



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Development Control Committee Botley West Solar Farm

05 February 2024

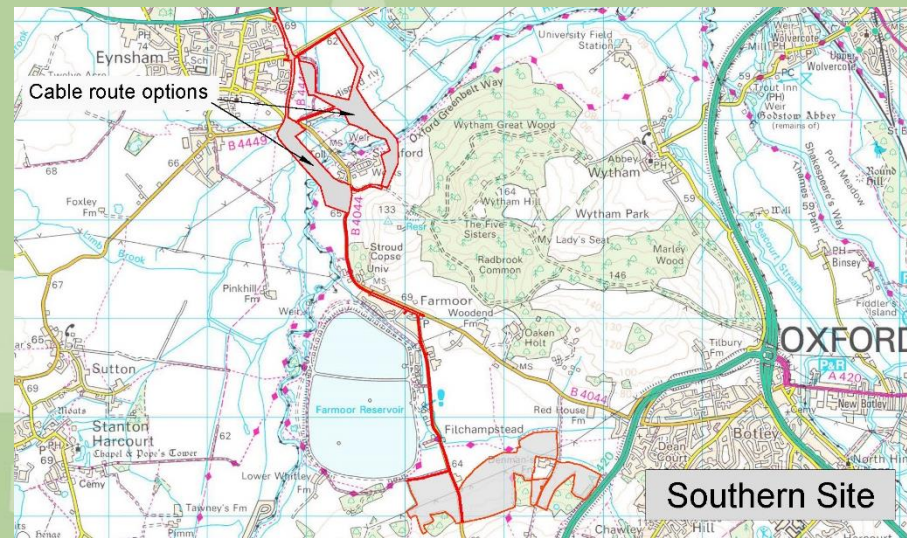
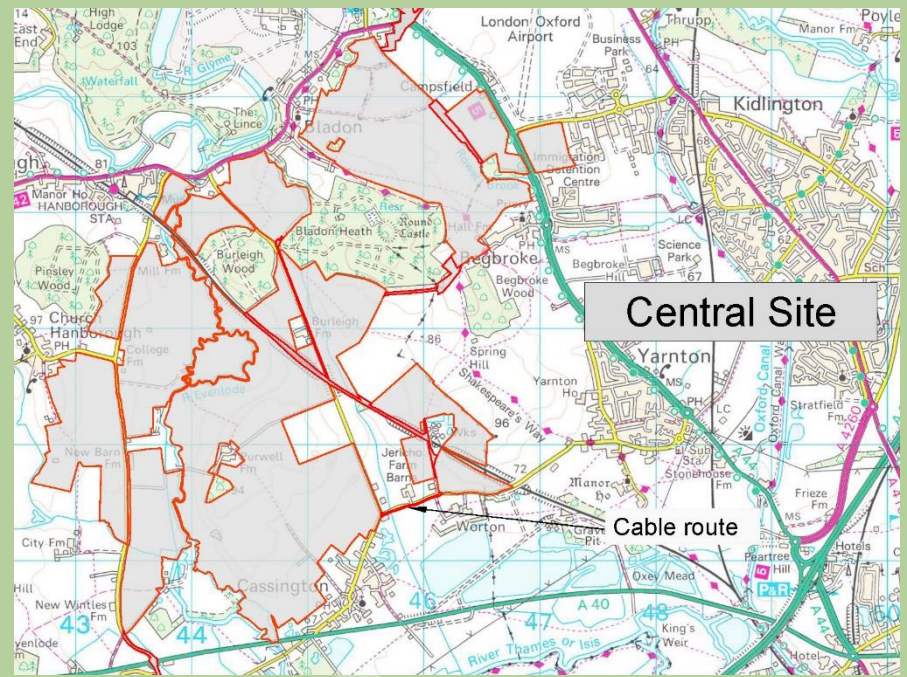
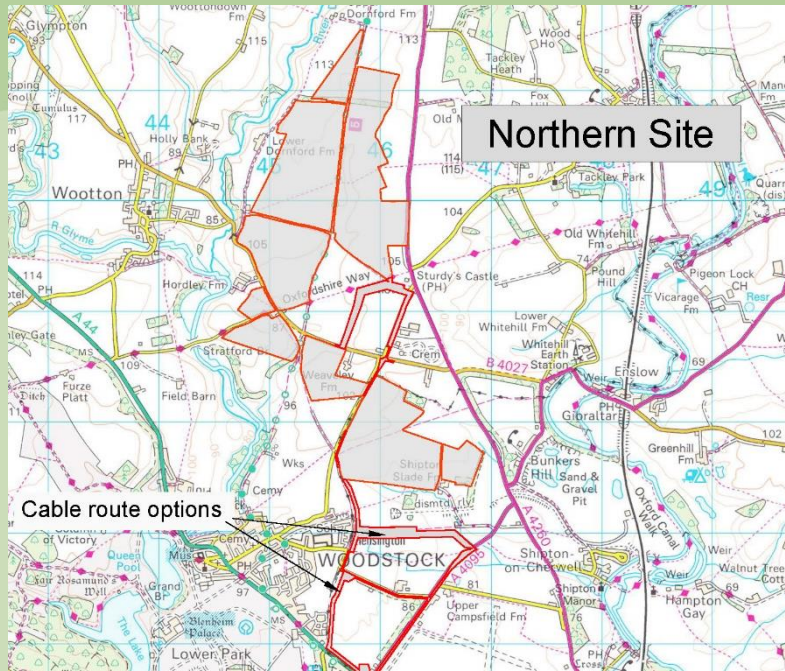
Purpose of Committee Meeting

- *To review the proposed draft response to the developer's consultation*
- *To endorse the proposed response to the consultation*
- *To agree to submit the response by the consultation deadline of 8 February 2024*

Recap of Proposal

- *Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) are proposing a new solar farm to the west of Oxford*
- *Proposals for a site area of approx. 1,300ha (890ha of panels) capable of generating 840MW of power to the national grid*
- *Proposal defined as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project – Decision to be made through Development Consent Order (DCO) process*

Development Location

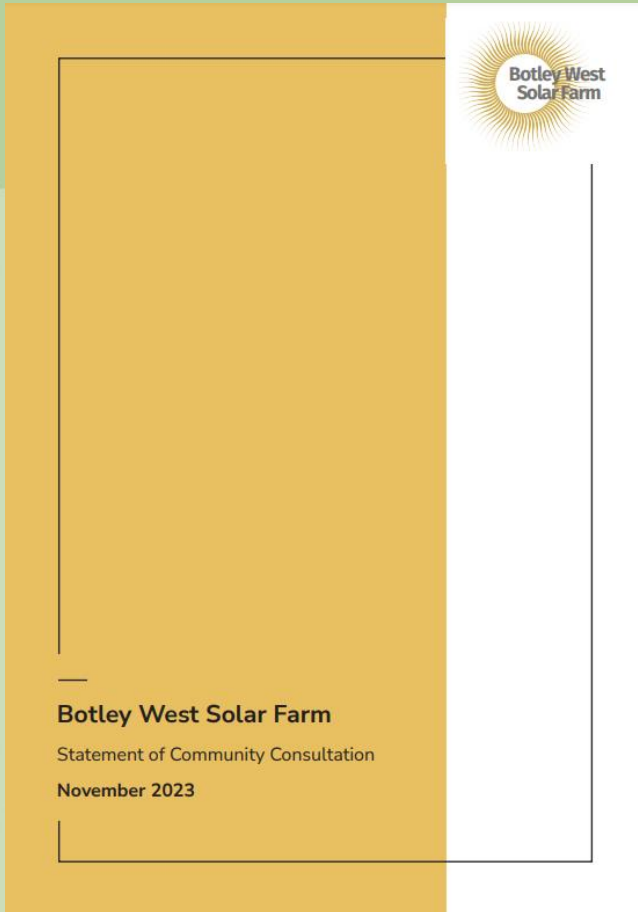


The DCO Process

Six Stages

- 1) *Pre-application – We are here!*
- 2) *Acceptance - (Expected summer 2024)*
- 3) *Pre-examination*
- 4) *Examination*
- 5) *Recommendation*
- 6) *Post decision*

Focused Statutory Consultation - 30 November 2023 – 8 February 2024

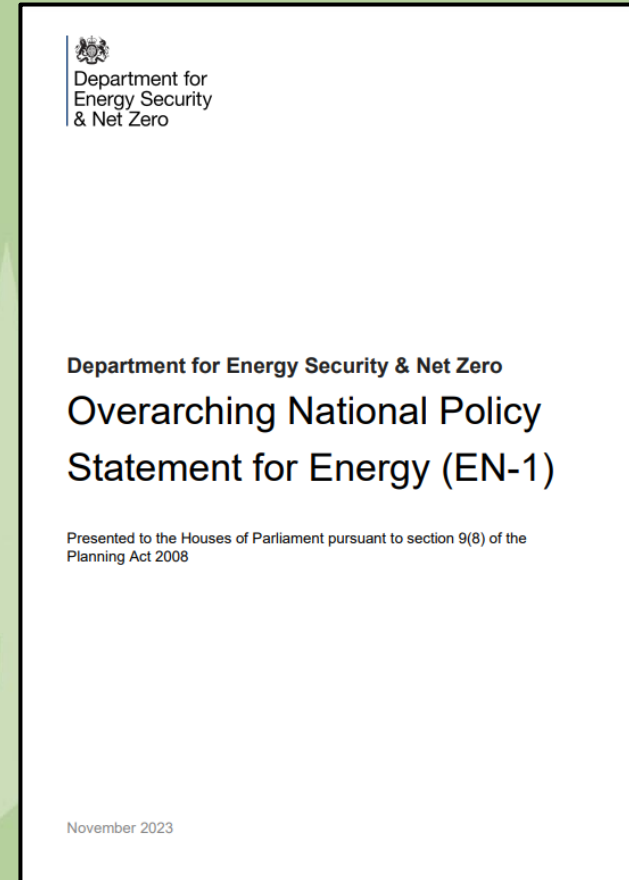


10 week consultation focused primarily on **Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)**

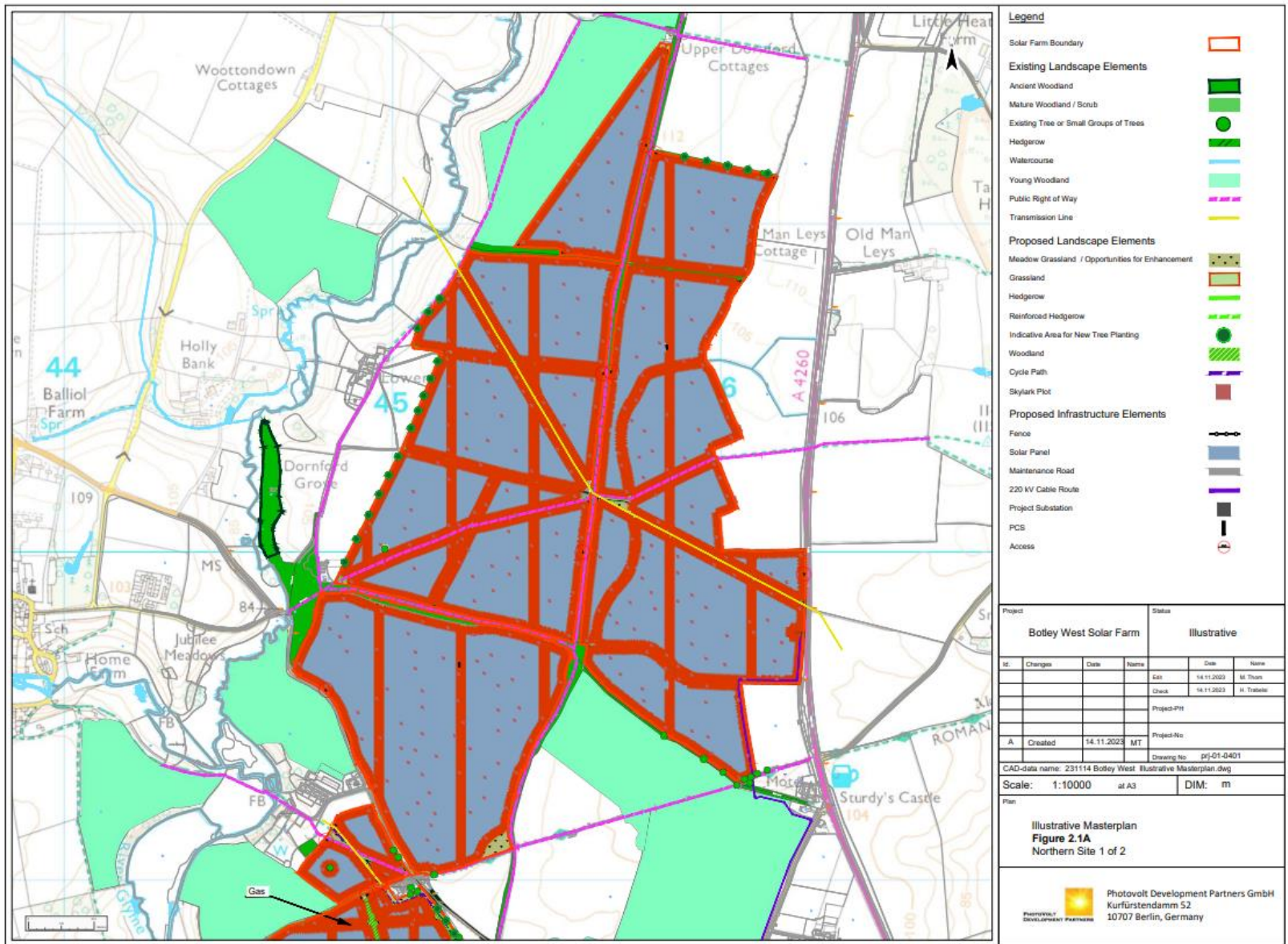
- Updated proposals, including the site layout and cable routes.
- Proposed environmental enhancement measures, such as biodiversity net gain and new recreational connectivity across the site.
- Proposed mitigation measures to minimise or avoid the potential impacts on the environment and local communities.

Need for the Proposal

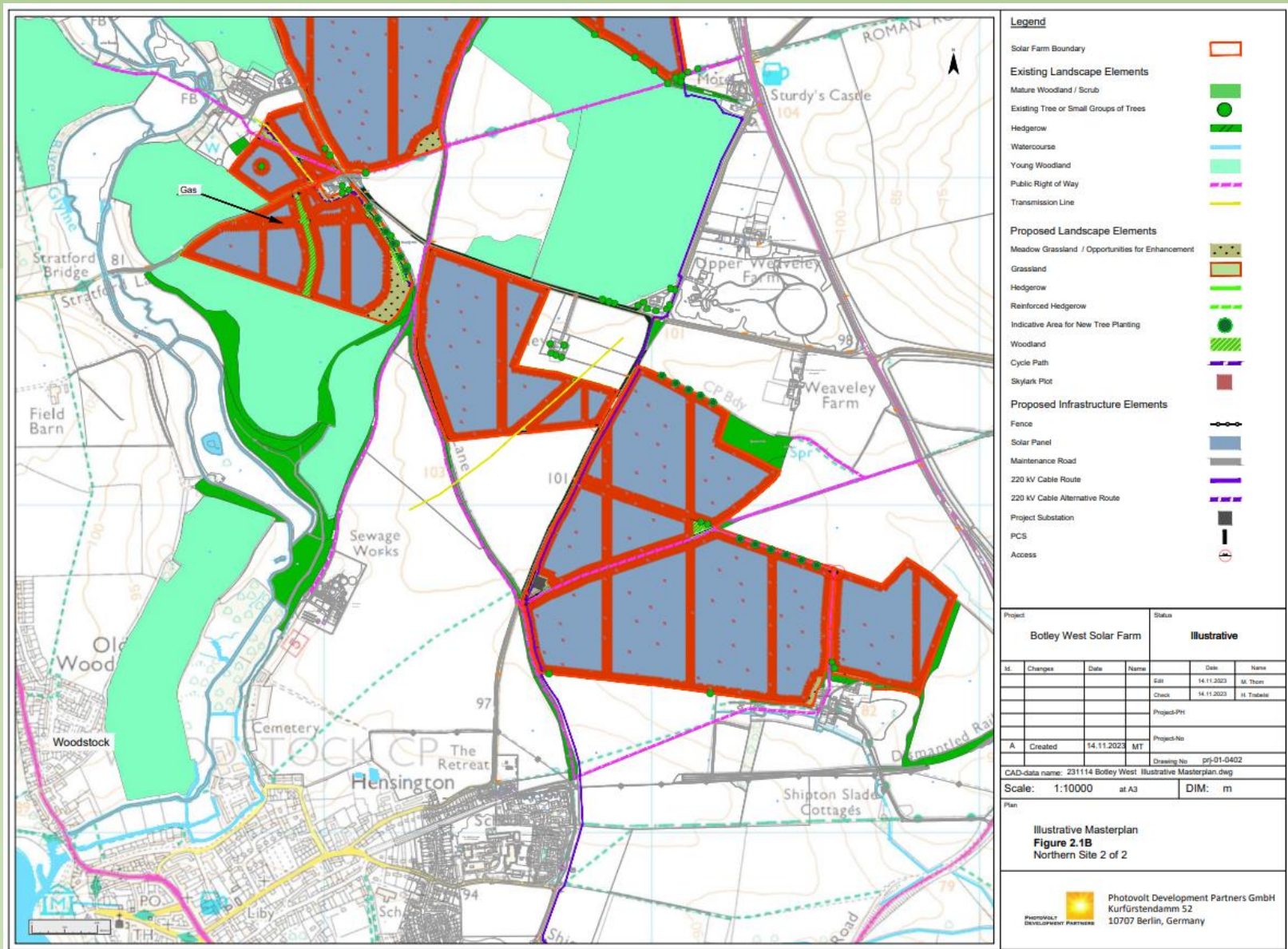
- **This consultation response does not focus on the need for the proposal or the suitability of alternatives.**
- Decisions on NSIPs are made in accordance with the framework provided by National Policy Statements (NPS) (Updated in January 2024)
- The Secretary of State should assess all applications for development consent on the basis that the government has demonstrated that there is a need for those types of infrastructure which is urgent.



Consultation Response Part I – Focus on Masterplan



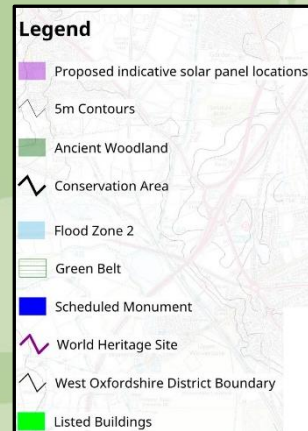
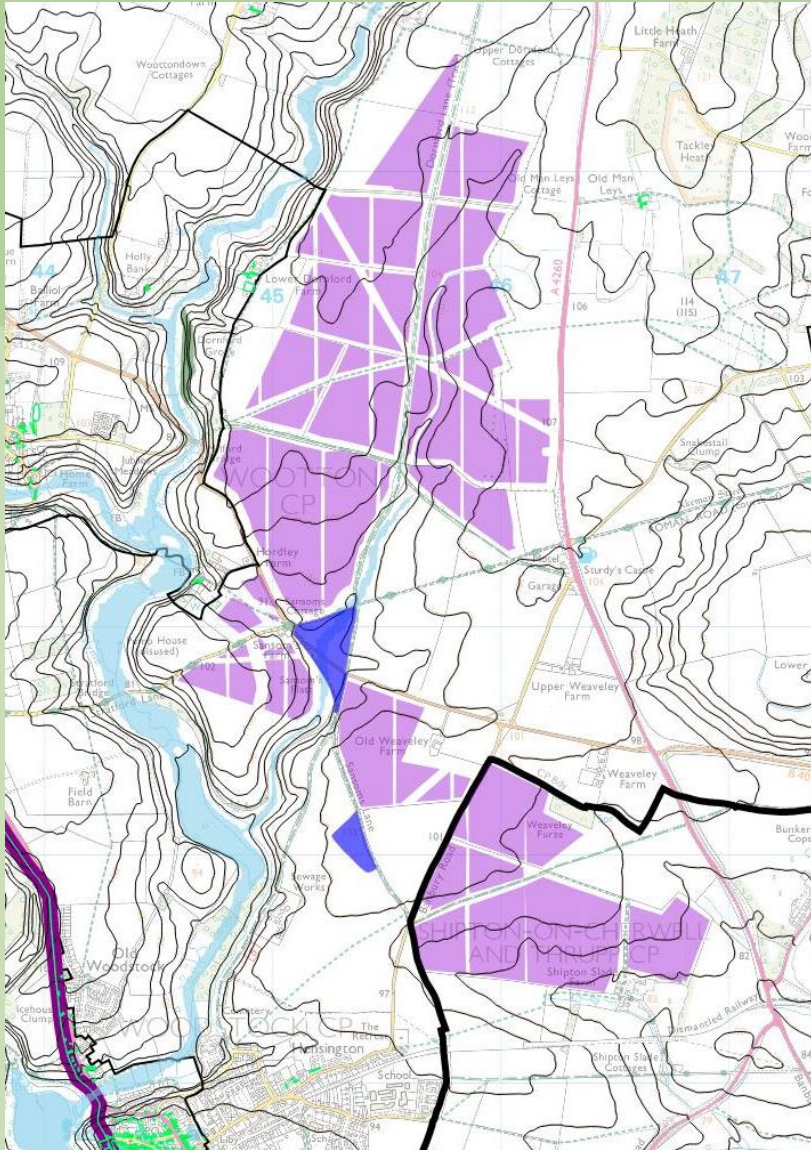
The Northern Site – Northeast of Woodstock



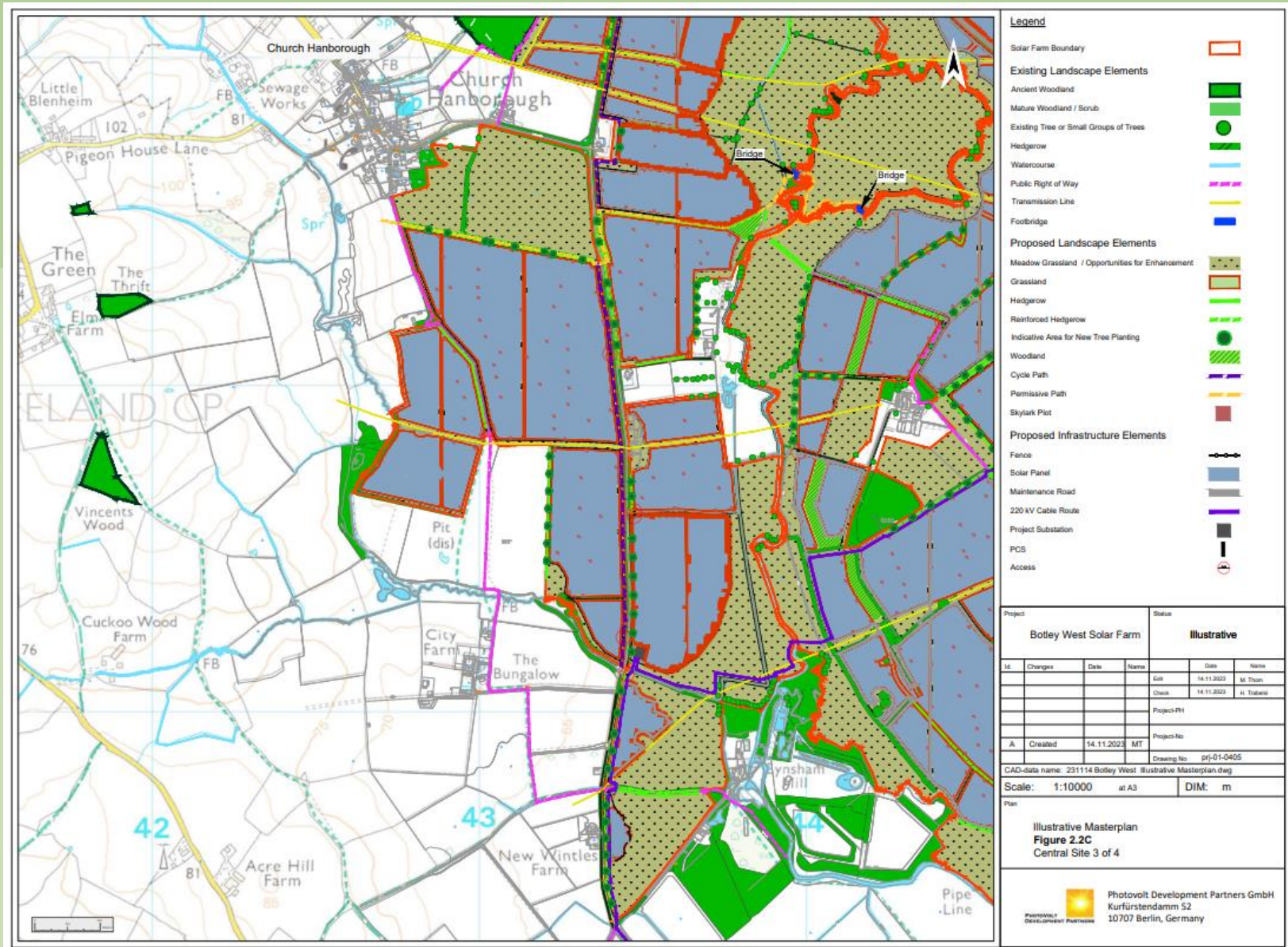
Key Sensitivities in Northern Site

Key Sensitivities

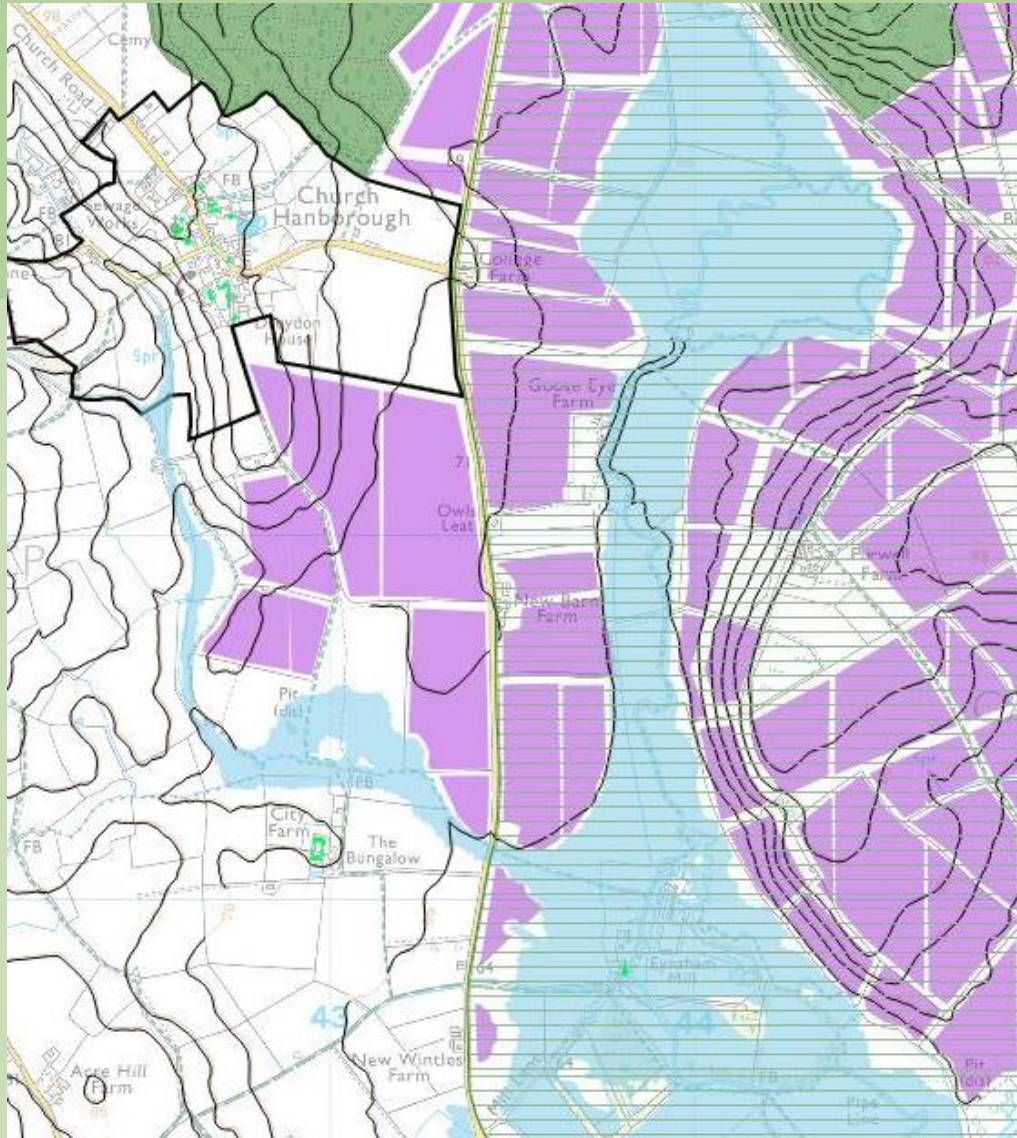
- Topography
- Landscape character
- Proximity to Scheduled Monument
- Potential for buried archaeology
- Proximity to Listed Buildings
- Proximity to Public Rights of Way
- Cumulative impact with other planned development



The Central Site – Southeast of Church Hanborough

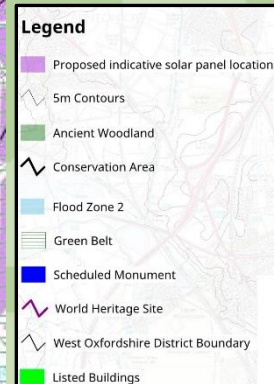


Key Sensitivities in Central Site

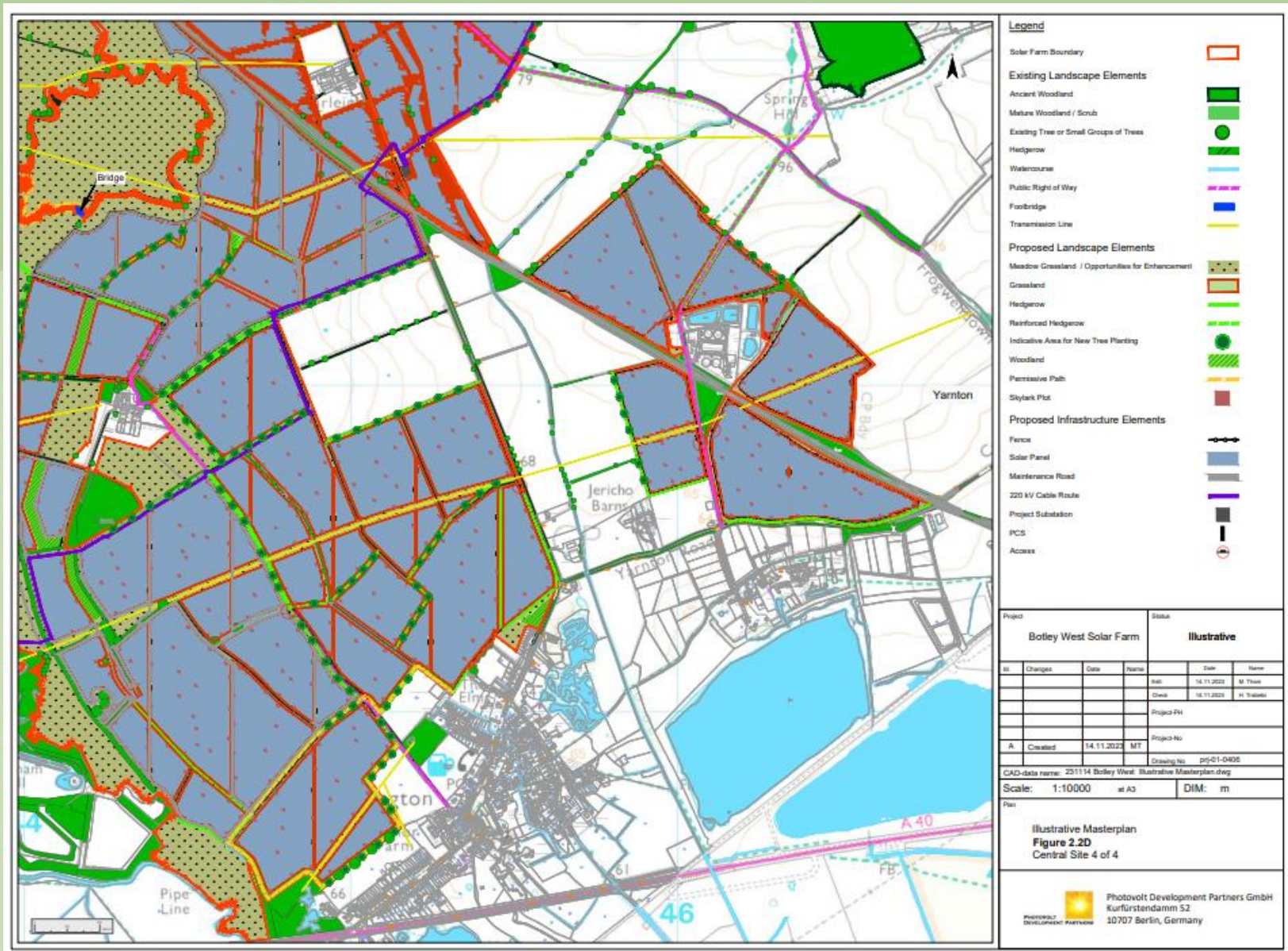


Key Sensitivities

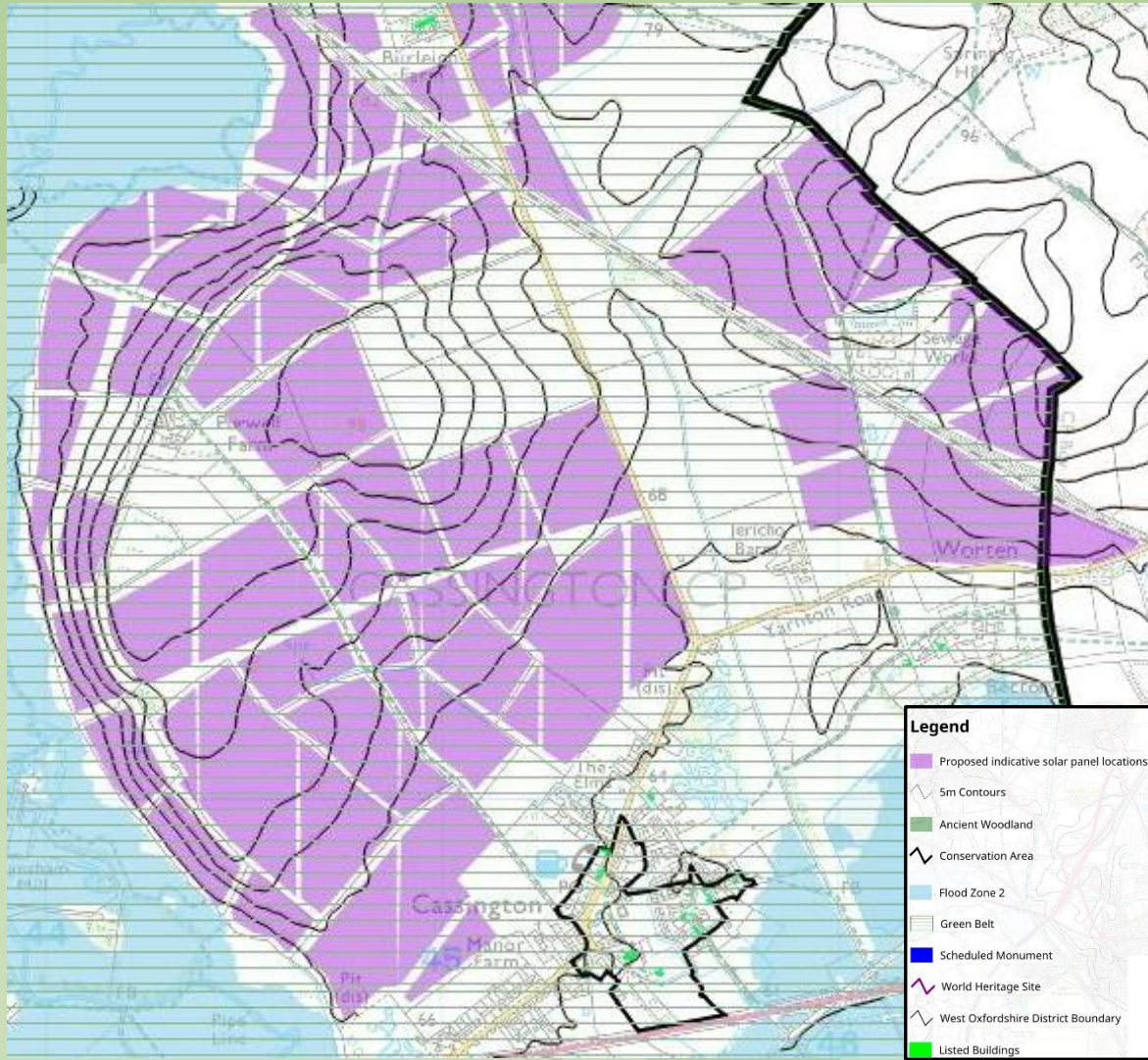
- Situated in Green Belt
- Landscape character
- Proximity to settlement
- Flood risk
- Evenlode Catchment
- Proximity to Listed Buildings
- Proximity to Conservation Area
- Concentration of Public Rights of Way
- Cumulative impact with other planned development



The Central Site – North of Cassington



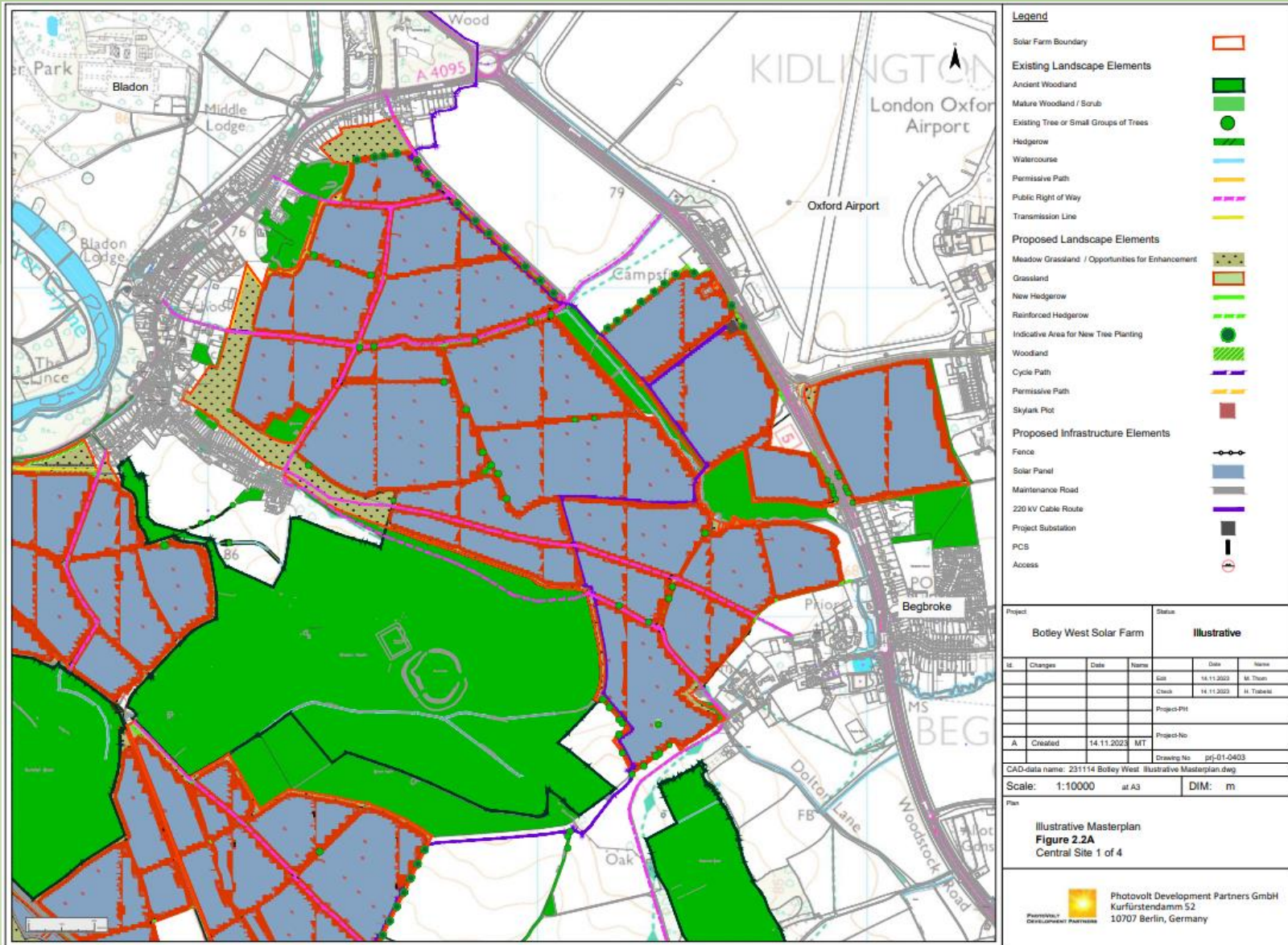
Key Sensitivities in Central Site



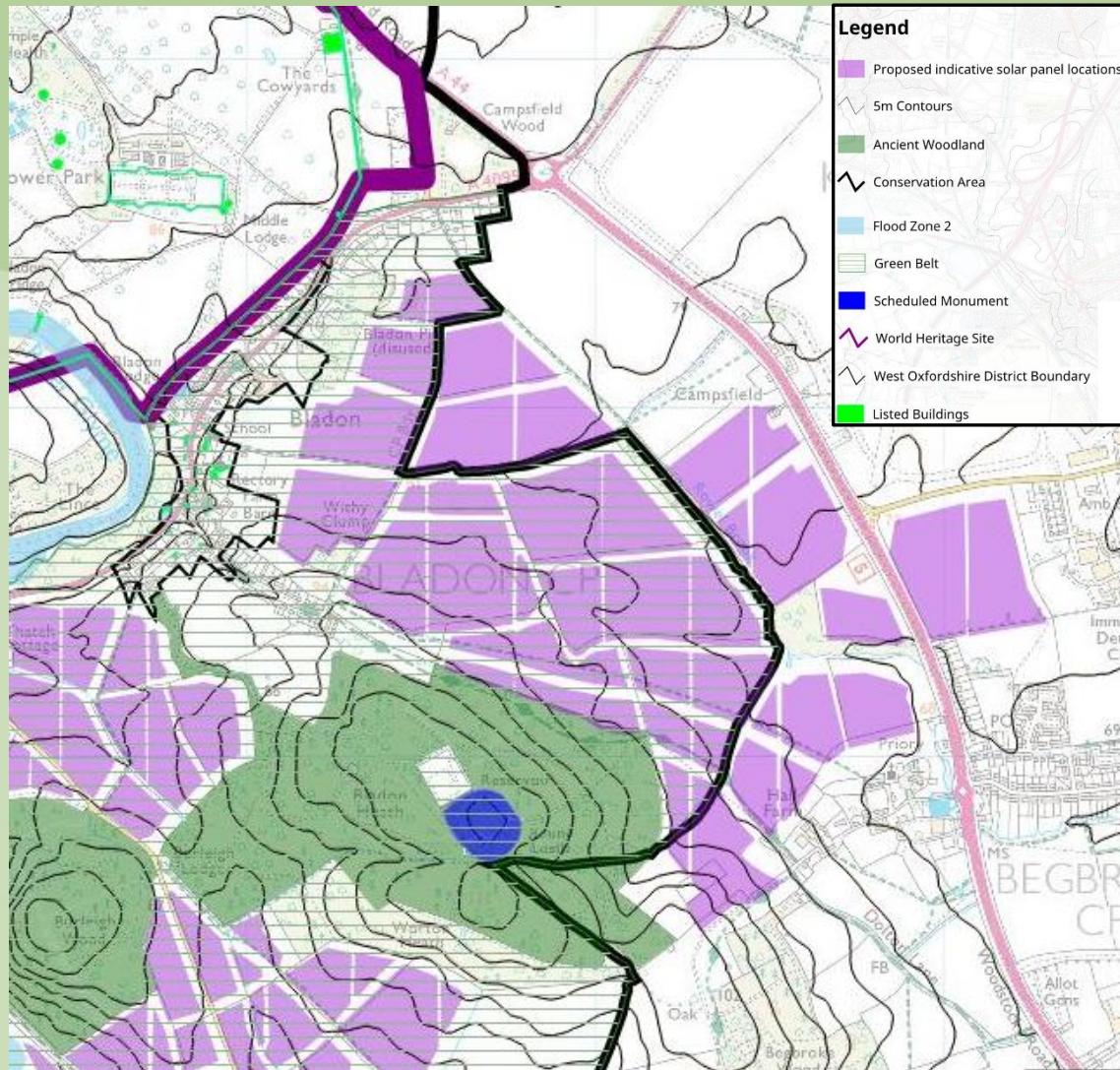
Key Sensitivities

- Situated in Green Belt
- Landscape character
- Proximity to settlement
- Flood risk
- Evenlode Catchment
- Proximity to Listed Buildings
- Proximity to Conservation Area
- Concentration of Public Rights of Way

The Central Site – South and East of Bladon



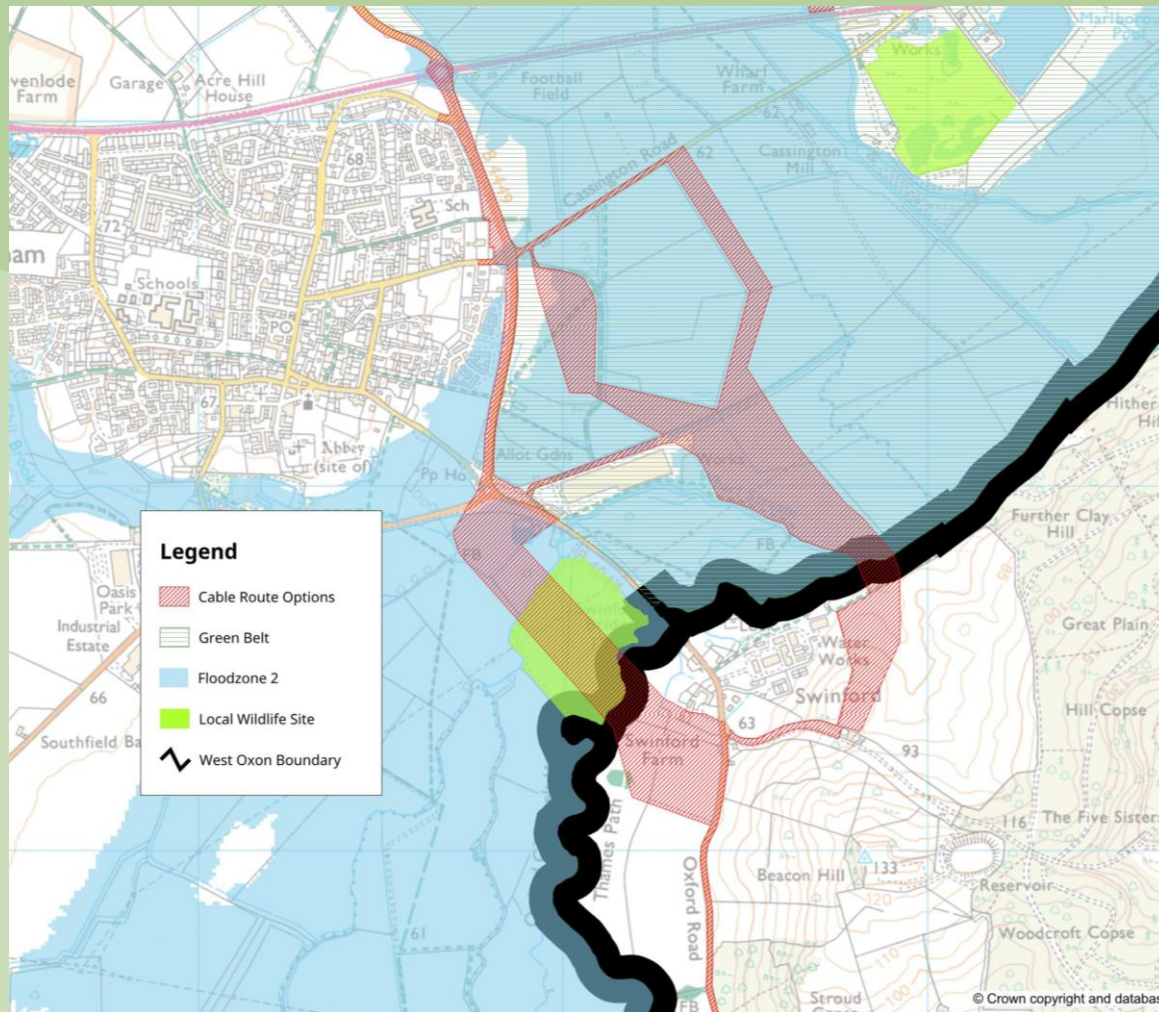
Key Sensitivities in Central Site



Key Sensitivities

- Proximity to World Heritage Site
- Situated in Green Belt
- Landscape character
- Proximity to settlement
- Proximity to Scheduled Monument
- Proximity to Listed Buildings
- Proximity to Conservation Area
- Concentration of Public Rights of Way

Key Sensitivities in Southern Site (West Oxon)



Key Sensitivities

- Flood Risk
- Local Wildlife Site

Summary of Comments in relation to masterplan

- Careful consideration needs to be given to landscape impacts of the proposal
- Applicant should minimise impacts on the Green Belt
- Buffers around heritage assets should be increased
- Buffers around existing settlements should be increased
- Opportunities increase woodland cover should be identified and buffers around Ancient Woodland increased
- Increase buffers around public rights of way
- Minimise impacts on best and most versatile agricultural land
- Ensure consistency with other plans and strategies
- Avoid harm to ecologically sensitive sites

Revisions will result in a reduced scale of project, but would help to minimise the magnitude and significance of effects on a sensitive environment.

Thematic Chapters of PEIR

BWSF PEIR is comprised of 20 chapters and covers a comprehensive range of social, environmental and economic elements relating to the proposal.

Chapter 7 – Historic Environment	Chapter 13 – Noise and Vibration
Chapter 8 – Landscape and Visual Resources	Chapter 14 – Climate Change
Chapter 9 – Ecology and Nature Conservation	Chapter 15 – Socioeconomics
Chapter 10 – Hydrology and Flood Risk	Chapter 16 – Human Health
Chapter 11 – Ground Conditions	Chapter 17 – Agricultural Land and Public Rights of Way
Chapter 12 – Traffic and Transport	Chapter 18 – Waste and Resources

It is apparent that the assessment for certain thematic chapters of the PEIR is incomplete and it is recognised that more assessment needs to be undertaken to underpin the Environmental Statement and to fully assess the impacts of the solar farm proposal.

Historic Environment

The PEIR Non Technical Summary (Para 6.2.15) confirms that the effects on designated heritage assets as a result of change within their setting have been assessed as not significant. These effects are fully reversible in that they would cease following decommissioning of the Project.

WODC concerns relate to impact on the setting of;

- Setting of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site
- Setting of Registered Parks and Gardens
- Setting of Listed Buildings
- Setting of Conservation Areas
- Setting of Scheduled Monuments

WODC cannot comment on the suitability and effectiveness of proposed mitigation planting at this stage and will await details of the Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan.

The applicant should have regard to comments made on the proposed masterplan, to identify where mitigation and enhancement measures should be focused, to minimise negative impact on the historic environment and heritage assets

Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site

Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Management Plan 2017

BLENHEIM PALACE WORLD HERITAGE SITE REVISED MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017

APPENDIX III : SETTING STUDY

Appendix III - Setting Study

5.02 The elements of Blenheim's OUV (and the attributes which convey it) which the setting most directly relates to are:

- The connection with the River Glyme - the management of this river as it runs through the setting of the WHS directly affects the character, ecological value and water quality of Lancelot Brown's lakes within the WHS;
- The links with the much larger and ancient Wychwood Forest area;
- The value of the boundary wall and plantations which mainly hide the park from outside views, but also form important woodland elements in the wider landscape;
- The key visual linkages between Blenheim and its setting - to Bladon church in the south and from Old Woodstock to the Column of Victory in the east;
- The character of the setting as traditional English countryside, dotted with picturesque villages mainly built using a uniform palate of materials.



Setting of Conservation Areas



Representative Viewpoint 38: View looking west from footpath 152/6/10, near Purwell Farm

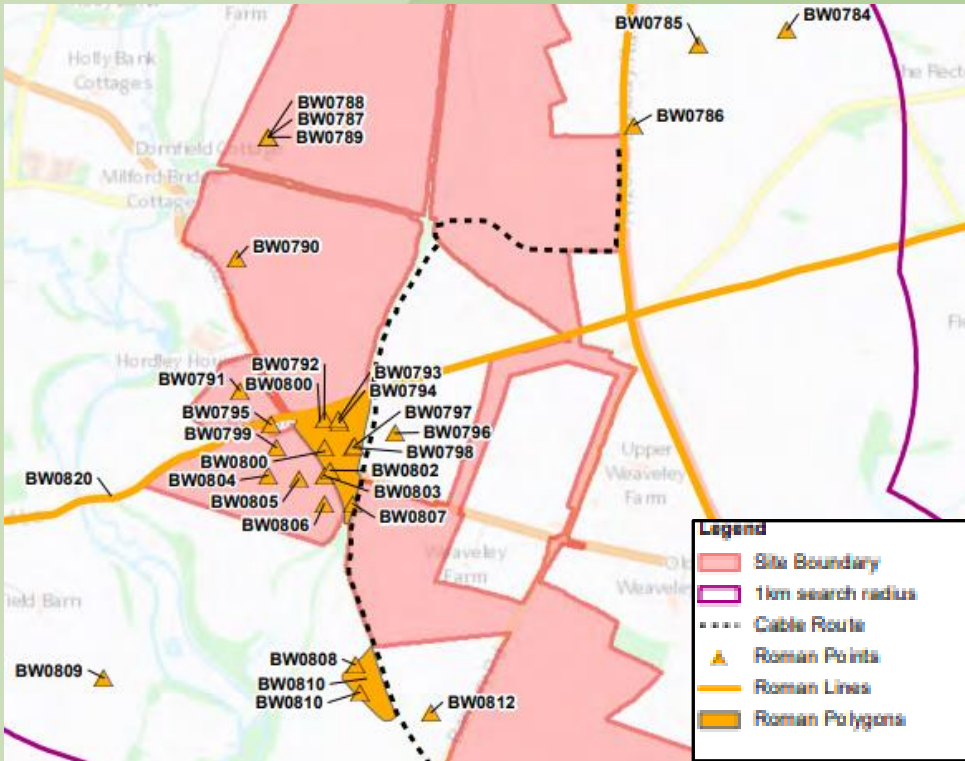
Barley West Side Farm 2614317	Date of photograph 18/11/2022 CG Grid Ref. S9842212201	Photometric level of view: 90° To be viewed at coordinate area height	Figure: 3.12
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Representative Viewpoint 39: View looking south east from footpath 152/6/10

Barley West Side Farm 2614317	Date of photograph 18/11/2022 CG Grid Ref. S9842211796	Photometric level of view: 90° To be viewed at coordinate area height	Figure: 3.14 34/3
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Setting of Scheduled Monuments

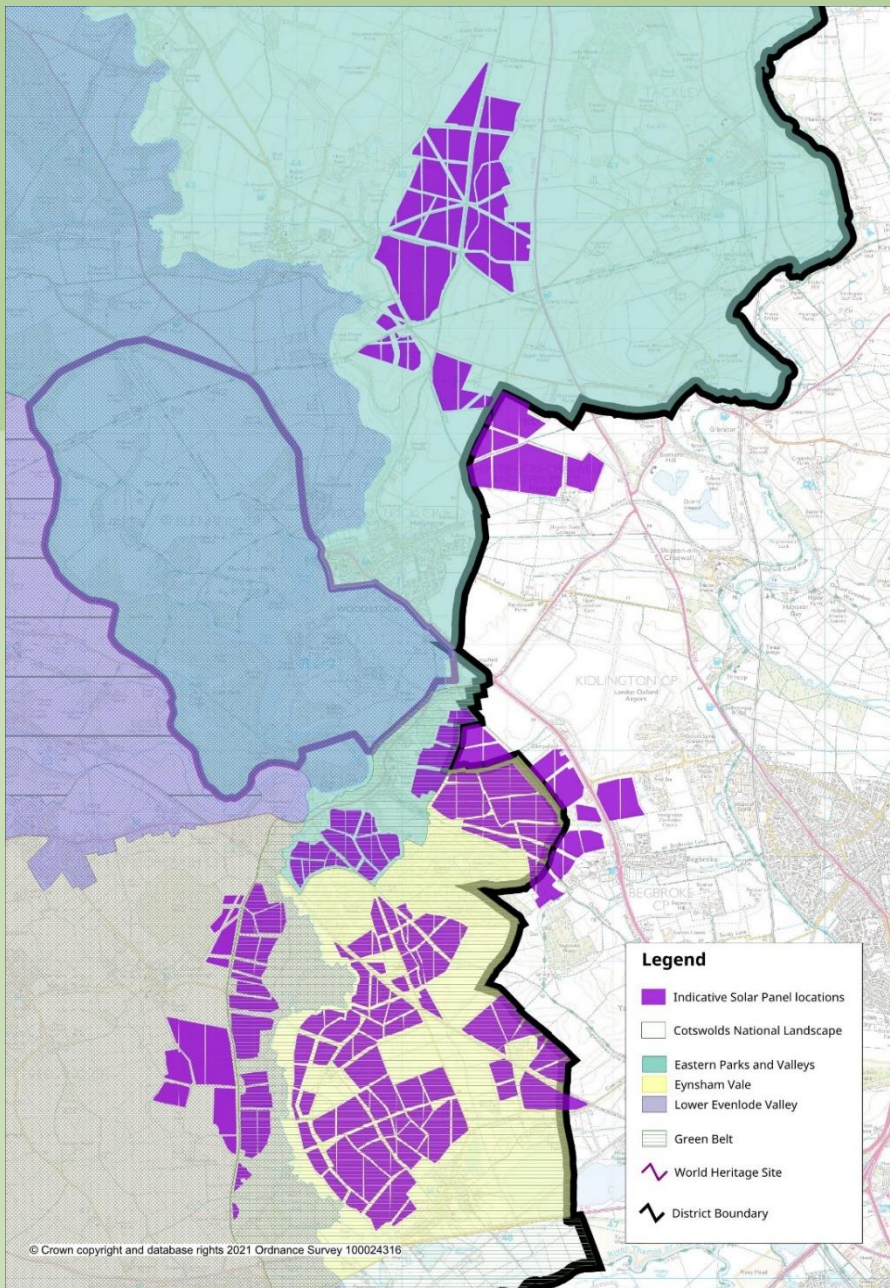


Landscape and Visual Resources

The Non Technical Summary of the PEIR (Para 6.3.11) confirms that a number of potential impacts upon landscape and visual resources associated with the construction, operational and maintenance, and decommissioning phases of the Project, were identified. It is considered that in terms of landscape, effects would be limited.

The applicant asserts that when considering the landscape character of the Project site and landscape character areas / types of the wider study area, significant landscape characterisation effects are unlikely.

WODC questions this assessment and considers that the project would result in significant landscape characterisation effects, both as a result of the project itself and cumulatively with other proposed developments in proximity to the site.



Key Sensitivities

- Site spans 2 Landscape Character Areas
- Wychwood Project Area
- Green Belt
- Proximity to Cotswolds National Landscape
- Proximity to Blenheim World Heritage Site

Ecology and Nature Conservation

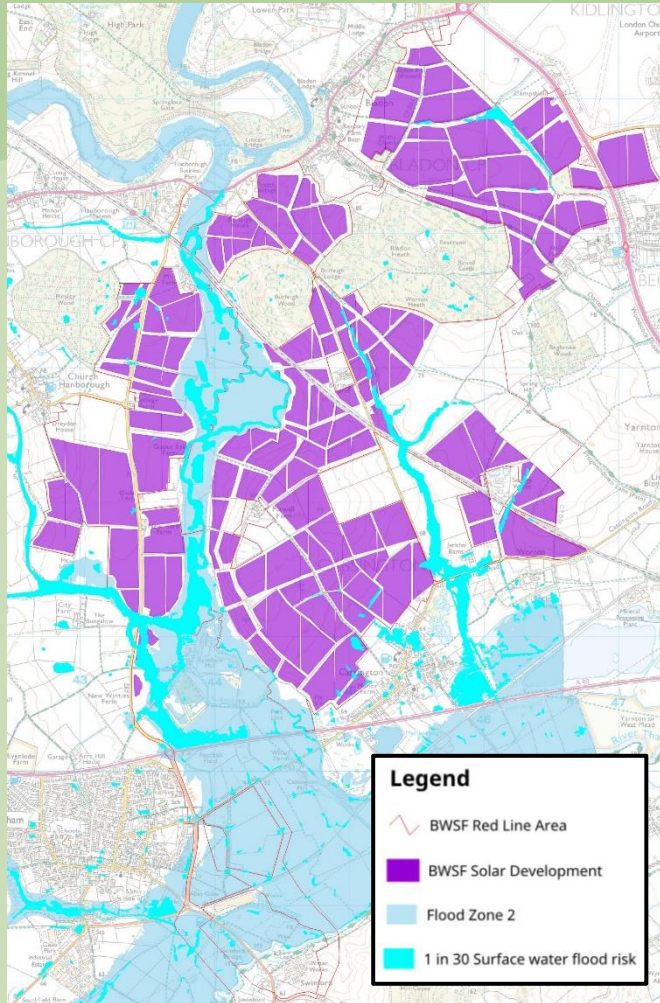
There are questions about the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures where they relate to ecology and nature conservation. It is not possible at this stage to take a fully informed view on the magnitude and significance of impacts on ecology and nature conservation without more detail on what is proposed in terms of the design of the project and details on implementation and management of environmental enhancements.

- Ground nesting and wintering birds
- Skylark Plots
- Buffers to ancient woodlands
- Noise impacts
- 70% BNG

Not possible to take a fully informed view at this stage in absence of Landscape and Ecology Management Plan, but would expect measures to contribute to nature recovery through a project at this scale

Flood Risk and Hydrology

It is not possible to comment of the suitability and effectiveness of mitigation measures at this stage while the detailed design and layout of the project are yet to be finalised.



Areas of potential concern and likely necessary locations for flood risk mitigation will be the foot of south facing slopes where solar panels are orientated downhill.

The area of land to the north of Cassington is an area of particular focus where surface water impacts may need to be mitigated and managed.

Also within the Evenlode Valley where the Catchment Management Plan seeks to reconnect the river channel with the flood plain, development proposals should not undermine such plans.

Traffic and Transport

WODC look to Oxfordshire County Council as local Highway Authority for comments on the PEIR.

WODC agree that the construction phase of the project is likely to generate the greatest number of vehicle movements.

WODC recognise that there will be traffic increases during the construction phase of the project and that cable trenching in the highway could cause traffic delays.

The impacts of increased traffic movements and delays caused by trenching within the highway should be mitigated as far as possible, by restricting peak time HGV movement and concentrating trenching within highway verges where possible

WODC cannot comment further at this stage.

Noise and Vibration

It is noted that an Operational Noise Management Plan (ONMP) will be prepared to identify the noise limits for the operation of the Project and the measures for how these limits would be monitored.

It will be informed by a full assessment of operational noise to be undertaken once the plant design is complete.

Climate Change

The whole-life impact of the Project has been determined to have a beneficial effect that is significant when comparing to current UK electricity grid factors.

Although a significant initial carbon cost of manufacturing and installation is incurred, by achieving a carbon payback period of 10 years (earliest estimated payback period) and providing subsequent net negative emissions in operation, the Project meets policy goals for the rate of carbon reduction in the context of UK carbon budgets.

WODC cannot comment further at this stage.

Air Quality

WODC support the implementation of appropriate dust control measures during the construction phase to minimise significant effects with respect to air quality during the project.

Socio Economics

The employment generation associated with each phase of works has been independently assessed with all phases considered to have a beneficial impact.

All other potential effects associated with key receptors were assessed as being not significant with the exception of the potential impact on the visitor economy during construction which has been assessed as adverse.

This is, however, based on the information currently available and this aspect will be further assessed in the Environmental Statement based on additional survey work which is currently being carried out.

WODC cannot comment further at this stage.

Human Health

A number of potential impacts on human health associated with the construction, operational and maintenance, and decommissioning phases of the Project, were identified.

These included access to open space, leisure and play; transport modes, access and connections; community identity, culture and resilience; education and employment opportunities; environmental conditions; climate change; and wider societal infrastructure.

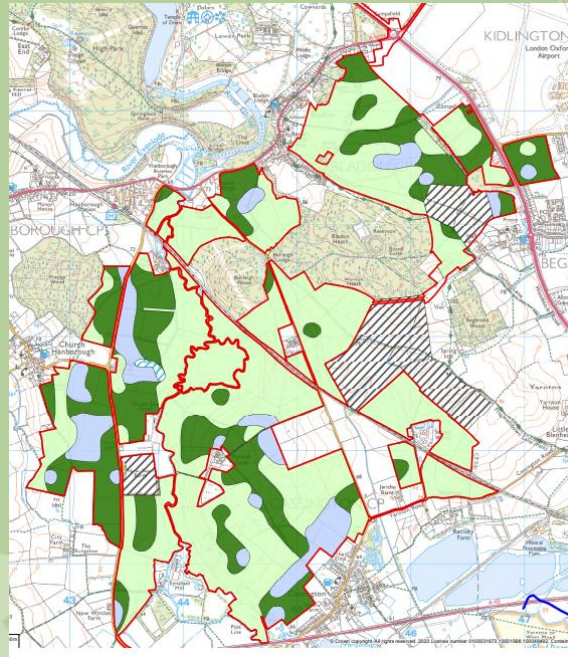
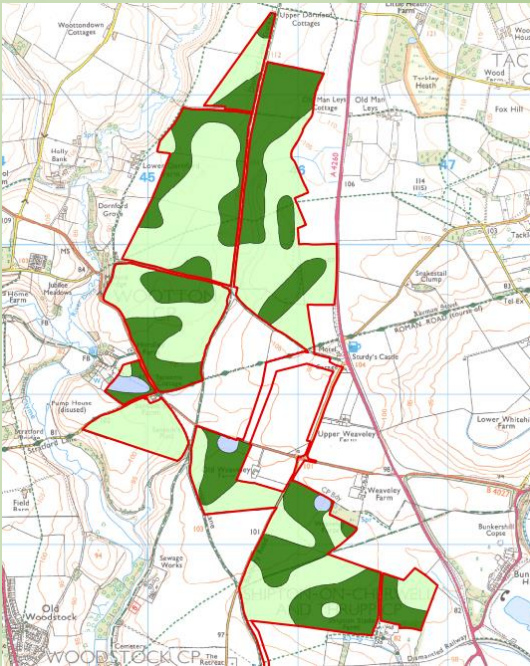
With the measures adopted as part of the Project in place, the majority of these impacts result in adverse effects but are not significant. There are also several beneficial effects on human health that have been identified.

WODC cannot comment further at this stage.

Agricultural land and Public Rights of Way

The Applicant identifies a range of significant cumulative effects that are likely to occur with respect to agricultural land and public rights of way including;

- permanent adverse cumulative effect as a result of loss of BMV agricultural land during construction of the Project
- temporary adverse cumulative effect on public rights of way, including footpaths and bridleways arising from disruption and reduced access during construction



Community Benefits

WODC support the provision of community benefits arising from the scheme and will seek to secure a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with the Applicant, to support the delivery of community benefit and environmental improvement projects in the area.

In terms of financial benefits and the opportunity for a community benefit fund, WODC consider that a £/MW/Annum contribution would be appropriate to reflect the scale of the scheme and to secure benefits over the lifetime of the project.

It is considered that a rate of £500 per MW per year may be appropriate

Further engagement – Beyond Pre-application

The current consultation isn't the last chance for the district council to express views on the development proposal.

- **Acceptance Stage** – WODC to submit adequacy of consultation representation
- **Pre-Examination** – Council to submit a 'Relevant Representation' – This is a summary of the Council's views on the application – Further site visit could be arranged to inform the Council's view at this stage
- **Examination** – WODC invited to submit a Local Impact Report – A key document in the decision making process - giving details of the likely impact of the proposed development on the area.



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