde Crook;
- South – Notton Hill Barn, Throop Farm, Hydelands Farm, Frampton, Southover, Longlands Farm, Compton Valence; and
- West – Greenford Farm, The Grange, Wynford Eagle.

5.3.71 Distant views of the operational solar farm area were identified for one residential property, Hog Cliff Farm, which lies on the east-facing slope of the Frome Valley, off the A37 Long Ash Lane, and has far-reaching westward views. Views experienced from this property are represented by **Viewpoint 5**, taken from OAL to the north at a similar elevation to the ground floor of the house.

PROW and OAL Users

5.3.72 Castle Hill Scheduled Monument to the north of Cattistock is designated as OAL. Elevated but distant views from the highest point within the OAL are represented by **Viewpoint 1**.

5.3.73 Footpath S29/7 extends from Norden Lane following the contours to just below the highest point of Fore Hill to the north of the Site. Views may be gained from a short length of the route nearest Norden Lane; views from the remainder of the route are screened by the landform of Fore Hill ridge and intervening vegetation. Views from this route are represented by **Viewpoint 2**.

5.3.74 Bridleways S29/8 and S29/12, and footpath S29/9 criss-cross and join at Fore Hill. Views are gained from a very short length of these routes close to the highest point of Fore Hill toward the Site. Views from the remainder of these routes are screened by intervening landform, aspect and/or vegetation. Views from these routes are represented by **Viewpoints 3, 15 and 24**.

5.3.75 A horseshoe-shaped area of land is designated as OAL at Longcombe Bottom to the north of the Site, southeast of Maiden Newton. Views from the southern part of this OAL are prevented by aspect as the landform falls to the northwest. Some views are gained from the northern part of the OAL subject to elevation, intervening landform and vegetation; such views are seen in the context of Maiden Newton Sewage Works which is sited on land below the OAL. Views from this OAL are represented by **Viewpoint 4**.

5.3.76 Farm Hill Bottom/Hog Cliff Bottom to the northeast of the Site is designated as OAL and also a National Nature Reserve (NNR). Subject to aspect, landform and intervening vegetation, some views are gained toward the Site. Bridleway S29/11 follows the bottom of the dry valley along Hog Cliff Bottom and views are gained toward the Site

from this route when not screened by Blastmoor Hill/intervening vegetation. Views from the OAL/NNR and bridleway are represented by **Viewpoints 5, 6, 18, 19 and 20**.

5.3.77 Footpath S29/13 extends from Cruxton toward Greenford Lane to the northwest of the Site; the Site is screened from this route by intervening and aspect/landform as represented by **Viewpoint 8**.

5.3.78 Two footpaths, S29/19 and S29/20, which form part of the long-distance Macmillan Way lie within the boundary of the fields within which the Application Site lies but would be outside of the operational solar farm area; footpath S29/19 also follows the agricultural access track that would provide operational access to the solar farm. Views of the operational solar farm area are gained from these stretches, but beyond the operational solar farm area views are screened by landform and intervening vegetation. Views from these routes are represented by **Viewpoints 9, 10, 11 and 25**.

5.3.79 Footpath S29/28 lies to the west of the Site and provides access from Greenford Lane to an unnamed OAL at Greenford Farm. Views from the footpath and OAL at a similar elevation to the western boundary of the Site are screened by intervening vegetation and aspect as represented by **Viewpoint 12**.

5.3.80 Footpath S61/14 extends southward from S29/19 toward an unnamed triangular copse to the southwest of the Site; the revised temporary construction access route would run parallel to this footpath before striking west toward Greenford Lane. Views toward the operational solar farm area are screened by the southern hedgerow and aspect/landform which falls away from this route which is represented by **Viewpoint 13**.

5.3.81 Bridleway S21/11 lies to the southeast of the Site, north of Langlands Farm. Views of the Site are screened by intervening landform and vegetation as represented by **Viewpoint 14**.

5.3.82 Footpath S29/24 lies to the east of Maiden Newton and crosses an unnamed OAL areas on route to Fore Hill. Views from the footpath and OAL are dependent upon by orientation of view and/or intervening landform and vegetation within and around the OAL. Some views are gained from the highest parts of the OAL as represented by **Viewpoint 16**.

5.3.83 Bridleway S29/10 lies on the western flank of Hog Cliff Bottom, with views toward the Site from the northern section of the bridleway being hidden by convex landform and/or intervening vegetation. Views are gained from the bridleway to the south of Blastmoor Hill Barn as represented by **Viewpoint 17**.

5.3.84 An unnamed area of OAL lies to the north of Combe Bottom but it is not connected to the public highway or PRoW network and so it requires crossing of private land. Views toward the Site from within this OAL are largely screened by Fore Hill, but views are gained from higher parts of this OAL as represented by **Viewpoint 21**.

5.3.85 Bridleways S29/16 and S29/26 lie to the east of the railway line, extending from Crockway toward Hyde Crook. Oblique views are gained from the routes toward the Site subject to intervening vegetation as represented by **Viewpoints 22 and 23**.

Road Users

5.3.86 The opportunity to gain views from roads within the vicinity of the Application Site are few due to intervening and roadside vegetation and landform, and the slightly sunken level of many of the routes. **Viewpoint 2** represents views gained by road users on Norden Lane northwest of Maiden Newton and **Viewpoint 7** represents brief distant views gained by road users of the A37/Church Lane at Picketts Cross adjacent to the Long Ash Service Station.

Sensitivity of Representative Visual Receptors

5.3.87 **Table 5.3** below lists the representative viewpoints assessed and provides information on their location, receptor type, and sensitivity.

Table 5.3 Summary of Visual Sensitivity

No.	Viewpoint Name and Distance to the Application Site	Receptors	Sensitivity
1	Castle Hill Scheduled Monument, Cattistock, 4.18km	OAL users	High
2	Norden Lane field Gate/Footpath 529/7, 3.54km	PROW users	High
		Road Users	Medium
3	Bridleways S29/8 and S29/12 junction, Fore Hill, 2.28km	PROW users	High
4	Longcombe Bottom, 1.73km	OAL users	**High**
5	Farm Hill Bottom/Hog Cliff Bottom National Nature Reserve, 2.56km	Residents	High
		OAL/NNR users	High
6	Bridleway S29/11, Hog Cliff Bottom, 1.84km	OAL/PROW users	High
7	A37/Church Lane at Pickett's Cross/Long Ash Service Station, 2.77km	Road users	Medium
8	Footpath S29/13, 650m	PROW users	High
9	Footpath S29/19 Macmillan Way northeast of site, 0m/210m	PROW users	High
10	Footpath S29/19 Macmillan Way at NW corner of site, 0m	PROW users	High
11	Footpath S29/19 and S29/20 junction Macmillan Way at SW corner of site, 0m	PROW users	High
12	Footpath S29/28, and OAL east of Greenford Lane, 670m	Residents	High
		OAL/PROW users	High
13	Footpath S29/20 southwest of site, 0m/725m	PROW users	High

No.	Viewpoint Name and Distance to the Application Site	Receptors	Sensitivity
14	Bridleway S21/11 northeast of Longlands Farm,1.74 km	PROW users	High
15	Bridleways S29/12 and S29/24 at Fore Hill, 2.06km	PROW users	High
16	Bridleway S29/24 and OAL east of Maiden Newton, 1.87km	OAL/PROW users	**High**
17	Bridleway S29/10 south of Blastmoor Hill Barn, 1.19km	PROW users	High
18	OAL, Hog Cliff Bottom, 1.44km	OAL users	High
19	OAL, Hog Cliff Bottom, 1.50km	OAL users	High
20	Bridleway S29/10 and OAL, Hog Cliff Farm track, 2.26km	OAL/PROW users	High
21	OAL, north of Combe Bottom, 3.21km	OAL users	High
22	Bridleway S29/26 north of railway line, 1.74km	PROW users	High
23	Bridleway S29/16, southwest of Hyde Crook, 1.96km	PROW users	High
24	Bridleway S29/12 at Fore Hill, 2.21km	PROW users	High
25	Footpath S29/19/Macmillan Way adjacent to Application Site, 0m	PROW users	High

5.3.88 The Visual Assessment and representative Photo views are presented at **Figure 5.4: Context Baseline Views** (including Context Baseline Viewpoint and Single Frame View) and **Appendices 5.6b: Visual Assessment**. Fourteen photomontages have been prepared, see **Figure 5.5a**.

5.3.89 The Combined Photoviews include two versions of the Context Baseline Viewpoint for each location, one with the operational solar farm area highlighted bright yellow to assist in identification/orientation, and the second 'natural' view without the yellow highlight.

5.4 ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

5.4.1 The following assessment of likely significant landscape and environmental effects is made with reference to **Chapter 4** of this ES which describes the Proposed Development.

5.4.2 For clarity, the landscape and visual assessment considers the following elements of the Application Site, within the 'red line' boundary:

- **Construction access**;
- **Operational solar farm**;
- **Connection**;
- **Maintenance access**; and
- **Footpath corridor**.

5.4.3 The temporary **construction access** would utilise existing farm tracks that extend from a small barn off Greenford Lane to the southwest of the operational solar farm area, south of Greenford Farm, west toward the unnamed triangular woodland and then north toward the operational solar farm. A small drop-off/turnaround area would be established to east of the Greenford Lane barn to allow for the transfer of materials and equipment to a construction compound and material storage that would be located at the northeast corner of the Site (adjacent to the proposed substation compound). Temporary matting would be used to reinforce the construction access, as required according to ground conditions.

5.4.4 In summary, the **operational solar farm** would be low-level, comprising dark-coloured non-reflective solar arrays set within light coloured metal frames where the panels would be a maximum of 2.6m above ground level (AGL). The solar arrays would be enclosed by woven mesh and timber post perimeter fencing (deer-stop type) 2m high. No CCTV security cameras would be used, but low-level (<1.5m high) motion sensors spaced at regular intervals and changes in fencing direction would be located inside the fence line. The DNO substation, ancillary buildings and plant (delivery substation, control house, and inverters) would be up to 3m in height adjacent to the boundary at the northwest corner of the Application Site. Ground level work within the operational solar farm area would include construction of cabling trenches, shallow drainage swales and permeable surfacing to the substation compound. During operation, the operational solar farm area would not have any fixed external lighting. All existing, healthy mature trees and established hedgerows within and along the boundaries of the Application Site will be retained, protected and managed throughout the life of the Proposed Development.

5.4.5 **Connection** to the distribution network would be about 180m to the north of the Application Site via an underground cable connected to an off-site 33kV overhead line at an existing pole in a field.

5.4.6 **Maintenance access** for light vehicles would be gained from Cruxton Farm using the existing farm track during operation of the solar farm. This is this existing surfaced track between Cruxton Farm and the operational solar farm. This route forms the northern section of footpath S29/19.

5.4.7 The Macmillan Way **footpath corridor** follows the route of footpaths S29/19 and S29/20 that lies adjacent to but outside of the operational site area, running along its western and southern boundaries. The secure operational solar farm fence would be established early in the construction period to define and safeguard users of the footpath corridor. The footpaths would remain open throughout the construction and decommissioning periods with use of suitable signage and/or banksmen during those periods at footpath/plant crossing points.

Construction and Decommissioning

5.4.8 A description of the construction programme and construction activities is provided in **Chapter 3** of this ES. Construction activities with the potential to affect landscape and visual amenity include site clearance and preparation including movement of vehicles, tall plant used for driving the supports for the solar arrays/tables, crane(s)

used for lifting the sub stations/components into position and high-level activities when connecting to the existing pole. Construction would take c.3 months (12-13 weeks) to complete and so landscape and visual effects arising from construction activities would be short-term and may be direct, indirect or secondary.

5.4.9 Construction activity potentially evident on the Application Site would include:

- Temporary construction compound(s), site office, cabins and lighting;
- Removal of non-retained vegetation and protective fencing to retained vegetation;
- Excavation, groundworks and cable runs;
- Temporary storage of materials, vehicles, and machinery;
- Vehicle and plant movements;
- Construction of solar arrays, substation etc.;
- Reinstatement of areas following completion of construction phase; and
- Hedge planting parallel to the western fence line.

5.4.10 Decommissioning would be a reversal of the construction works, taking a similar period of time (c.3 months). All materials would be dismantled and removed from site for recycling or re-use as appropriate at that time. The operational solar farm area would be returned to its current condition suitable for agricultural use.

5.4.11 Effects are summarised at **Appendix 5.5b: Landscape Effects Summary Table** and **Appendix 5.6b: Visual Effects Summary Table**.

Landscape Elements and Features

Topography and Land Form

5.4.12 The operational solar farm is a low-lying development, and so construction **and decommissioning** activities would be low-level. Due to the nature of construction of the solar farm, there would be no notable amendments to topography and landform, with localised groundworks. Reversible interventions would occur to construct the substation base leading to negligible magnitude of change across the Application Site. With medium sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect on topography and land form would be negligible.

Land Use and Land Cover

5.4.13 Land use across the developed area of the Application Site would change from agricultural to construction compound during the 3-month establishment (or removal) of the operational solar farm. Therefore, the change of land use during construction (and decommissioning) would be temporary and short-term and would be of **low magnitude**. With medium sensitivity and **low magnitude of change**, the significance of effect on land use would be **minor**.

5.4.14 All established healthy trees and hedgerows within and along the boundaries of the Application Site would be retained and protected throughout the construction works. With high sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect on land cover would be negligible.

Settlement, Built Form and Infrastructure

5.4.15 Temporary site offices would be established as part of the construction works, but these would be removed from the Application Site prior to operation of the Proposed Development. Built form during the short-term construction period would be very localised and temporary leading to a **low magnitude of change**. With low sensitivity and **low**

magnitude of change, the significance of effect on built form during construction would be **minor** but localised and short term.

5.4.16 Construction traffic would use existing highways and farm tracks extending from Greenford Lane. The access is presently used by large farm and delivery vehicles. The access track would be temporarily reinforced as required by prevailing ground conditions. The change upon highways during construction would be very localised and limited leading to no more than a temporary negligible magnitude of change. With low sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect on highways during construction would be negligible.

Public Rights of Way and Open Access Land

5.4.17 Part of bridleway S61/4 and footpaths S29/19 between Greenford Lane and the operational solar farm would be directly affected by construction traffic; suitable safety signage would be in place. The remainder of S29/19 and part footpath S29/20 lie outside of the operational solar farm site and a fenced corridor would be established along these lengths of route to ensure safety of walkers using this route during the short construction phase. There would be no loss or diversion to the routes which would remain open throughout the construction works and so only very localised temporary effects would occur leading to a low short-term magnitude of change. With high sensitivity and low magnitude of change, the significance of effect on PROW S61/4, 29/19 and 29/20 during construction would be moderate but short-term.

Watercourses and Drainage

5.4.18 The requirement for drainage works would be limited to construction of shallow swales (ditches) as set out in the Flood Risk Assessment that is submitted in accompanies the planning application. The swales would provide temporary storage/attenuation and/or intercept potential surface water run-off and would be grass-seeded and maintained by mowing or grazing. The swales would be established at the beginning of construction works. There would be no change to existing drainage features, which would be protected during construction works. A new DNO substation would be constructed at the northwest corner of the Site and would be connected via underground cable to an existing overhead power line in the field to the north. There would be no loss of infrastructure. The magnitude of change during construction to existing infrastructure and drainage features and elements would be negligible. With low sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect on infrastructure and drainage during construction would be negligible.

Effects upon Landscape Elements and Features during Construction

5.4.19 Overall, temporary short-term changes to topography, landform, land cover, and drainage arising from construction operations would lead to no more than a negligible significance of effect upon these features and elements.

5.4.20 Temporary short-term changes to land use and built form would lead to localised **minor significance of effects** on these features during construction.

5.4.21 Three PROW (bridleway S61/4 and footpaths S29/19 and S29/20) would be subject to temporary, direct changes but would remain open along established alignments and useable throughout the short-term construction works leading to a moderate, but short-term effects.

Landscape Character and Designations

5.4.22 The Application Site lies within and displays characteristics of the NCA134 Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase, and at a local scale it falls within the Upper Frome Valley - Chalk Valley and Downland LCT. With reference to this wider landscape, the degree of direct change to NCA134 and the Chalk Valley and Downland LCT arising from construction work within the Application Site would be limited; the landform, landscape structure and scale of field patterns, hedgerows and mature trees would remain unchanged. Temporary, short-term construction activities would locally affect the tranquillity, but this would be very localised and would have no more than a negligible magnitude of change upon these landscape character areas as a whole. With high sensitivity and a negligible magnitude of change the significance of effect of upon NCA134.

5.4.23 With high sensitivity and a **negligible magnitude of change** the effect of upon the Chalk Valley and Downland LCT areas would be **negligible beyond the Site**.

5.4.24 **Landscape character effects within the Site are assessed as low during construction and decommissioning which when combined with a high sensitivity results in a moderate effect, which would be contained to the Site.**

5.4.25 The Application Site lies within the designated Dorset AONB landscape which covers and extensive swathe of land taking in 1,128 square kilometres (see https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-constraints/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-aonbs). The study area for the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (**Figure 5.3**) extends to a 5km radius from the centre of the Application Site. The landscape character within the Application Site (red line boundary) which extends to 18.79 hectares (including the temporary construction access) has the potential to be *directly* affected by the Proposed Development.

5.4.26 The character of land outside the Application Site that falls within the yellow shaded areas of the ZTV has the potential to be *indirectly* affected due to intervisibility, although in reality this is much less due to localised screening from individual trees and hedgerows including hedgerows bounding the operational solar farm area. A review of the ZTV shows that the extent of potential intervisibility/yellow shading including the Application Site (e.g. direct and potential indirect effect) forms a limited portion of the 5km radius study area and is limited to the southwestern flank of the Frome valley, which in the context of the Dorset AONB is very localised.

5.4.27 Overall, whilst construction of the solar farm would locally affect tranquillity, this would be very localised and of short duration and would have no more than a negligible magnitude of change upon the Dorset AONB as a whole. With high sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect upon the Dorset AONB would be negligible during construction.

Night Time Character

5.4.28 The night-time character is that of dark rural skies punctuated by lighting associated with isolated clusters of development and roads, partly influenced by sky glow associated with Dorchester and Maiden Newton. Construction of the solar farm is proposed during summer months and therefore it is unlikely that there would be a requirement for temporary task lighting during this period due to long daylight hours; no lighting would be used outside of working hours. At most, effects would be temporary and indirect, leading to negligible magnitude of change. With high sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect on night-time character during construction would be negligible.

Visual Receptors

5.4.29 The visual assessment at **Figure 5.4** and Summary of effects at **Appendix 5.6** considers the representative Viewpoints 1-25 and describes the existing (baseline) view, receptor sensitivity and predicted magnitude of change arising from the construction of the Proposed Development. An assessment has also been made of other visual receptors that occur in the vicinity of the Application Site.

Residents/Local Community

5.4.30 Site surveys confirmed that there is very limited potential for residential properties to gain views of the operational solar farm area during construction and decommissioning due to a combination of the nature of the ribbon development along the Frome Valley, few isolated properties and farmsteads, landform and intervening vegetation. A few properties (Greenford Farm and The Grange) may gain views of the temporary construction access that extends from Greenford Lane toward the operational solar farm area. No potential close, medium or distant views were identified during desk studies and field surveys from residential properties at or in the following settlements toward the operational solar farm area:

- North - Cruxton, Cruxton Farm, Lower Vauchurch, Little Cruxton, Maiden Newton, Tollerford, Cattistock;
- East - Notton, Notton Farm, Crockway Farm, Hyde Crook;
- South – Notton Hill Barn, Throop Farm, Hydelands Farm, Frampton, Southover, Longlands Farm, Compton Valence; and
- West – Greenford Farm, The Grange, Wynford Eagle.

5.4.31 For these settlements and properties of high sensitivity there would be a magnitude of negligible to no change leading to a neutral significance of effect.

5.4.32 Distant views were identified for one residential property, Hog Cliff Farm, which lies on the east-facing slope of the Frome Valley toward the operational solar farm area. Views experienced from this property are represented by **Viewpoint 5**. Effects would be temporary and indirect mitigated in part by distance, leading to a low magnitude of change. With high sensitivity and low magnitude of change, the **effect during construction would be moderate**.

PROW and Open Access Land

5.4.33 Recreational users of PROW S61/4, S29/19 and S29/20 that in part pass through or adjacent to the temporary construction access and operational solar farm area would gain open views of construction activities local to the routes (**Viewpoints 10, 11 and 25**). The operational fence would be erected at the start of construction works so that a safe corridor is maintained for the PROW which would remain open and on their existing alignments throughout construction. With high sensitivity and a high but temporary magnitude of change, the effect would be major for the short-term of the construction period.

5.4.34 Views gained by users of the c.700m elevated section of the Wessex Ridgeway (S29/8) to the northeast are limited by flanking hedgerows, but distant views of construction activity within the Site may be gained through occasional gaps at field accesses. With high sensitivity and a temporary **low magnitude of change**, the **effect would be moderate** for the short-term of the construction period. The Site is not visible from the lower sections of the Wessex Ridgeway and so the **effects on this c.1300m section would be negligible**.

5.4.35 Open views of construction activity may be gained by PROW users on short sections of footpath S29/9 and bridleways S29/12 and S29/24 at Fore Hill to the east of Maiden Newton (**Viewpoints 3, 15 and 24**). With high sensitivity and low to negligible magnitude of change, the effect would be moderate to negligible for the short-term of the construction period. The Site is not visible from the remainder of the routes and so the effects on those sections would be neutral.

5.4.36 Localised views toward construction activity within Site may be gained from parts of OAL at Longcombe Down and from OAL and PROW S29/24 east of Maiden Newton to the north (**Viewpoints 4 and 16**). With **high sensitivity** and **low magnitude of change**, the **effect would be moderate** for the short-term of the construction period.

5.4.37 Localised views toward construction activity within Site may be gained from parts of OAL and PROW S29/10 and S29/11 at Hog Cliff Bottom and Blastmoor Hill to the northeast (**Viewpoints 5, 6, 17, 18 and 19**). With high sensitivity and low magnitude of change, the effect would be moderate for the short-term of the construction period. **For receptors at Viewpoint 20 the effects are assessed as negligible.**

5.4.38 The proposed temporary construction access leads from Greenford Lane to the Site and so runs parallel to, but separate from, footpath S29/20 (**Viewpoint 13**). Intermittent vehicle movements along the temporary construction access may coincide with and be experienced by users of the PROW leading to a **negligible magnitude of effects; negligible magnitude and high sensitivity would lead to short-term negligible effects.**

5.4.39 Localised views toward construction activity within Site may be gained from parts of PROW S29/16 which continues as S29/26 (**Viewpoints 22 and 23**) to the east. With high sensitivity and **low magnitude of change**, **the effect would be moderate** for the short-term of the construction period.

5.4.40 Distance from the Site reduces the likelihood of construction activity being visible (**Viewpoints 1, 2 and 21**). Intervening landform, trees and hedgerows screen views from OAL and PROW of high sensitivity elsewhere along the floor and sides of the Frome Valley to the north, east and south of the Site (**Viewpoints 8, 9, 12, 14**) and from the downland plateau to the west and so the magnitude would be negligible to no change, leading to **effects of either negligible or no change.**

Road Users

5.4.41 The opportunity to gain views from roads within the vicinity of the Application Site are few due to intervening and roadside vegetation and landform, and the slightly sunken level of many of the routes. Road users on Norden Lane to the northeast of Maiden Newton (**Viewpoint 2**) and Church Lane between the A37 and Frampton to the east of the Site (**Viewpoint 7**) may gain glimpsed views toward construction activity subject to roadside vegetation, speed and direction of travel and intervening features. With medium sensitivity and a **magnitude of change of either low or negligible,** the significance of effect for these road users would be minor to negligible.

5.4.42 Road users elsewhere along the floor and sides of the Frome Valley to the north, east and south of the Site, and from the downland plateau to the west would not gain views toward any construction activity within the Site due to aspect, roadside vegetation, intervening features, speed and direction of travel. With medium sensitivity and a magnitude of no change, the significance of effect for these road users would be neutral.

Representative Viewpoints

5.4.43 Twenty-five representative viewpoints have been identified and assessed. Effects of major significance have been identified during construction works for three of

the representative viewpoints from footpaths (**Viewpoints 10, 11 and 25**) which lie immediately adjacent to the operational solar farm area. Effects of moderate, but not significant, have been identified during construction works for eleven of the representative viewpoints from OAL or PROW (Viewpoints 3, 5, 6, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23 and 24) at Fore Hill and Hog Cliff/Hog Cliff Bottom. **The eleven remaining viewpoints (Viewpoints 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 20 and 21) were identified as experiencing negligible or no change effects during construction** (see **Appendix 5.6b**).

Operation

5.4.44 Operational effects upon landscape and visual receptors would arise from the presence of the solar farm features including the solar arrays, substation/components, fencing and access tracks during the 40-year life of the Proposed Development.

Landscape Elements and Features

Topography and Land Form

5.4.45 The Proposed Development is a low-lying one, with the solar arrays being up to 2.6m tall. Due to the nature of the proposed solar farm development, there would be no amendments to topography and landform following construction, leading to a magnitude of no change. With medium sensitivity and a magnitude of no change, **the effect upon topography and land form would be no change.**

Land Use and Land Cover

5.4.46 Land use across the developed area of the solar farm would change from agricultural to energy production managed by sheep grazing during the operational lifespan of the Proposed Development, however, this change would be reversed during decommissioning (see below). Therefore, the magnitude of change on land use would be temporary and reversible, but long-term (40-year period) of **low magnitude**. With medium sensitivity and a **low magnitude of change**, **the significance of effect upon land use would be minor**, temporary but long-term and reversible.

5.4.47 Land cover comprising established trees within and along the boundaries of the Site would be retained, maintained and enhanced where required (i.e. by 'gapping-up' of hedgerows) throughout the operational lifespan of the Proposed Development in accordance with the LEMP. A new hedgerow would be planted along the western fence line of the Site to screen users of footpath S29/19 **with the minor amendments to the scheme also proposing a new hedgerow alongside the existing PRoW S29/20** New and established grassland beneath and around the edges of the solar farm would be retained or reinstated and suitably managed by grazing and/or mowing to maintain a continuous sward. A new area of wildflower meadow would be established and managed in accordance with the LEMP. The magnitude of change on established vegetation including trees and hedgerows would be positive and low. **The significance of effect on land cover would be low at Year 1 for both agricultural grassland and, trees and hedgerows and minor beneficial at Year 15 agricultural grassland. By year 15 the effects would be moderate beneficial for trees and hedgerows, and grassland.**

Settlements, Built Form and Infrastructure

5.4.48 The existing pattern and nature of permanent built form would remain unchanged by the Proposed Development; this would give rise to a permanent low magnitude of change leading to minor residual effects. Temporary but long-term structures would be established within the Application Site for a 40-year period including the solar arrays, access tracks and fencing. This would give rise a temporary but long-term **low magnitude of change** upon built form, that would be very localised, reversible,

and contained within the Site. With low sensitivity and **low magnitude of change**, the **significance of effect on built form would be minor.**

5.4.49 Operational traffic would be limited to maintenance vans/light vehicles visiting the Application Site via existing highways and the entrance to Cruxton Farm, and so the change upon highways during operation would be no change. Highways outside of the Site boundary would be unchanged during the operation of the Proposed Development. With low (highways) sensitivity and a negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect for highways would be negligible.

Public Rights of Way and Open Access Land

5.4.50 In part, footpath S29/19 follows the access track between Cruxton Farm and the Site and so would be subject to occasional conflict with maintenance vehicles; this would be similar to existing farm vehicle movements. **Both footpath S29/20 and footpath S29/19** would remain open along its established alignment within a fenced corridor flanked by a new hedgerow adjacent to the solar farm throughout the operational lifespan of the Proposed Development. This would lead to very localised temporary but long-term (40-years) and reversible low to negligible magnitude of change upon these landscape elements. With high sensitivity and negligible magnitude of effect, the significance of effect would be negligible. Visual amenity is assessed below.

5.4.51 PROW and OAL outside of the solar farm boundary would be unchanged during the operation of the Proposed Development. With high sensitivity and a magnitude of no change, the significance of effect would be neutral.

Watercourses and Drainage

5.4.52 The shallow grassed swales constructed during construction works would provide temporary storage/attenuation and/or intercept potential surface water run-off during the operational lifespan of the Proposed Development. There would be no change to these or existing drainage features during operation of the Proposed Development. With low sensitivity and a magnitude of negligible to no change, the **significance of effect to infrastructure and drainage features and elements would be no change.**

Effects upon Landscape Elements and Features during Operation

5.4.53 Overall, temporary (reversible) but long-term changes to topography, landform, and drainage arising from operation of the Proposed Development would lead **no effect upon these features and elements.**

5.4.54 Existing patterns of (permanent) built form would be retained. Temporary, reversible, but long-term land use changes of **low magnitude** would occur across much of, and be confined to, the Application Site with the introduction of the solar farm structures leading to **minor, but reversible significance of effect upon built form**.

5.4.55 Land cover comprising established trees and new and established hedgerows and grassland and a small wildflower meadow beneath and around the edges of the solar farm would be retained or reinstated and suitably managed by grazing and/or mowing to maintain a continuous sward for the lifetime of the Proposed Development, leading to a minor beneficial significance of effect, **which increases to moderate beneficial by Year 15.**

5.4.56 Footpaths S29/19 and S29/20 would be subject to temporary, reversible, direct and indirect changes but would remain open and useable throughout the operational lifespan of the Proposed Development leading to a **negligible significance of effect**.

Landscape Character and Designations

5.4.57 With reference to the wider landscape, the degree of direct change to NCA134 Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase and the Upper Frome Valley - Chalk Valley and Downland LCT arising from operation of the Proposed Development would be limited due to the retention and maintenance of the landscape structure and scale of field patterns, hedgerows and mature trees. Temporary, but long-term presence of the solar farm features would locally and indirectly affect tranquillity, but this would be very localised and would have no more than a **negligible magnitude of change** upon these landscape character areas as a whole. With high sensitivity and **negligible magnitude of change** the significance of effect of upon these landscape character areas **beyond the Site would be negligible**.

5.4.58 Landscape character effects within the Site are assessed as low during Years 1 and 15 which when combined with a high sensitivity results in a moderate effect, which would be contained to the Site.

5.4.59 As described at **paragraph 5.4.25** above, the designated Dorset AONB landscape which covers and extensive swathe of land taking in 1,128 square kilometres. The landscape character within the operational solar farm boundary which extends to 17.66 hectares (i.e. the red line excluding the temporary construction access).

5.4.60 Operation of the solar farm would locally affect the tranquillity of Dorset AONB, but this is limited to the southwestern flank of the Frome valley, which in the context of the Dorset AONB is very localised and would have no more than a **negligible magnitude of change upon the AONB as a whole**. With high sensitivity and **negligible magnitude of change**, the **significance of effect upon the Dorset AONB would be negligible** during operation and temporary but long-term and reversible; following decommissioning, the land would be returned to agriculture without any adverse effects on the AONB in perpetuity.

5.4.61 Overall, whilst operation of the solar farm would affect tranquillity, this would be very localised and would have no more than a negligible magnitude of change upon the Dorset AONB as a whole. With high sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change, the significance of effect upon the Dorset AONB would be negligible during operation.

Night Time Character

5.4.62 During operation, permanent lighting within the Proposed Development would be limited to infrequent bulkhead and task lighting to the substation which is likely to be located on the west or south-facing facade; the wider site would not be lit. The bulkhead and substation task lighting may be used for short periods. Effects would be temporary, indirect and very localised and similar in appearance to lighting at Cruxton Farm and other clustered development within Frome Valley. Overall, this would lead to **negligible magnitude of change** to the night-time character. With high sensitivity and **negligible magnitude of change**, the **significance of effect on night-time character during operation at Years 1 and 15 would be negligible**.

Visual Receptors

Residents/Local Community

5.4.63 The following summarises the assessment and should be read in conjunction with **Figures 5.4 and 5.5a**, and **Appendix 5.6b**.

5.4.64 No potential close, medium or distant views were identified toward the operational solar farm during desk studies and field surveys from residential properties at or in the following settlements:

- North - Cruxton, Cruxton Farm, Lower Vauchurch, Little Cruxton, Maiden Newton, Tollerford, Cattistock;
- East - Notton, Notton Farm, Crockway Farm, Hyde Crook;
- South – Notton Hill Barn, Throop Farm, Hydelands Farm, Frampton, Southover, Longlands Farm, Compton Valence; and
- West – Greenford Farm, The Grange, Wynford Eagle.

5.4.65 For these settlements and properties of high sensitivity there would be a magnitude of negligible to no change leading to a neutral significance of effect.

5.4.66 Distant views were identified for one residential property, Hog Cliff Farm, which lies on the west-facing slope of the Frome Valley. Views experienced from this property are represented by **Viewpoint 5**. Effects would be temporary but long term and reversible and indirect, mitigated in part by distance leading to a low magnitude of change. With high sensitivity and low magnitude of change, the **significance of effect during operation at Years 1 and 15 would be moderate**.

PROW Users

5.4.67 Recreational users of PROW S29/19 and S29/20 that in part pass through or adjacent to the Application Site (**Viewpoints 10, 11 and 25**). At Year 1, views of and through the Site fence toward the solar arrays and equipment would be gained from S29/19 and S29/20. By Year 15 the new hedgerow would establish a visual screen between footpath S29/19 and **footpath S29/20 and the proposals** . With high sensitivity and a high magnitude of change at Year 1, the effect on footpaths S29/19 and S29/20 would be major reducing to negligible as the new hedgerow establishes.

5.4.68 Views gained by users of the c.700m elevated section of the Wessex Ridgeway (S29/8) to the northeast are limited by flanking hedgerows, but distant views of the solar arrays may be gained through occasional gaps at field accesses. With high sensitivity and a **low magnitude of change**, the effect would be **moderate at Year 1 with the potential to reduce to negligible by Year 15.** The Site is not visible from the lower sections of the Wessex Ridgeway and so the effects on this c.1300m section would be neutral.

5.4.69 Open, but distant views of the operational solar farm may be gained by PROW users on a short sections of footpath S29/9 and bridleways S29/8 and S29/12 at Fore Hill to the east of Maiden Newton (**Viewpoints 3, 15 and 24**). With high sensitivity and **low magnitude of change**, the effect would be **moderate at Years 1 and 15**. The operational solar farm is not visible from the remainder of the routes and so the effects on those sections would be neutral.

5.4.70 Localised views toward the operational solar farm may be gained from parts of OAL at Longcombe Down and from OAL and PROW S29/24 east of Maiden Newton to the north (**Viewpoints 4 and 16**). With **high sensitivity** and **low magnitude of change**, the **effect would be moderate.**

5.4.71 Localised views of the solar arrays may be gained from parts of OAL and PROW S29/10 and S29/11 at Hog Cliff Bottom and Blastmoor Hill to the northeast (**Viewpoints 5, 6, 17, 18 and19**). With high sensitivity and **low magnitude of change, the effect would be moderate at Years 1 and 15.**

5.4.72 Localised views toward the operational solar farm would be gained from parts of PROW S29/16 which continues as S29/26 (**Viewpoints 22 and 23**) to the east. With high sensitivity and **low magnitude of change, the effect would be moderate**.

5.4.73 Distance from the Site reduces the likelihood of **the proposals** being visible **(Viewpoints 1, 2 and 21**). Intervening landform, trees and hedgerows screen views from OAL and PROW of high sensitivity elsewhere along the floor and sides of the Frome Valley to the north, east and south of the Site, and from the downland plateau to the west (**Viewpoints 8, 9, 12, 13 and 14**) and so the magnitude would be **negligible, leading to a negligible effects at years 1 and 15.**

Road Users

5.4.74 Road users on Norden Lane (**Viewpoint 2**) to the northeast of Maiden Newton and Church Lane between the A37 and Frampton to the east of the Site (**Viewpoint 7**) may gain glimpsed views toward the operational solar farm subject to roadside vegetation, speed and direction of travel and intervening features. With medium sensitivity and a magnitude of **either low or negligible change, the significance of effect for these road users would be minor or negligible at Years 1 and 15**.

5.4.75 Road users elsewhere along the floor and sides of the Frome Valley to the north, east and south of the Site, and from the downland plateau to the west would not gain views toward the solar arrays within the Site due to aspect, roadside vegetation, intervening features, speed and direction of travel. With medium sensitivity and a magnitude of no change, the significance of effect for these road users at Years 1 and 15 would be negligible.

Representative Viewpoints

5.4.76 Twenty-five representative viewpoints have been identified and assessed. Effects of major significance (significant) have been identified for three of the representative viewpoints from footpaths (**Viewpoints 10, 11 and 25**) which lie immediately adjacent to the operational solar farm area, **with the effects upon receptors at Viewpoints 10 and 25 reducing to Negligible by Year 15**. Effects of moderate have been identified during operation of the solar farm for twelve of the representative viewpoints from OAL or PROW (**Viewpoints 3, 4, 5, 6, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23** and **24**) at Fore Hill and Hog Cliff/Hog Cliff Bottom. **Receptors at Viewpoint 7 would be subject to minor effects during operation**. Eight viewpoints/receptors (**Viewpoints 1, 2, 8, 9, 12, 13, 20** and **21**) were identified as experiencing negligible during operation (see **Appendix 5.6b**), **and receptors at Viewpoint 14 experiencing no effects during operation.**

Decommissioning

5.4.77 It is anticipated that decommissioning would be a reversal of the construction phase, comprising similar construction plant, traffic and activities as the arrays, fencing etc. are dismantled. All materials and structures would be removed, and the Application Site would be 'made-good' and returned to pre-development agricultural uses. All existing healthy mature trees and hedgerows would be retained and be managed to maintain these landscape features.

5.5 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Mitigation by Design

5.5.1 Mitigation embedded in the proposed development includes use of the existing agricultural access routes to the south of the operational solar farm area to minimise effects upon residents of Cruxton; use of the existing Cruxton Farm access track during operation of the solar farm; selection of low-level solar arrays (2.6m AGL); deer-stop fencing; and retention and protection of existing hedgerows and trees around and within the boundary of the Site throughout construction and operation of the solar farm. Internal

site security is to be provided by low-level (<1.5m high) motion sensors spaced at regular intervals and changes in fencing direction located inside the fence line, thus removing the need for, and mitigating potential visual and landscape effects of CCTV cameras mounted at high level (>4m high) poles.

5.5.2 The proposed DNO substation and the switchgear cabinet are to be sited on lower ground set down below the horizon at the northwest corner of the site, using the established northern hedgerow as a visual screen.

5.5.3 Further mitigation and enhancements are proposed, which would include gapping-up of existing field hedgerows where required and extending the internal hedgerow toward the eastern boundary. **Planting a new hedgerow broadly parallel to the western and southern Site boundaries to create a green corridors for users of PROW S29/19 (Macmillan Way) and S29/20 to separate and screen them from the proposed solar farm which would be in keeping with other PROW routes within the Frome valley.** All existing hedgerows would be managed at a minimum 2.5m to 3.0m above ground level to enhance screening of the low-level 2.6m high solar arrays, with the proposed hedgerow maintained at 2.0m above ground level.

5.5.4 **A biodiversity enhancement area to the north of the Site on the triangular parcel of land between the existing MacMillian Way and permissive footpath would be planted with species diverse wildflower grassland.**

5.5.5 Land beneath and around the solar arrays and associated equipment would be seeded with appropriate grass mixes and managed to promote biodiversity (see **ES Figure 3.4: Landscape Planting Plan, Appendix 3.3: LEMP** and **Table 5.4: Mitigation**).

Table 5.4: Mitigation

Ref	Measure to avoid, reduce or manage any adverse effects and/or to deliver beneficial effects	How measure would be secured		
		By Design	By S.106	By Condition
1	Protection and retention of existing mature trees and hedgerows within the Application Site and along its boundaries during construction)	X		X
2	Protection and retention of existing mature trees and hedgerows within the Application Site and along its boundaries during operation)	X		X
3	Sensitive location of DNO substation and switchgear building to screen and anchor it within the landscape	X		
4	Establish and maintain 4m minimum width corridor flanked by new native hedgerow (maintained at 2.0m height) along footpath S29/19 and S29/20 adjacent to the Application Site during construction and operation.	X		X
5	Where necessary, repair external hedgerows along boundaries and manage to a minimum height of c.3m during operation			X

Ref	Measure to avoid, reduce or manage any adverse effects and/or to deliver beneficial effects	How measure would be secured		
		By Design	By S.106	By Condition
6	Extend the central hedgerow eastward (c.20m) whilst maintaining a suitable vehicular access and manage to a height of 3m during operation.	X		X
9	Retain and/or establish areas of grassland beneath and around the arrays and associated equipment to be positively managed for nature conservation where possible through low level grazing or mowing (retained open land within the Application Site to be subject to ongoing agricultural regimes) during operation.	X		X
10	**Establish wildflower meadow at the southwest corner and north of the Site and managed for biodiversity.**	X		X

5.6 CUMULATIVE AND IN-COMBINATION EFFECTS

5.6.1 **Section 2.8 of ES Chapter 2** describes one third-party solar farm development within the vicinity of the Application Site that may have the potential to give rise to cumulative effects, as identified by Dorset Council in their EIA Screening Opinion. This section sets out cumulative and any in-combination effects on landscape and visual receptors arising from the combined effects of the Proposed development and the identified Ash Lane Solar Park at Long Ash Lane, Wardon Hill. Where there are no cumulative effects, this is also stated.

5.6.2 The location of the cumulative site is shown at **Figure 2.1: Cumulative Plan** and the following should be read in conjunction with **Figure 5.6a: Cumulative ZTV** and **Figure 5.7: Cumulative Views**.

5.6.3 The permitted Ash Lane Solar Park occupies three parcels of land to the east of the Southern Counties Complex, although to date only the central parcel (c.8.6 hectares) has been developed and is occupied by the operational solar farm. Nonetheless, to provide a robust worst-case cumulative assessment, the full extent of the permitted Southern Counties site has been used.

5.6.4 With respect to cumulative effects on landscape resources the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact states:

> **"7.19 Cumulative landscape effects may result from adding new types of change or from increasing or extending the effects of the main project when it is considered in isolation. For example, the landscape effects of the main project may be judged of relatively low significance when taken on their own, but when taken together with the effects of other schemes, usually of the same type, the cumulative landscape effects may become more significant."**

5.6.5 With respect to visual matters, cumulative effects arise where the visibility of other proposals overlaps with that of the Proposed Development to incur an incremental effect. Cumulative effects relate to landscape character and visual amenity. Within

cumulative assessment, the proposals may be viewed in combination, in succession, or sequentially.

Cumulative Landscape Elements and Features Effects

5.6.6 Limited, temporary (reversible) but long-term changes to topography, landform, highways, infrastructure and drainage arising from construction and operation of the Proposed Development would lead to no more than **negligible effect** upon these features and elements and therefore it is concluded that no significant cumulative effects would arise.

5.6.7 It is envisaged that temporary, reversible, but long-term land use changes and any changes to PROW would be mitigated or offset by each cumulative development as part of the planning application and Reserved Matters applications. Notwithstanding, the effects upon such landscape elements would be very localised and cumulative effects resulting from construction and operation of the cumulative sites would be no more than negligible.

5.6.8 It is envisaged that existing land cover (trees and hedgerows) and landscape patterns would be retained by each cumulative development, and that such features would be enhanced and supplemented by proposed planting leading to minor to moderate beneficial effects.

Cumulative Landscape Elements Effects

5.6.9 Limited, temporary (reversible) but long-term changes to topography, landform, highways, infrastructure and drainage, and PROW arising from construction and operation of the Proposed Development would lead to no more than **negligible effect** upon these features and elements and therefore it is concluded that no significant cumulative effects would arise.

5.6.10 It is envisaged that temporary, reversible, but long-term land use changes would be mitigated or offset by each cumulative development as part of the planning application and Reserved Matters applications. Notwithstanding, the effects upon such landscape elements would be very localised and cumulative effects resulting from construction and operation of the cumulative sites would be no more than negligible.

5.6.11 It is envisaged that existing land cover (trees and hedgerows) and landscape patterns would be retained by each cumulative development, and that such features would be enhanced and supplemented by proposed planting leading to minor to moderate beneficial effects.

Cumulative Landscape Character Effects

5.6.12 The Application Site exhibits characteristics associated at the macro-scale with NCA134: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase and at the local level Chalk Valley and Downland LT.

5.6.13 Long Ash Lane Solar Park falls within the same character areas at macro- and local level as the Application Site, namely NCA134 and Chalk Valley and Downland LT. Overall, it is considered that the cumulative effects on NCA134 and Chalk Valley and Downland LT arising from the existing/permitted Long Ash Lane Solar Park and the Proposed Development would be negligible as each retains existing landscape pattern, scale, structure and characteristic features, and being fully reversible would not adversely affect the character of NCA134 and Chalk Valley and Downland LT in perpetuity.

5.6.14 Indirect visual effects arising from the Proposed Development and Long Ash Lane Solar Park have been considered in the visual assessment at **Appendix 5.6a**.

Cumulative Night-Time Character Effects

5.6.15 Lighting within the Application Site during construction would have no more than a negligible significance of effect on night-time character and would not be experienced in cumulation or combination with the Long Ash Lane cumulative site.

5.6.16 There would be no lighting of the Proposed Development during operation and so no cumulative effects would arise.

5.6.17 The overall cumulative significance of effect on night-time character would be negligible.

Cumulative Visual Effects

5.6.18 **Figure 5.6a** provides a ZTV of the 3m high Southern Counties Solar Farm (green shading) overlaid onto the proposed Cruxton Farm Solar Farm ZTV (2.6m high, yellow shading). The location and extent of areas where the two green/yellow ZTVs overlap i.e., where cumulative views may potentially be gained, is shown shaded pink on the CZTV. It is worth reiterating that small building groups or isolated buildings, small areas of woodland, tree belts, isolated buildings, trees and hedgerows are not accounted for and therefore the CZTV represents a theoretical visibility, as unmapped features can control or prevent views locally. **Figure 5.7** illustrates potential cumulative viewpoints and **Appendix 5.6b** describes the magnitude and significance of cumulative visual effects identified during site survey.

5.6.19 A cumulative site assessment was conducted on 7th April 2021 during very good to excellent visibility, when representative, publicly accessible locations within the pink-shaded areas were visited. These comprised two areas, firstly bridleway S42/32 at Stagg's Folly 4.8km northeast of the Application Site/ 1.8km south of Long Ash Lane Solar Farm; and secondly, roads and footpath S50/5 to the east of Eggardon Hill/west of Eggardon Hill Farm some 5km to the west of the Application Site and 10.1km southwest of Long Ash Lane Solar Farm.

5.6.20 Bridleway S42/32 at Stagg's Folly comprises a stopped-up highway truncated by the A37. The tarmacked route is sunken below adjacent field levels and is flanked for much of its length by clipped hedgerows, where occasional gaps and a field entrance permit views out toward the surrounding countryside. Looking north, views of part of the as-built Long Ash Lane Solar Farm are gained from a double field gate midway along the bridleway, as shown on **Figure 5.7: Cumulative View 1**. In this representative view the as-built solar farm is largely obscured by intervening trees and hedgerows, and that land on which the remainder of the solar farm is permitted is not visible.

5.6.21 Looking south-southwest from this location, the adjacent hedgerow fragments and filters views, and this screening effect is further enhanced by rising convex landform immediately to the south of the bridleway. Fast-moving traffic on the A37 is audible, and just discernible (due to the movement) through the tracery of adjacent hedgerows. Long distance views toward the Application Site to the southwest, are not perceptible due to the fragmenting effect of the path side hedgerow branches; this screening effect would be increased when in leaf.

5.6.22 In conclusion, the site assessment has confirmed that no in-combination, in succession, or sequential cumulative effects would occur along bridleway S42/32 due to locally occurring vegetation combined with the slightly sunken nature of the route.

5.6.23 **Figure 5.7: Cumulative View 2** is from footpath S50/5 on elevated land to the east of west of Eggardon Hill Farm close to Roman Road south of King's Lane junction. Views from the above-named highways, and Barrowland Lane and Shatcombe Lane to the northeast are largely screened by roadside vegetation and so the footpath was selected as it affords a more open view. The distinctive and widely visible telecommunications masts adjacent to the Long Ash Lane Solar Farm are seen on the horizon (the eastern flank of the Frome Valley) to the northeast, with light-coloured medium to large scale building at the go-cart centre seen against the dark, wooded backdrop. The as-built part of the solar farm, and that land on which the remainder of the solar farm is permitted (between the buildings and the woodland), is not discernible to the naked eye.

5.6.24 Panoramic, far-reaching views are gained looking east toward the Application Site, above the foreground cluster of Eggardon Hill Farm buildings. Whilst the landform appears largely contiguous, it is formed by a series of intermediate ridges and combes, with the latter not being visible. Central to this view, slightly below the most distant horizon, is the unnamed triangular woodland block that lies to the south of and identifies the ridgeline upon which the Application Site lies. Beyond this and occupying the horizon to the northeast (left) of the view is the eastern flank of the Frome Valley; the silos at the piggeries at Notton are just discernible to the naked eye. The Application Site lies on the western (east-facing) flank of the Frome valley and so falls away from this viewpoint. This effect is further strengthened by intervening vegetation including the western boundary hedgerow; therefore, the Application Site is not visible from this direction of view.

5.6.25 In conclusion, the site assessment has confirmed that the Application Site is not visible from this direction and so no in-combination, in succession, or sequential cumulative effects would occur along footpath S50/5. This also applies to users of adjacent roads with potential visibility further masked by roadside vegetation.

5.6.26 Overall, the significance of cumulative visual effects is **negligible**.

5.7 SUMMARY

5.7.1 This assessment has considered the potential significant effects of the Proposed Development on the existing landscape character, landscape components and features, and visual amenity. The Proposed Development would be located on agricultural land and would introduce low-level renewable energy infrastructure into the landscape. The proposals would be consistent with the form, scale and pattern of the existing landscape.

5.7.2 Consultation responses regarding the LVIA have been received from Dorset Council, Dorset AONB Partnership, and Natural England. Subsequently, it was agreed by all parties that further information would be prepared by the applicant comprising mapping amendments, additional viewpoint assessment/photography, and additional photomontage preparation, in total of 25 representative viewpoints have been assessed.

5.7.3 The relevant planning policies relate primarily to the need to protect and enhance the landscape character and biodiversity of Dorset and the Special Qualities of the designated Dorset AONB. The Proposed Development is designed in such a way as to help comply with the relevant policies relating to landscape character and the need to protect and enhance local landscape features.

5.7.4 The Proposed Development has been sensitively sited and designed by locating the development in such a position where the number of potential receptors is limited; where views of the full extent of the solar arrays are minimised; by limiting the proposed height of development; by maintaining PROW on existing alignments in protected corridors; by retention and enhancement of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees that screen the site and maintain field patterns that contribute to local character; by establishing grassland, a wildflower meadow, and nature conservation features for the lifetime of the proposed development; and by managing existing and proposed hedgerows,

trees, grassland and meadow in such a way as to make a positive contribution to the overall green infrastructure and ecological networks of this part of the AONB.

5.7.5 With respect to Special Qualities of the AONB, the first Special Quality 'Contrast and diversity' is of particular relevance to this LVIA with respect to "…Uninterrupted panoramic views to appreciate the complex pattern and textures of the surrounding landscapes…", 'tranquillity and remoteness' and 'undeveloped rural character.'

5.7.6 The proposed development will introduce a new element in to the landscape and would be visible in whole or part from a limited area of the AONB in proximity to the application site, affecting receptors that include a limited number of residential properties, and limited extents of public rights of way, Open Access Land, and roads. Overall, the existing features of the landscape and views will prevail as it has been sited and restricted in elevation and height so as to maintain uninterrupted panoramic views within the AONB.

5.7.7 The solar farm would represent development within a rural setting that affects tranquillity, but this effect would be very localised and limited to visual perceptions as the proposed operational development would not generate any noise, air or odour emissions.

5.7.8 The Proposed Development also presents opportunities to deliver enhanced ecological interest by removing land from intensive agriculture and managing it in such a way as to promote biodiversity as set out in the Dorset AONB 'Guidelines for Large Scale Solar PV Arrays.'

5.7.9 The designated Dorset AONB landscape covers and extensive swathe of land taking in 1,128 square kilometres. In the context of the AONB as a whole, the proposed development would have a relatively localised and time-limited effect upon the landscape. Overall, it is considered that the effects on views and landscape character arising from the Proposed Development may be locally adverse during the lifetime of the scheme; this effect has been minimised by careful siting and design of the development and through proposed mitigation and management measures. The Proposed Development would however retain existing landscape pattern, scale, structure and characteristic features, and importantly, it is fully reversible and so would not adversely affect the landscape character of the AONB in perpetuity.

5.7.10 These limited effects are to be considered and weighed in the context of planning policy, sustainable energy generation, and public benefits arising from the Proposed Development; that balance is beyond the scope of the LVIA and is discussed in the Planning Statement that accompanies the planning application.

5.7.11 It is concluded that the Proposed Development would not significantly harm the existing positive landscape elements associated with the Application Site. The existing landform of the Application Site would remain largely unchanged except possibly at a localised level during the construction and decommissioning period.

5.7.12 The Proposed Development would not require the loss of trees, tree groups or hedgerows. Existing trees and hedgerows would be protected and positively managed throughout construction and the lifetime of the Proposed Development to enhance structure, diversity and longevity. A new hedgerow would be established along the western **and southern boundaries of the Site**. Management of existing trees and existing and new hedgerows would reinforce and enhance landscape elements leading to beneficial effects within the Site and its immediate environs.

5.7.13 Opportunities to enhance the local distinctiveness, character and biodiversity of the area have been introduced as part of the proposed mitigation measures and are outlined within the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan that accompanies the planning application. These will allow for the infill planting of hedgerows with local native

species and implementation of grassland, wildflower meadow mixes and also management of grassland beneath the panels through sheep-grazing.

5.7.14 Following decommissioning at the end of the operational life of the panels, the operational solar farm area can be returned to its current condition. There would be long-term benefits to the local landscape character arising from the mitigation measures and the enhancements to landscape features within the Application Site.

5.7.15 This assessment has demonstrated that the actual area that the Proposed Development would be visible from is considerably smaller than that identified by the SZTV and is limited to a 'cone' of landscape to the north through to east of the Site on the eastern flank of the Frome Valley. The visual assessment shows that visibility would be restricted by a combination of the landform, aspect, and distance from the operational solar farm and the enclosure provided by intervening vegetation surrounding the operational solar farm. Due to the low profile of the panels, they would not be easily perceptible in most distant views from publicly available viewpoints, including from PROW and OAL.

5.7.16 **Effects of major significance have been identified during construction works for three of the representative viewpoints from footpaths (Viewpoints 10, 11 and 25) which lie immediately adjacent to the operational solar farm area. Effects of moderate, but not significant, have been identified during construction works for seven eleven of the representative viewpoints from OAL or PROW (Viewpoints 3, 5, 6, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23 and 24) at Fore Hill and Hog Cliff/Hog Cliff Bottom. Six viewpoints (Viewpoint 6, 13, 16, 20, 22 and 23) would be subject to potential minor to negligible, not significant, effects during construction. The nine eleven remaining viewpoints (Viewpoints 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 20 and 21) were identified as experiencing negligible or neutral no change effects during construction (see Appendix 5.6b)**.

5.7.17 **Effects of major significance (significant) have been identified for three of the representative viewpoints from footpaths (Viewpoints 10, 11 and 25) which lie immediately adjacent to the operational solar farm area, with the effects upon receptors at Viewpoints 10 and 25 reducing to Negligible by Year 15. Effects of moderate have been identified during operation of the solar farm for twelve of the representative viewpoints from OAL or PROW (Viewpoints 3, 4, 5, 6, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23 and 24) at Fore Hill and Hog Cliff/Hog Cliff Bottom. Receptors at Viewpoint 7 would be subject to minor effects during operation. Eight viewpoints/receptors (Viewpoints 1, 2, 8, 9, 12, 13, 20 and 21) were identified as experiencing negligible during operation (see Appendix 5.6b), and receptors at Viewpoint 14 experiencing no effects during operation.**

5.7.18 A not significant residual effect would be experienced by one property, Hog Cliff Farm, during construction and operation at Years 1 and 15; this effect would be reversed upon decommissioning of the Proposed Development. This effect is afforded by the extent of the Proposed Development that is visible due to relative elevation of the viewpoint to the Site.

5.7.19 On balance it is concluded that the Proposed Development could be successfully accommodated within the Application Site and surrounding landscape with only very limited **adverse** temporary but long-term residual effects on landscape character or visual amenity as a whole. The Proposed Development it is fully reversible and so once decommissioned, would not adversely affect the landscape character of the AONB in perpetuity.

Table 5.2: Glossary

Term	Description
AGL	Above Ground Level – height measured from the ground usually measured in metres AGL (mAGL)
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum – baseline standard for expressing height relative to the Ordnance Datum at Newlyn, Cornwall usually measured in metres AOD (mAOD)
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BS	British Standard - standards produced by BSI Group
CA	Conservation Area
CCTV	Close Circuit Television – security cameras
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
CZTV	Cumulative Zone of Theoretical Visibility (see ZTV)
Construction Environmental Management Plan	A site or project specific plan designed to ensure best practice and/or appropriate environmental management practices are applied throughout the construction, operation and/or demolition phases of a project.
Cumulative Zone of Theoretical Visibility	Cumulative Zone of Theoretical Visibility – used within LVIAs to identify areas of interest for further investigation and assessment where the proposed development may be seen additionally, consecutively or sequentially with other similar existing or proposed developments.
DAS	Design and Access Statement
DCSLA	Dorset Council Senior Landscape Architect
Design and Access Statement	A statement accompanying an application that sets out the rationale for the design approach and how the Proposed Development would be accessed for a range of users
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment – process of identifying the likely significance of environmental effects arising from a proposed development.
Environmental Impact Assessment	Process for identifying the likely significance of environmental effects (beneficial or adverse) arising from a Proposed Development, by comparing the existing environmental conditions prior to development (the baseline) with the environmental conditions during/following the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of a development should it proceed.
Environmental Statement	Document setting out the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment

Term	Description
ES	Environmental Statement – document reporting on the findings of an EIA.
Flood Risk Assessment	An assessment as to the current and future flood risk of an area where development is proposed. A FRA is supporting information for a planning application
FRA	Flood Risk Assessment
GE	Google Earth
GLVIA3	'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Third Edition' published in April 2013 by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. Guidance providing advice on the process of assessing the landscape and visual effects of developments and their significance.
ha	Hectare – unit of measurement 100m x 100m, or 10,000m^2
Hedgerows Regulations 1997	Regulations which aims, according to guidance produced by the Department of the Environment, "to protect important hedgerows in the countryside by controlling their removal through a system of notification. In summary, the guidance states that the system is concerned with the removal of hedgerows, either in whole or in part, and covers any act which results in the destruction of a hedgerow. The procedure in the Regulations is triggered only when land managers or utility operators want to remove a hedgerow. The system is in favour of protecting and retaining 'important' hedgerows. The Hedgerow Regulations set out criteria that must be used by the local planning authority in determining which hedgerows are 'important'. The criteria relate to the value of hedgerows from an archaeological, historical, wildlife and landscape perspective.
HTA	Horticultural Trade Association - represents the UK garden industry with wide ranging membership
km	Unit of measurement for distance, 1km = 1000m
Landscape and Ecology Management Plan	This is a document which is drafted, usually with input both from suitably experienced ecologist and landscape architects, and sets out the management aims and prescriptions to be implemented
Landscape Character Area	Single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other types.
Landscape Character Type	These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar

Term	Description
	combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use, and settlement pattern.
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LCT	Landscape Character Type
LEMP	Landscape and Ecology Management Plan
Local Planning Authority	The Council (County, Borough or District) that is empowered by law to exercise statutory town planning functions for a particular area (administrative boundary) of the UK
LPA	Local Planning Authority
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – a documented and unbiased assessment of effects projects / developments may have on the identified landscape and visual resource.
MAGIC	'Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside' website – Government sponsored website containing environmental data from several public bodies including Natural England, the Environment Agency, English Heritage, Forestry Commission, Marine Management Organisation and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
National Character Areas	Previously known as Joint Character Areas developed by the then Countryside Agency. These are areas that share similar landscape characteristics. See also LCA.
National Cycle Network	The national cycling route network of the United Kingdom, established and maintained by the charity Sustrans.
National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949	The Act provided the framework for the creation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales, and also addressed public rights of way and access to open land.
National Planning Policy Framework	Document setting out the Government's planning policies for England and instruction on how they are expected to be applied
National Planning Practice Guidance	On-line resource to support the implementation of the NPPF
NCA	National Character Areas
NCN	National Cycle Network
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPPG	National Planning Practice Guidance
NTS	Non Technical Summary – Summary document in a non-technical language
OAL	Open Access Land as defined by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Term	Description
OS	Ordnance Survey – Mapping agency
PPG	Planning Practice Guidance
PROW	Public Rights of Way – footpath, bridleway or byways over which members of the public have a right
Receptor	A location, feature (trees, hedgerows, PROW) or individual (person, road user) upon which the effect of a proposed development is assessed, i.e. the receiving environment
SM	Scheduled Monument
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest - conservation designation denoting a protected area in the United Kingdom
Statutory Development Plan	An aspect of the town and country planning system in the UK comprising a set of documents that set out the Local Authorities policies and proposals for the development and use of land in their area.
ZTV	Zone of Theoretical Visibility – used within LVIAs to identify areas of interest for further investigation and assessment.