

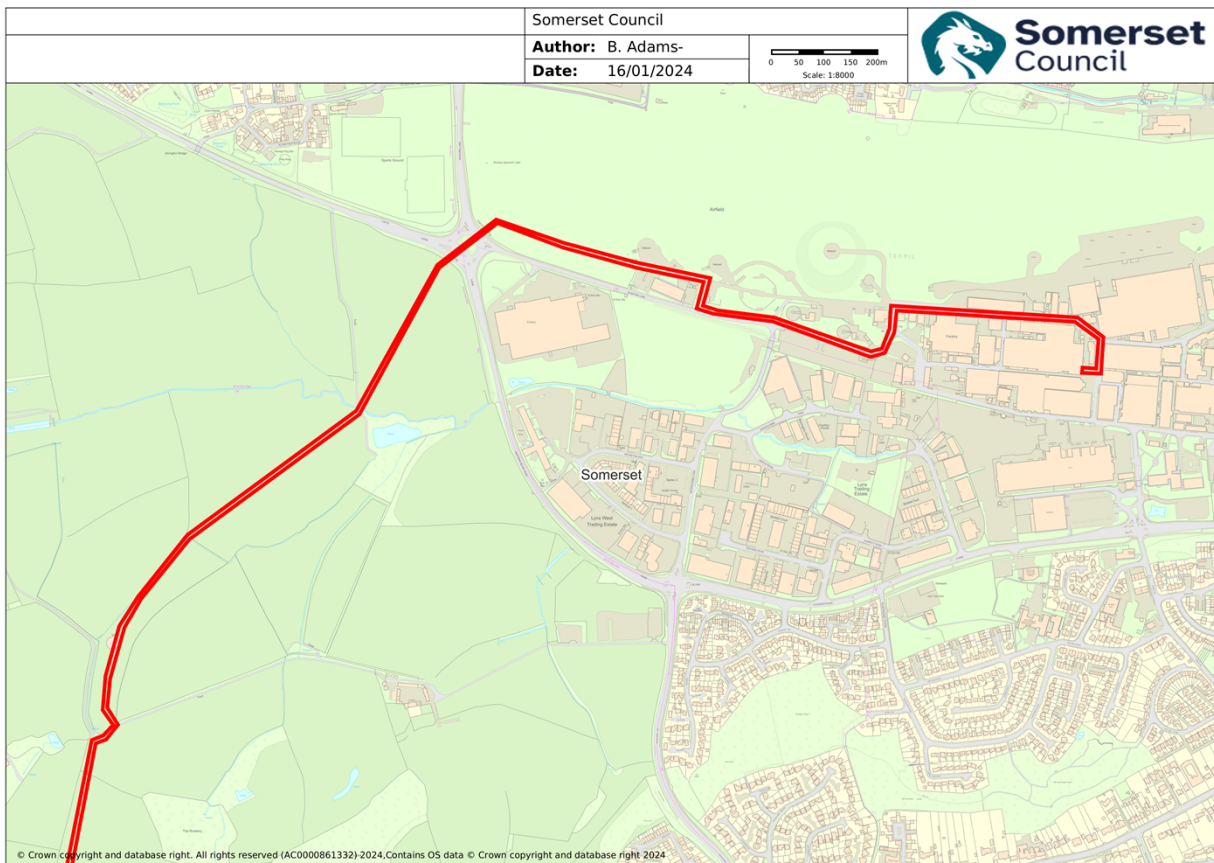
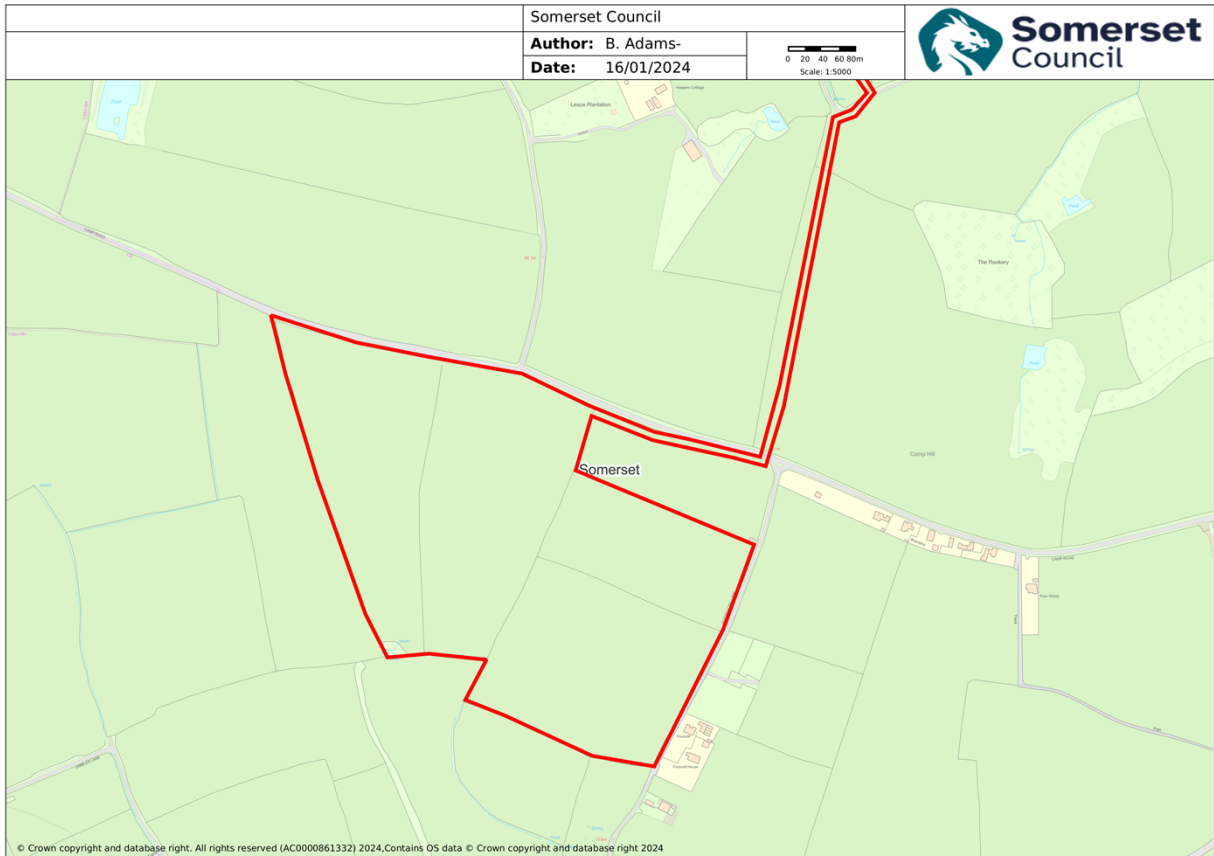
Officer Report On Planning Application: 23/02111/FUL

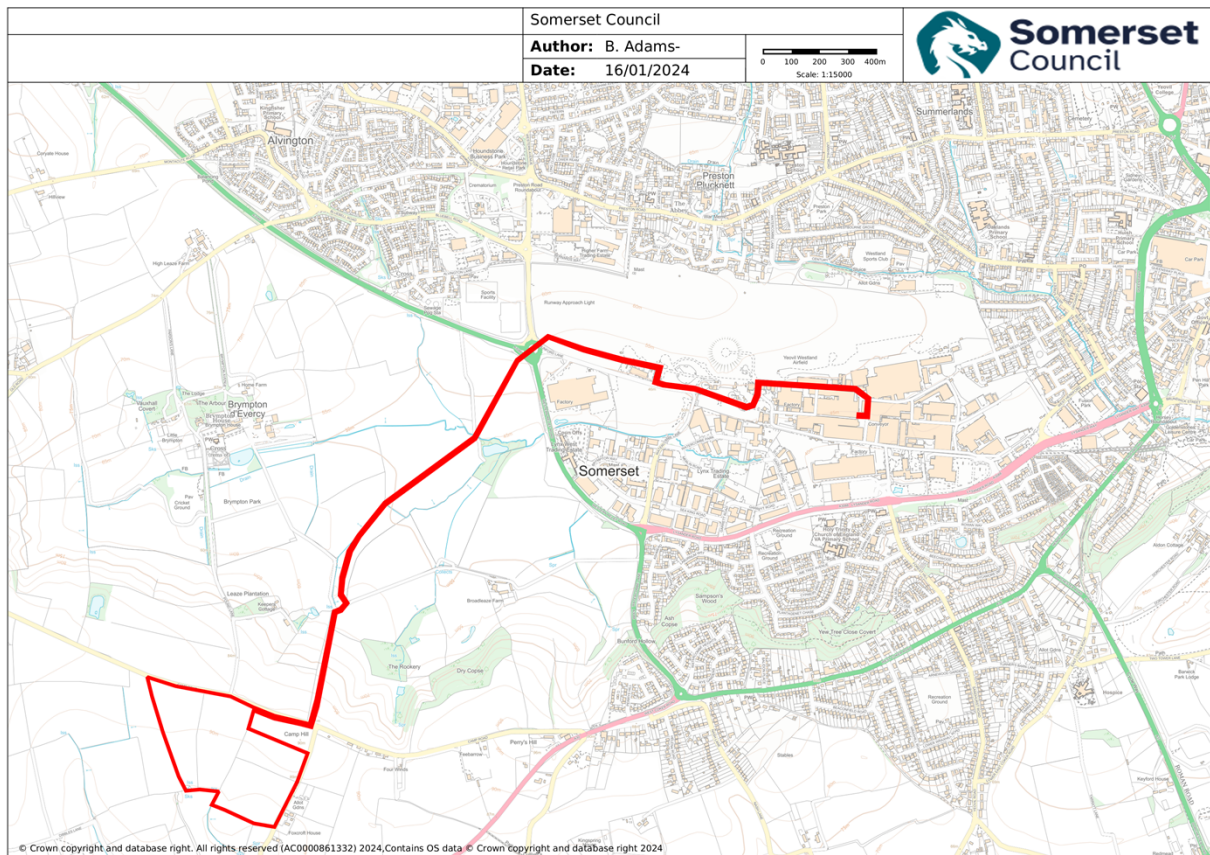
Proposal:	Solar PV farm and associated infrastructure including battery energy storage and access arrangements and cable run to supply renewable electricity to Leonardo
Site Address:	Land South Of Camp Road, West Coker, Yeovil, Somerset,
Parish:	West Coker
COKER Division	Cllr Mike Hewitson and Cllr Oliver Patrick
Recommending Case Officer:	Linda Hayden (Principal Specialist)
Target date:	14th November 2023
Applicant:	E Wagland
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Ben Lewis, Renplan Ltd, The Hive, 6 Beaufighter Road, Weston-super-Mare BS24 8EE
Application Type:	Major Other f/space 1,000 sq.m or 1 ha+

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

This is a major application and is referred to the Planning South Committee at the request of West Coker Parish Council and the Divisional Member in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation.

SITE DESCRIPTION:





The 16.24 hectare application site lies in the countryside to the south-west of Yeovil and to the north of West Coker village, it also includes a cable route from the site to the Leonardo site in Yeovil. The site is bounded by Camp Road which runs along the north boundary and Gooseacre Lane running along the eastern boundary. A Public Right of Way Footpath (PROW) Y 29/8 runs through the centre of the site from north to south, there is also a Public Right of Way Footpath (Y29/6) which runs along the western boundary but is not within the application site. There are no directly adjoining residential properties, but there is a small group of dwellings and allotment gardens which sit opposite the south eastern part of the site on Gooseacre Lane. The site forms part of a larger farm estate and comprises Grade 2 agricultural land classified as 'best and most versatile' agricultural land consisting of fields bounded by mature hedging and tree groups.

The site itself contains no heritage assets but the Brympton d'Evercy estate (Brympton House (Grade I), the adjoining Grade II* Listed farmhouse, the Church of St Andrew (Grade I), the Chantry House (Grade I), Barns and Stables (Grade II* and Grade II), a Clock Tower (Grade II), Lodge Cottage (Grade II), and Walled Pond (Grade II) are situated to the north. The buildings are set within a Grade II* Listed Park and Garden. West Coker village to the south of the site is largely covered by a

conservation area with a number of listed buildings. There are also a number of Archaeological Sites of County Importance within the vicinity, including Camp Road.

To the south-east is a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the form of a Minor Romano British Villa.

The site is within the buffer zone of the ancient woodlands to the north-east of the site 'The Rookery' and 'Dry Copse'. These are also Local Wildlife Sites. They, along with smaller sites to the north, are also designated Broadleaved Woodland Stepping Stones and Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitat.

The site is within a Great Crested Newt Risk Zone and is a Great Crested Newt Strategic Opportunity Area as defined by Natural England.

The listed park and garden to the north is covered by a protected species zone for Brown Long-eared Bats.

The site is with an SSSI Impact Risk Zone for notification to Natural England of any wind or solar development.

The SSDC Peripheral Landscape Study designates the High Landscape Sensitivity, and the surrounding fields that have High Visual Sensitivity, with low capacity to accommodate built development.

The site is within Flood Zone 1 indicating a low probability of flooding and has no designation for surface water flooding.

The site lies considerably beyond the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site but falls within the Parrett Catchment Area of Risk. 5kms to the south lies the Dorset National Landscape (previously known as Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)).

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL:

This is an application for full temporary (40 years and 6 months) permission for the development of a ground mounted solar energy generation system and associated infrastructure including battery energy storage and access arrangements. The proposal involves the installation of solar panels and associated infrastructure facility of approximately 15.23 megawatts peak (MWp), to supply Leonardo of Yeovil.

The proposals will retain and improve the existing access point, providing new access

tracks for construction and maintenance set away from the hedge boundaries and proposed supplementary buffer planting. A track will terminate within each field to allow access to the inverters.

Together with associated infrastructure and housings the development is comprised of the following main elements:

- A solar scheme of fixed ground mounted photo-voltaic (PV) panels and ancillary development including battery storage, switch room, substation and transformers. An underground cable route will also run broadly north-eastwards to connect to the Leonardo Helicopter site;
- The solar panels will be arranged in rows and mounted no higher than 2.7m from ground level and orientated southwards to maximise power generation. The ancillary development will be no higher than 2.9m;
- The solar panels will be mounted on metal frames with support posts inserted into the ground to a depth of approximately 1-1.5m, depending on ground conditions, thereby avoiding the use of concrete foundations;
- A 2m high perimeter post and wire (deer) fence will surround the proposed development. A green palisade security fence will surround the battery storage area;
- CCTV cameras will be mounted on poles along the perimeter fence;
- Access tracks (for construction and operation), approximately 3.5m wide consisting of Type 1 MOT compacted gravel and a geotextile lining, utilising the existing entrance off Camp Road to the north;
- Retention and enhancement of boundary tree, shrub and hedgerow planting to retain enclosure and screening as well as for biodiversity and nature conservation benefits; and
- Extensive proposed woodland and hedgerow planting for screening, promotion of landscape character and landscape elements and for biodiversity (including Biodiversity Net Gain measures). There will also be areas of rough grassland/tussocky grassland for biodiversity.

The application is supported by:

- Planning, Design and Access Statement
- Agricultural Land Classification Survey
- Construction Traffic Management Plan
- Statement of Community Involvement
- Flood Risk Assessment and SWDS
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (cabling route)
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

- Landscape and Visual Appraisal
- Glint and Glare Assessment
- Noise Assessment Report
- Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- Site Selection Statement (with Addendum)
- Economic Statement
- Camp Road Sequential Location Assessment (with Addendum)
- Geophysical Survey
- Sustainability Report - Carbon Reduction Plan for Leonardo

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

22/03034/EIASS

EIASS Screening Request - Determined that an Environmental Impact Assessment not required 15/12/2022

POLICY:

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), and Paragraphs 2, 11 and 12 of the NPPF states that applications are to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a general duty on local planning authorities when determining planning applications as respect listed buildings and states:
in considering whether to grant planning permission, or permission in principle, for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any feature of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 72 of the Listed Buildings Act requires that special attention shall be paid in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This requirement extends to all powers under the Planning Acts, not only those that relate directly to historic buildings. The desirability of preserving or enhancing the area should also, in the Secretary of State's view, be a material consideration in the planning authority's handling of development proposals that are outside the conservation area but would affect its setting, or views into or out of the area.

For the purposes of determining current applications the Local Planning Authority considers that the adopted development plan comprises the following:

South Somerset Local Plan adopted March 2015

SD1 Sustainable Development

EQ1 Addressing Climate Change in South Somerset

EQ2 General Development

EQ3 Historic Environment

EQ4 Biodiversity

EQ5 Green Infrastructure

EQ6 Woodland and Forests

EQ7 Pollution Control

TA5 Transport Impact of New Development

TA6 Parking Standards

Chapter 2 of the Local Plan sets out the 'Spatial Portrait of South Somerset'.

Paragraph 2.8:

'Manufacturing plays a specialist role in South Somerset's economy and in 2011 provided over 20% of the total employment in the district, which is twice the South-West and national average rate. This is helped, principally, because of the importance of defence-related industries and expenditure from Agusta Westland (now Leonardo), Thales and other associated industries.'

Neighbourhood Plan

None relevant.

Local Plan Review

A new unitary council for Somerset was invested on 1 April 2023 to replace the existing county and district councils.

The numerous stages in Local, Mineral and Waste Plan preparation of the former district councils will therefore no longer be progressed to new plans through the statutory process based on their individual geographies. A new Development Plan(s) is to be prepared as part of the single unitary council. This includes ongoing work to progress and align key evidence base documents. Relevant documents, including an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) for the new Somerset Council will be published in due course as the councils work through the transitional arrangements. Until the Somerset Local Plan is adopted, existing Local Plans remain in place for the

individual geographical areas of the former district councils.

Other material considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- Natural Environment
- Renewable and low carbon energy
- Noise

Somerset County Council Parking Strategy, September 2012

South Somerset District Council Landscape Assessment published 1993

CONSULTATION:

Consultee comments summarised below. Full comments available on the planning file

West Coker Parish Council:

Comment:

PC: OBJECTS with comments

Members objected to the application for several reasons:

1. Members objected to the use of Agricultural land as the site for a solar farm. Farming land is a limited resource and should be protected from mass development of this kind. Members noticed there is only one access point to the site and, for safety reasons, felt two access points would be necessary.
2. Members felt the design should include substantially more ecological and biodiversity initiatives and would welcome the opportunity of working with Conrad Energy as to what they should be.
3. Leonardo site (carparks, roofs) should be utilised for solar panels, to reduce the number required at Camp Road, or simply in addition to those at Camp Road.
4. The panels on site could efficiently charge the large batteries and negate the argument for having batteries at Camp Road. We estimate 4.5 hectares is available

on the carparks and 1.5 hectares on the roof of the Kuehne & Nagel building (designed to hold solar panels but requiring permission from the owner).

Members objected to the batteries being stored at Camp Road and felt the applicant could and should make more efforts to locate the batteries at Leonardo.

5. This would reduce the risks associated with potential battery fires should they occur at Camp Road. Leonardo is equipped with a fire response team on site and the site is monitored continuously. The extinguishing of a battery fire at Camp Road, would likely create a flooding issue for local properties and land.

6. We feel it is essential that conditions are put in place to ensure the site is fully maintained and operational throughout the term of the project and the site is returned to its pre-solar farm at the end of the project. The solar farm equipment should be recycled/repurposed rather than landfill although we appreciate the method for doing so can't be detailed at this point when it will occur so far in the future.

Brympton Parish Council (cable route runs through Parish) :
Support the granting of permission.

Yeovil Town Council (cable route runs through part of Parish):
Comment:
'Support. The benefits far outweigh any negative impacts.'

Highways

Comment:

Summary:

Solar PV farm and associated infrastructure including battery energy storage and access arrangements and cable run to supply renewable electricity to Leonardo, Land South of Camp Road West Coker Yeovil Somerset.

This is a proposal for Solar PV Installation (including a small battery storage facility) to the south-west of Yeovil and to the north of West Coker village. It is a temporary installation for 40 years. The development is effectively fully 'reversible' on decommissioning.

Full comments:

The Highway Authority deem the following points to be salient;

- Site Location Plan Ref. CRE001-SP-01 reviewed and red-line boundary shown.

- Camp Lane Layout Plan has been provided; Ref. CRE001-PL-01.
- Access & Visibility Splay Details;
 - It is to be located at an existing gateway adjoining Camp Road (Indicative Landscape Masterplan provided; Fig. 20).
 - Cross-section of Access Track provided (ref. CFE001-SD-09). Min. width 3.5m.
 - Temporary Traffic Regulation Order; Installation of a 30mph during construction phase therefore 43m visibility splays in both directions must be present.
 - CTMP states no loose or unbound material used in the surface treatment within 20m of the highway boundary with gates set back 20m.
 - This will remain private and will not be adopted by Somerset Council.
- Parking & Turning - During all stages of construction and operation, this will be accommodated on-site with no vehicles to be parking or waiting on the adjoining road network during any stage of the development (CTMP; Section 2.2.6).
- Collision Data - There is 1 slight injury collision detailed (2020; skidding on ice) but no data showing for the current access location to be used. There will be a temporary speed restriction of 30mph put in place during the construction phase.
- Public Rights of Way - Site Analysis Figure-2 shows two PROW. One of which is along the western site boundary and the other passes centrally through the site connecting with Camp Road to the north and the fringes of West Coker to the south.
 - Further communication must be made to Somerset Council's PROW team.
- Drainage - I acknowledge receipt of the drawings and report listed below and can confirm that I have no objection in principle to the proposals as they relate to the existing public highway and have no further observations to make.
 - CRE001-PL-01 Rev.18 - Camp Lane Layout Plan
 - CRE001-SD-09 Rev.01 - Standard Drawings - Access Track Cross Section
 - CRE001-SP-01 Rev.07 - Camp Lane Site Location Plan
 - J-15137 Report No. 1 - Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage Strategy dated 22nd June 2023
- Construction Traffic Management Plan;

- This has been provided at full application submission.
- The delivery and construction/installation phase of the proposed development is expected to commence in Summer 2024 and take place over a six-month period.
- Trip generation projections associated with the proposed development is given.
- Vehicular access is expected to be taken from an existing field access junction with Camp Road which will be widened to accommodate the movement of Heavy Commercial Vehicles (HCVs) and is to be utilised during the construction, installation, and maintenance periods (Section 171 licence requirement).
- A swept path analysis showing a HCV accessing/egressing the site via the existing field access on Camp Road has been provided. Banksman provision noted.
- Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) is documented in section 2.2.5. Installation of a 30mph temporary speed limit on the approaches to the access junction on Camp Road for the duration of the works.'

In the event of permission being granted, the Highways Team recommend conditions are imposed in relation to; provision of access; visibility splays; entrance gate arrangements; materials to be used for access; and parking provision.

Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)

Following submission of additional information during the course of this application, LLFA has no objections subject to conditions.

Historic England:

Comment:

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

We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers.'

Conservation Specialist

Comment:

'I have been on site. It is flat and well bounded by hedges. I don't see any potential for impact on built heritage but in such a big landscape I am happy to look at any public comments if further assessment is required.'

The Gardens Trust:

Comment:

' Thank you for consulting the Gardens Trust in its role as Statutory Consultee on the above application which affects Brympton D'Evercy, an historic designed landscape of national importance which is included by Historic England on the Register of Parks and Gardens (RPG) of Special Historic Interest at Grade II.*

We have considered the information provided in support of the application and liaised with our colleagues in the Somerset Gardens Trust. The panels are situated a few fields to the south of the RPG, across Camp Road. The panels face south, so there will not be any glint towards the north where the RPG is. There is already some tree cover and the existing hedges are to be grown to 3m, further mitigating any visibility. On the basis of this, we confirm we do not wish to comment on the proposals at this stage. We would however emphasise that this does not in any way signify either our approval or disapproval of the proposals.'

Archaeologist (South West Heritage Trust):

Following receipt of additional information, the archaeologist is now content with the application subject to the imposition of conditions.

Ecologist (Somerset Ecology Services):

Comment:

Ecology

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site was carried out by Western Ecology in September 2022 & November 2022, the report was produced in May 2023. The results of the report are summarised below (some sections taken directly from the report).

Site location The site comprises an area of agricultural land located within a rural area. The village of West Coker is located approximately 300m to the south of the proposed development area, with the urban area associated with the town of Yeovil located approximately 1.3km to the north-east. The Site comprises four fields of cultivated grassland, with an area of woodland located at the south-west boundary. Hedgerows and lines of trees provided external and internal boundaries.

A small stream is present along the southern boundary of the northern field. Aquatic vegetation was largely absent, the steep banks were vegetated. A number of wet

ditches were present adjacent to hedgerows. Plant species within these ditches included nettle, rosebay willowherb, common hogweed and rye grasses.

Survey Results - Notable and Protected Species:

Habitats: It is understood that there will not be any loss of hedgerow/hedge bank habitat.

Bats: Mature trees associated with hedgerows and woodland may provide potential roosting habitat.

The site sits within a rural area which is not lit at night. The local landscape contains optimal foraging habitat for a range of bat species and it is likely that foraging occurs within the site.

Birds: Hedgerows, trees, and cultivated land will provide nesting opportunities for a range of farmland bird species.

Badger: There are no Badger setts within the site. The fields, hedgerows and woodland provide foraging opportunities for this species.

Reptiles: The hedgerow and woodland habitat within the site provide opportunities for species group, with additional suitable habitat in adjacent off-site areas. Slow worm, common lizard and banded grass snake are likely to be present within and around the site.

Amphibians: Habitat located at field boundaries (hedgerows and woodland) represents suitable terrestrial habitat for this species group. There is the potential for great crested newt and other amphibians such as common toad to occur within the site. The cable route passes through Green and Amber risk zones for GCN. The cable route involves temporary works within predominantly arable farmland which lacks sufficient vegetative structure and is unlikely to be used by GCN for sheltering during the daytime or hibernation period. Where the cable route crosses suitable terrestrial habitat (such as rough grassland, hedgerows and tall ruderal habitat), construction activities have some potential to result in the capture, killing, disturbance or injury of a Great Crested Newt, Cable route for proposed solar farm at Camp Road - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, May 2023 Page 16 of 31 and the loss/damage of resting places, which would be deemed an offence. Mitigation is recommended.

Dormice: The hedgerows, line of trees and adjacent woodland provide potential habitat for this species.

Hedgehogs: The hedgerows and woodland provide potential refuge and foraging opportunities for hedgehog

Water Vole & Otter: The watercourse is potentially suitable for water vole and otter. There is potential that individuals may become trapped within any construction site during the development phase.

Invertebrates: Habitats at this Site are likely to support common and widespread invertebrates, although priority invertebrate habitats such as flushes, suitable brown-field land and soft rock cliffs are absent from the Site.

Invasives: No invasive non-native plant species listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended were noted during the survey. It should be noted that whilst not listed on Schedule 8 of the Act, bamboo species (Target Note 4) can be invasive within semi-natural habitats.

SES Comments:

The LEMP provided by Western Ecology in May 2023 includes precautionary working methods for reptiles, breeding birds, otter, dormice, and water vole. The LEMP also includes buffers around trees, hedgerows and the watercourse (where appropriate), as well as timing of works, a management plan, and some habitat/biodiversity enhancements. The LEMP covers most of the requirements needed from an ecology standpoint. Other requirements include a District Level Licence for GCN, a lighting plan (to ensure no artificial lighting is used during/post construction), and some Biodiversity enhancements (bat/bird boxes, etc.).

The ecologist requests that condition are imposed in relation to: lighting; great crested newt District Level Licence; Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP); and mitigation features.

Natural England:

Comment:

'b No Objection

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites.'

Forestry Commission

No comments received.

Dorset AONB:

Comment:

'Due to the distance of this application site from the designated area, we do not wish to comment on this occasion.'

Landscape Consultant for Somerset Council:

Objects, in principle to the application.

Comments/queries:

- the inclusion of hedgerows with the planned landscaping
- the very high number of CA's and Listed Buildings underpins a high overall sensitivity
- users of PROW's and particularly important routes such as Monarch's Way and MacMillan Way, are of 'high sensitivity' and not the 'medium-high' as assessed in the LVIA
- acknowledges that the visibility of the scheme does reduce relatively quickly as one moves away from the site and intervening vegetation and topography combine to heavily influence where it can be seen from
- less concerned with the longer distance views from elevated ground as, in reality, from these locations, existing vegetation will be significantly higher than, and will filter views of, the panels. In these cases, the panels will most probably appear as a change in colour and texture.
- consider that it is not possible to successfully mitigate the harms to those walking through the site, but it is possible to significantly reduce the effects on those passing the site on Gooseacre Lane to the immediate east and Camp Road to the immediate north.
- question why the proposed woodland planting does not extend fully to the junction of Gooseacre lane and Camp Road and even westwards along the northern site boundary.
- question why there is no design proposal or any mitigation of any sort to deal with open views into the site and note the fact that the gates into the site will need to be set some 20m back from the roadside.
- Hedgerow removal. The LVIA states that 'minor hedgerow' will be removed to create the access. This is at odds with the Swept Path Analysis drawings LTP/5248/T1/01.01 REV B which clearly shows some hedge being removed to create the 8m radii at the site access. Of greater concern on the same drawing, are the green dotted lines which normally denote visibility splays. These are extensive in each direction. The CTMP notes that visibility splays are short of the required distance but does not say what that distance might be.

Overall conclusions:

'Having studied the submitted scheme and the LVIA, my overall conclusion on landscape matters is that there is a high degree of harm to landscape character, albeit restricted to a relatively small area to the immediate north of West Coker. That harm extends to or

includes harm to the landscape setting of West Coker. In addition, there are also visual harms, but it is accepted that those are restricted to those who pass through and immediately past the site.

Overall, and irrespective of the point of clarification around loss of hedgerow, I would object to the scheme due to the harms identified above and the fact that I do not think that harm to character, setting and visual amenity can be effectively mitigated through planting.'

Rights of Way Officer:

No objections subject to informatives.

Environmental Health Officer:

No comments received

Designing Out Crime Officer (DOCO):

Advises that the scheme is not acceptable in its current form. Has concerns regarding the type of fencing proposed and requests that specialist security fencing is used. Provides advice in relation to CCTV provision and security measures for the site equipment and site compound.

(Officer Note: The agents have responded to these comments but the DOCO remains concerned about the fencing).

Devon and Somerset Fire Service:

Comment:

'The Fire and Rescue Authority is a statutory consultee under the current Building Regulations and will make detailed comments at that time when consulted by building control (or approved inspector).'

MOD:

Comment:

'The MOD maintain no objection to this application subject to the following conditional requirement being included as part of any planning permission granted:

The planting in all areas should be designed to minimise the use of fruit/berry bearing species.

Reason

To minimise the attraction of an exploitable food resource for flocking birds which are considered hazardous to aviation safety at Yeovil Aerodrome and RNAS Yeovilton.'

REPRESENTATIONS:

Local residents near the site were notified of the application, site notices were displayed around the site and an advert was placed in the local newspaper. 75 representations have been received, of which 58 object, 13 support and 4 made general representations.

Comments summarised below. Full comments available on Planning Register.

Support:

- Renewable energy sources with the ability for livestock to graze are preferable to industrial estates or houses.
- Someone thinking of the future to tackle climate change and not thinking of themselves and the shallow village life.
- Fields will be free from soil erosion caused by intensive farming of seed crops. Not all agricultural work is a benefit to nature, and not all developments are at the detriment of habitats.
- Solar farm will contribute to reducing global warming
- It will be barely visible to most
- No noteworthy walks or views in the are
- Worth sacrificing some rural beauty to combat climate change.
- Should be far more solar farms
- Aligns with planning policy EQ1 of the Local Plan
- Should put climate change before money and self-interest
- Support subject to conditions to require solar panels be placed on new warehouse at Leonardos, grazing of sheep for 6 months each year, drainage measures to improve surface water disposal and no changes to junction of Gooseacre Lane and Camp Road which would facilitate additional traffic in Gooseacre Lane
- Developments like this are crucial and should not be 'booted out' by an uninformed protestation and nimbyism.
- We must do as much as possible to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels

- The land is not prime agricultural land and the proposed scheme would lead to equal or improved biodiversity compared with current use.
- There is employment benefit to this scheme. Leonardo are by far the largest employer in Yeovil and the surrounding area. Their future in this area is dependent on securing contracts that have environmental clauses requiring demonstration of commitment to reducing their carbon footprint.
- Important for Leonardo to reduce their energy costs.

Objections:

- Land should be used for farming
- Leonardo's should use their own site/roofs for installation of solar panels
- Solar farms are unsightly
- Adverse impact on wildlife
- The proposed development contradicts local and national planning policy, including South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 (SSLP) and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Proposal is contrary to Policies SS2, EQ1 of the Local Plan
- Risk for fire from batteries
- Impact on local landscape
- Impact on Tourism
- Impact on mental health through creeping urbanisation
- Question efficacy of solar panels
- Impact on flora and fauna
- Solar farm could lead to other development on the land
- Wind power is preferable and provides power during the winter
- Site entrance is dangerous and road is not suitable for heavy construction vehicles
- Impact on views from property
- Impact on users of footpath
- Risk of flooding, local road can get flooded
- There is no benefit to the local population, needs to be better compensation for residents of West Coker
- Hedgerows need to be protected
- A thorough environmental impact study ned to be undertaken
- Panels are not recyclable
- Land will become unusable after 25 years
- Developer has not sufficiently engaged with the local community
- Does not promote effective use of land, contrary to NPPF
- Similar proposal has been dismissed at appeal due to impact on landscape, impact on footpath (noise)
- Request official fire risk assessment for the battery storage

- Devalue property
- Grid challenges - additional power may require updating of grid infrastructure which is costly and technically challenging
- Land contamination risk
- Glare and visual impact
- Impact on allotments
- Maintenance and cleaning
- How will time limit be enforced and how will restoration of site be secured
- New housing should be required to have solar panels
- Query presence of a covenant on the land
- West Coker is a conservation area and will be adversely impacted by the development
- Insufficient information regarding archaeology
- Concerns in relation to matters of Health, Safety and of Airworthiness given the proximity of site to Yeovil and West Coker in respect of Flight Operation of manned/unmanned Future Rotorcraft Experimental Flight Clearances

General representations:

- Query if Leonardo have fully considered possibilities of using their own site
- Query if a condition be imposed to require improvement of the hedgerow to the north of the site with established vegetation to immediately totally screen the site when driving along Camp Road.
- There should be a condition requiring solar panels on the roof of the new Leonardo warehouse

Divisional Member Cllr Mike Hewitson:

Comments:

'In summary I support this application, and believe that permission should be granted. In the midst of a Climate & Ecological Emergency I believe that low carbon microgeneration, along with the habitat improvements that the applicant has detailed are worthy of support.'

I note the concerns of West Coker Parish Council, but I believe these can largely be mitigated through Conditions which would be a more reasonable approach to refusal.

I do not see adequate planning grounds for refusal.'

Divisional Member Cllr Oliver Patrick:

Objects to the grant of planning permission:

Comments:

' Loss of trees or ecological habitats: Potential loss of ecological habitats and contamination of land due to polluted firewater (contrary to NPPF chapter 15 paragraph 185 and SSDC Local Planning Policy EQ7)

Flood Risk: If a fire occurs in the Battery Energy Storage Systems on site then a recommended 1,900L of water per minute must be deliverable for a minimum of 2 hours. That's according to the fire & rescue advice offered at other battery energy storage sites.

This equates to potentially 228,000L of water poured on site to extinguish a battery fire. No consideration appears to have been given to the localised flooding impact this could have in the area, let alone the contamination of the soil and watercourses by polluted firewater (as per point 5, above).'

CONSIDERATIONS:

Principle of Development:

In May 2019 South Somerset District Council formally recognised a climate and ecological emergency.

Paragraph 13.12 of the Local Plan states:

In terms of other potential renewable and low carbon energy resources in South Somerset, there is good potential to develop solar photovoltaic panels as the district has relatively high levels of sunshine duration compared to the rest of the UK, with around 1,500 sunshine hours per year.

Policy EQ1 of the Local Plan states:

Development of renewable and low carbon energy generation will be encouraged and permitted, providing there are no significant adverse impacts upon residential and visual amenity, landscape character, designated heritage assets, and biodiversity.

Paragraph 13.24 of the Local Plan sets out the following target to address climate change:

Annual 1% increase in the proportion of the district's electricity consumption met by renewable electricity generation located in South Somerset

Paragraph 157 of the NPPF states:

'The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas

emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.'

Paragraph 163 of the NPPF states:

'When determining planning applications⁵⁷ 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 significant cutting greenhouse gas emissions;
- b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable⁵⁸. 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; and
- c) in the case of applications for the repowering and life-extension of existing renewable sites, give significant weight to the benefits of utilising an established site, and approve the proposal if its impacts are or can be made acceptable. '

The submitted Planning Statement notes that the proposed solar farm would have an energy generation capacity of approximately 15.23 megawatts peak (MWp). It would generate approximately 26% of the annual energy required to operate Leonardo Helicopter's Yeovil facility and 16% of the company's consumption across all UK operations, while also providing energy security for the business via storage working alongside the grid.

The scheme would not meet the criteria of utility scale solar projects or nationally significant infrastructure projects which require over 50mw of energy production.

Objectors consider that the proposal does not accord with Policy SS2 Development in Rural Settlements which states that development in Rural Settlements (not Market Towns or Rural Centres) will be strictly controlled and limited to that which inter alia :

- Provides employment opportunities appropriate to the scale of the settlement;

In this case, the applicants have submitted an Economic Impact Assessment which concludes:

'the proposed development could support the following direct economic benefits:

- Supporting 45 direct FTE construction jobs and a further 60 indirect/induced jobs in the supply chain and related services during the peak phase of the anticipated build period;
- Delivering a total of £2.1 million in construction employment GVA throughout the peak of the build period;
- Supporting an uplift in local wages in the order of £92,000 per annum through the operation and maintenance of the solar farm once fully constructed;
- Boosting local authority revenues through the uplift in business rates of £53,000 per annum;
- Reduce the demand for energy from the local grid network, alleviating the existing energy constraints in Yeovil therefore, in turn, unlocking the potential for further economic development; and
- Supporting the national target to achieve net zero by 2050.'

For the reasons above, the principle of the proposed solar farm is considered acceptable in line with policies EQ1 and SS2 of the Local Plan. However, this is subject to a detailed assessment of the impact of the scheme on other receptors such as landscape.

Visual Amenity and Landscape Character:

Local Plan policy EQ1 encourages renewable and low carbon energy development, *providing there are no significant adverse impacts upon .. visual amenity [and] landscape character ..*

Policy EQ2 of the Local Plan requires high quality design, which promotes South Somerset's local distinctiveness and preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the district by:

- *Creating quality places;*
- *Conserving and enhancing the landscape character of the area;*
- *Reinforcing local distinctiveness and respect local context;*
- *Having regard to:*
 - *Local area character;*
 - *Site specific considerations; and*
 - *Not risking the integrity of internationally, nationally or locally designated*

landscape sites.

Policy EQ5 of the Local Plan promotes the enhancement of green infrastructure with reference to walking and cycling routes, increasing access, improving physical and mental health benefits, increasing tree cover, enhancing landscape and place, protecting existing green infrastructure and mitigating any loss.

Paragraph 180 b) of the NPPF states:

Planning... decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

The site lies within Landscape Character Area 'Yeovil Sand, Dipslopes and Escarpments' within the Yeovil Peripheral Landscape Study, the site has been identified as an area of high landscape sensitivity and as an area of high visual sensitivity, with a low capacity to accommodate built development.

Paragraph 5 of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) Renewable and low carbon energy states:

The National Planning Policy Framework explains that all communities have a responsibility to help increase the use and supply of green energy, but this does not mean that the need for renewable energy automatically overrides environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities.

Paragraph 15 states:

... in considering planning applications., it is important to be clear that:

- the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections;
- cumulative impacts require particular attention, especially the increasing impact that ... large scale solar farms can have on landscape and local amenity as the number of ... solar arrays in an area increases;
- local topography is an important factor in assessing whether ... large scale solar farms could have a damaging effect on landscape and recognise that the impact can be as great in predominately flat landscapes as in hilly or mountainous areas;
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting;
- proposals in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and in areas close to them where there could be an adverse impact on the protected area, will need careful consideration;
- protecting local amenity is an important consideration which should be given

proper weight in planning decisions.

The application site is not subject to any landscape designations but there are significant heritage assets in the form of the Brympton Estate and park and garden sited to the north.

The Council's Landscape Consultant has been consulted on this application and along with some queries about the proposed mitigation has an 'in principle' objection to the proposal on the grounds that the proposal will have *'a high degree of harm to landscape character, albeit restricted to a relatively small area to the immediate north of West Coker. That harm extends to or includes harm to the landscape setting of West Coker. In addition, there are also visual harms, but it is accepted that those are restricted to those who pass through and immediately past the site.'*

The applicant's landscape advisers have provided a robust response to the Council's Landscape Consultant's assessment. They have confirmed that:

- The proposed hedgerows (alongside the PROW) are illustrated on Figure 20: Indicative Landscape Masterplan on either side of the public right of way that crosses the site and are identified within the key on Figure 20 as "Proposed species rich native hedgerow managed to a minimum height of 3m high."

The proposed hedgerow is also described in bullet point 4 in paragraph 4.18 of the LVIA as:

"Proposed native hedgerow will run along the line of the public right of way that passes centrally through the site. This will provide separation and enclosure to the proposed development when perceived from the public right of way. The proposed hedgerow will also help to 'break' up the built form, including when perceived from elevated ground to the south."

- In response to the Council's Landscape Architect comment on the impacts on the public right of way that passes through the site, within paragraph 6.49 of the LVIA, it states "open and close proximity views will be possible towards the proposed development from the public right of way. There will be a change to the view from fields to development and the magnitude of impacts will be high, the level of effect will be major adverse." This is illustrated in Viewpoint 1 (Figures 10A-10F) with a comprehensive 180 degree view from the public right of way. The Council's Landscape Architect agrees with this statement.
- It also states within the LVIA, and as illustrated in Viewpoint 1 (Figures 10A-10F), that "the growth of the proposed hedgerow planting will create a

vegetated corridor along the public right of way which will help to restrict the influence of the proposed development over time, although glimpses of some of the structures associated with the proposed development, such as security cameras will be possible above this enclosure. In addition, the proposed development will also be potentially perceived through the proposed hedgerow vegetation during the winter months. The magnitude of impact will be low, the level of effect will be minor adverse."

- It is also mentioned within paragraph 3.11 of the LVIA that the site has been identified as an area of high landscape sensitivity and as an area of high visual sensitivity, with a low capacity to accommodate built development within the South Somerset District Council Peripheral Landscape Study - Yeovil, September 2008.

The sensitivity and capacity ratings, as stated within the Yeovil Study, are for new housing and employment sites.

Housing/employment sites are very different for solar schemes in terms of their landscape and visual impacts. Housing/employment sites are permanent, taller and involve a more intensive land use. Solar schemes are temporary, smaller and involve a less intensive land use - they cannot be compared.

- The LVIA considers historic landscape designations in terms of their role in defining landscape character, such as Registered Parks and Gardens, Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments and the potential impacts and effects on their setting are considered from a landscape and visual perspective. More detail on the impacts on the setting of heritage features can be found in the Allen Archaeology Limited Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment, March 2023 that accompanies this planning application."

The assessment of impacts and effects on the setting of heritage features (from a landscape and visual perspective only) has been determined through analysis of the ZTV and site survey, including determination of viewpoints and photomontages. Therefore, in my professional opinion, based on a combination of both qualitative and quantitative assessment, I would disagree with the Council's Landscape Architect. There will be no influence on the setting of heritage features as a result of the proposed development.

Application Details

The following elements are involved in the proposed development.

Solar Panels

Objections have been received relating to potential glare from the proposal. In this case, the submitted Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study, dated March 2023, concludes that *'No significant impacts are predicted upon road safety, residential amenity, and aviation activity at Yeovil Aerodrome. No mitigation is recommended.'*

Boundary treatments

The proposed solar farm would involve a deer fence along all boundaries including those aligning the public footpath this will site behind the proposed hedgerow that will line each side of the footpath. The fence would have a height of approx. 2.5m and would comprise wire mesh between timber posts. The battery compound would be bounded by 2.4 m metal palisade fencing.

Trees and hedges

The following landscape mitigation is proposed for the site:

- Existing hedgerows within and surrounding the proposed development will be retained and enhanced, where appropriate and maintained at a minimum of 3m in height. Proposed native species rich 'gap' filling planting will be introduced into the existing retained vegetative structure. This will strengthen and give additional height to the existing vegetative structure on the boundaries and within the proposed development, where required and reinforce the surrounding regular landscape pattern. In addition, the reinforcement of existing hedgerow boundaries will also help to restrict views from the surrounding visual amenity receptors;
- Proposed planting will reflect the existing landscape character and landscape pattern within the study area through the sensitive selection of species that will enhance the proposed development and the wider landscape. The use of native species that are characteristic of the area will also promote a sense of place as well as provide nature conservation and biodiversity interest;
- Proposed native woodland planting, focussed to the south-east of the proposed development, adjacent to Gooseacre Lane, will help to provide screening and enclosure, particularly from the nearby scattered residential properties;
- Proposed native hedgerow will run along the line of the public right of way that passes centrally through the site. This will provide separation and enclosure to the proposed development when perceived from the public right of way. The proposed hedgerow will also help to 'break' up the built form, including when perceived from elevated ground to the south;
- Between the fence line and the field boundaries and along the line of the

public right of way will be maintained as rough grassland/tussocky grassland for nature conservation and biodiversity enhancements; and

- Any gaps or areas of bare or disturbed ground in the existing grassland, following construction will be re-seeded with a species rich grassland mix, suitable for grazing and specifically for solar parks.

Battery Storage and transformer units

A battery storage area is proposed to the north of the main site comprising 9 battery storage units (6m long x 2.4m wide x 2.9m high) with a switch room (12m long x 3.7m wide x 2.9m high). These have the appearance of storage containers.

Three groups of three transformer units (12.2m long x 2.5m wide x 2.9m high) are along proposed within the main site. Again, these have the appearance of container units.

All of this supporting infrastructure is to be located within the main body of the site and due to the existing trees and hedgerows and the proposed landscaping is unlikely to be publicly visible.

CCTV Cameras:

A number of 2.5m high CCTV cameras are proposed throughout the site.

Access

The site will be accessed using the existing access to Camp Road. New access tracks through the site are proposed for construction and maintenance set away from the hedge boundaries and proposed supplementary buffer planting. A track will terminate within each field to allow access to the inverters.

The access will be improved in order to allow for the construction of the development but affected hedgerows will be replaced once construction is complete. Heavy Commercial Vehicles (HCVs) will be required to use the access during the construction/installation phases only. The Construction Traffic Management Plan submitted with the application also assesses visibility along the 60mph road and suggests the installation of temporary portable traffic signals to, and a temporary speed limit reduction of 30mph on approach during the construction phase to mitigate for visibility splays short of the required distance and ensure the requisite level of safety.

Views

It is a matter of agreement between the landscape consultants that the visibility of the scheme does reduce relatively quickly as one moves away from the site and

intervening vegetation and topography combine to heavily influence where it can be seen from. It is therefore agreed, as stated in the LVIA, that the wider influence of the proposed development on landscape character, including on the setting of landscape relevant designations and views from visual amenity receptors as a result of the operation of the proposed development would be minimal. Furthermore, long distance views from elevated ground are mitigated as in reality existing vegetation will be significantly higher than, and will filter views of, the panels. In these cases, the panels will most probably appear as a change in colour and texture within the existing landscape.

Removal and remediation

The submitted Planning Statement notes that the proposal is for a 40-year operational period for the Solar PV Farm and its ancillary equipment with a further 6 months to allow for decommissioning and reinstatement of the land. The statement advises that the *'development is effectively fully reversible' on decommissioning.*

In terms of the recycling of materials from the development, the applicant advises that *'the development contains mostly recyclable materials including non-reflective recyclable glass, copper, aluminium, steel, and silicon in semi-conductors'.*

Should the Council be minded to approve this application then it is considered reasonable to impose a condition requiring the remediation of the site 40 years after the determination date in accordance with details to be approved by the LPA (or upon the ceasing of the use if sooner).

Assessment of visual impact

By its nature, a solar farm would be out of character with a pastoral landscape. While the site is relatively screened by existing vegetation and topography, close and some long-distance views of the site are publicly available. It should also be recognised that the application site lies in an area with a number of important heritage assets.

The changes to the landscape and visual amenity arising from the scheme would be considered to result in some harm by reason of the introduction of built form that would be out of character with the area.

However, the majority of the existing, grassland, trees and hedges on site would be retained and that the proposed landscaping strategy would provide screening from views within and adjacent to the site, particularly given the 'green lane' design for the central footpath. The screening would be less effective in the short term but would improve over time as the vegetation matures.

While the screening would also be less effective in long views, it is acknowledged that the visual impact of the development would be significantly lessened by the distances involved.

It is also acknowledged that the ecological buffers devoid of built form would also lessen the impact of the solar farm by reducing the parcels of development to some degree. It is the Officer's view, therefore, that the proposed layout and landscaping strategy would be sufficient to reduce the visual impact of the scheme to an acceptable level.

Notwithstanding the residual visual impact of the scheme following mitigation, it is acknowledged that the proposed landscaping would significantly enhance the site. This landscaping enhancement would remain in situ following the removal and remediation of the solar farm and would continue to mature and improve in the long term.

It is considered that the proposed solar farm has been sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the area. As such, the scheme would not be considered to risk the integrity of the local landscape and is in accordance with Local Plan policy EQ2.

Turning to the public footpaths and walking routes within and adjacent to the site, following mitigation, the development would not be considered to have a harmful impact on the experience of users of the walking and cycling routes within the site and its vicinity. As such, the scheme is capable of compliance with policy EQ5.

The proposed landscaping strategy would contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by delivering mitigation to reduce the visual impact of the scheme, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. As such, the scheme is capable of compliance with Paragraph 180 b) of the NPPF.

In terms of paragraph 5 of the Renewable Energy PPG, it must be recognised that there are a number of objections including an objection from West Coker Parish Council. It is the Officer's view that the amended landscaping scheme and layout would mitigate the visual impact of the scheme to an acceptable level that would improve over time and result in long-term enhancements following the decommissioning of the operations and restoration of the site. As such, it is considered that the planning concerns of local communities would be overridden by the need for renewable energy in this case and the amended application would accord with the Renewable and Low Carbon Energy PPG in this regard.

Conclusion on visual/character impact

Overall, the proposed scheme is considered acceptable with respect to the visual amenity and character of the site and surrounding area, including the setting of the Dorset AONB.

Therefore, subject to conditions, the scheme would be capable of compliance with Local Plan policies EQ1, EQ2 and EQ5, paragraphs 174 b) and 176 of the NPPF and paragraph 15 of the Renewable Energy PPG.

Heritage Assets:

Local Plan policy EQ1 encourages renewable and low carbon energy development, *providing there are no significant adverse impacts upon ... designated heritage assets...*

Local Plan policy EQ3 states:

Heritage assets will be conserved and where appropriate enhanced for their historic significance and important contribution to local distinctiveness, character and sense of place. Their potential to contribute towards the economy, tourism, education and local identity will be exploited.

All new development proposals relating to the historic environment will be expected to:

- Safeguard or where appropriate enhance the significance, character, setting and local distinctiveness of heritage assets;
- Make a positive contribution to its character through high standards of design which reflect and complement it and through the use of appropriate materials and techniques;
- Ensure alterations, including those for energy efficiency and renewable energy, are balanced alongside the need to retain the integrity of the historic environment and to respect the character and performance of buildings, adopting principles of minimum intervention and reversibility.

Paragraph 201 of the NPPF states:

Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset)...

Paragraph 203 of the NPPF states:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of: a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and

putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality.

Paragraph 205 of the NPPF states:

When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Paragraph 206 of the NPPF states:

Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 208 of the NPPF states:

Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal ...

In terms of heritage assets within the vicinity, the following are of note:

Scheduled Monuments

Chessels Roman Villa is a Scheduled Monument within the study area (Site 4: Historic England (HE) reference 1006186). It survives entirely as below ground features, with no visible surface features.

The submitted archaeological and heritage assessment advises that "*There is no intervisibility to the site due to the hedges around the site boundary and further intervening foliage there will therefore be no adverse effect to the setting or significance of this asset.*"

Listed Buildings

To the north of the site is the Brympton d'Evercy estate (Brympton House (Grade I), the adjoining Grade II* Listed farmhouse, the Church of St Andrew (Grade I), the Chantry House (Grade I), Barns and Stables (Grade II* and Grade II), a Clock Tower (Grade II), Lodge Cottage (Grade II), and Walled Pond (Grade II).

Historic England have objected to the application.

The submitted archaeological and heritage assessment advises that *There is no intervisibility with this site from the proposed development site and the cable route will not be visible therefore this asset will not be negatively affected by the proposed development.*

Registered Park and Gardens

Brympton d'Evercy is a Grade II* Registered Park and garden situated to the north of the site, it is summarised in its listing as '*C19 and C20 gardens developed within the surviving framework of a late C17 formal garden.*'

The Garden's Trust have commented "*The panels are situated a few fields to the south of the RPG, across Camp Road. The panels face south, so there will not be any glint towards the north where the RPG is. There is already some tree cover and the existing hedges are to be grown to 3m, further mitigating any visibility. On the basis of this, we confirm we do not wish to comment on the proposals at this stage. We would however emphasise that this does not in any way signify either our approval or disapproval of the proposals.*"

It is noted that the proposed cable route passes c.20m east of the listed park, but this will have no above-ground impact and therefore, there will be no adverse effect on the setting of this asset.

Conservation Areas

The Conservation Area of West Coker is located c.200m south of the proposed development site at its closest point. The area is heavily obscured by intervening trees and foliage, and the lack of intervisibility means the Conservation Area will not be adversely affected by the proposed development.

Designated assets

There are no Registered Battlefields within the study area.

There are no designated or undesignated assets within the proposed development site.

The submitted Archaeology and Heritage Statement concludes that:

"The study area contains one Scheduled Monument, 78 Listed Buildings, one Registered Park and Garden and one Conservation Area. No designated assets are

located within the proposed development site and the proposed cable route does not go through any designated areas. The majority of the Listed Buildings as well as the Conservation Area is located within West Coker, and despite the relatively close proximity there is no intervisibility of designated assets due to intervening hedges/trees and the topography of West Coker. There is no intervisibility with the Scheduled Monument due to the hedges around the site boundary and further intervening foliage. The proposed cable route will run in close proximity to the Registered Park and Garden however there will be no above ground visual impact. In conclusion the proposed development site is in a well screened location and the cable route does not have any above ground impact nor does it go through any designated areas therefore the proposed development will not have an adverse effect on the setting nor significance of any designated assets in the study area."

Historic England has been consulted on this application and has raised no objections with regard to heritage assets.

By reason of the intervening buildings and hedgerows, the separation gap and the proposed landscaping, the proposal is considered to result in 'less than substantial harm' to the significance of the heritage assets and their setting.

In accordance with Para's 205 and 208 of the NPPF, great weight must be given to the heritage asset's conservation and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. In this case, it is considered that the proposal will result in 'less than substantial harm' to the heritage assets and consideration therefore needs to be given as to whether the public benefits of the proposed development outweigh any perceived harm to the heritage asset.

In this case, it is considered that considerable weight can be given to the provision of renewable energy sufficient to provide Leonardo with up to 26% of its energy needs with the associated reduction in carbon emissions. In addition, significant weight can be given to the biodiversity net gain (88.33% ecological net gain to habitat units and a 39.44% ecological net gain of hedgerow units). As such, there is very clear benefit and given the lack of any objection from the relevant statutory Heritage Bodies (Historic England and the Gardens Trust) and the Council's Conservation Specialist, the benefits of the solar farm can be considered to outweigh the harm the setting of heritage assets.

Archaeology

The Council's Archaeology Consultant has been consulted on this application and originally raised concerns. Following receipt of additional information, the Archaeologist is now satisfied with the scheme subject to conditions.

Whilst there is some potential for archaeological assets to be present within the site, the avoidance of harm measures and additional investigations noted in the submitted archaeological documents are considered satisfactory in this case, subject to conditions.

Conclusion on heritage impact

For the above reasons, the proposal is considered capable of compliance with Local Plan policies EQ1 and EQ3 and the NPPF in this regard.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The nearest residential properties to the site are located on Gooseacre Lane to the south-east of the site. The proposals include the planting of a woodland opposite these dwellings and the adjacent allotment gardens to provide natural screening (as well as providing a biodiversity gain).

Local Plan policy EQ1 encourages renewable and low carbon energy development, *providing there are no significant adverse impacts upon residential .. amenity ..*

Local Plan policy EQ2 states:

Development proposals should protect the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

Local Plan policy EQ7 controls harm to amenity, health or safety arising from new development.

The Council's Environmental Health Officer has been consulted and has made no comments at the time of writing.

Given the proposed planting, it is not considered that the development would result in harm to the neighbouring amenity of the nearest dwellings in the form of overbearing impact, loss of light, privacy or outlook.

With regard to noise during the operational phase, it is not considered that the solar farm would give rise to unacceptable noise levels by reason of the nature of the

development and the separation distances to nearby dwellings. The submitted noise assessment concludes that:

'The assessment identifies that the Proposed Development will give rise to rating noise levels that are typically equal to or below the measured day and night-time background sound levels in the area, at the closest assessed residential receptors, thus giving rise to a Low Impact.'

Consequently, the assessment demonstrates that the development will give rise to noise impacts that would be categorised as No Observed Adverse Effect Level (NOAEL) within the PPG Noise guidance.

For ease of reference, the definition of No Observed Adverse Effect Level in PPG Noise is reproduced below:

"Noise can be heard, but does not cause any change in behaviour, attitude or other physiological response. Can slightly affect the acoustic character of the area but not such that there is a change in the quality of life."

Given that, the Proposed Development conforms to National and Local Planning Policy requirements; as such, it is recommended that noise should not be a constraint to the approval of this Planning Application, providing that the plant is constructed and operated in accordance with the acoustic assumptions of this report.'

For these reasons, the proposal is considered capable of policy compliance with regard to Local Plan policies EQ1 and EQ2 with regard to neighbouring amenity and the relevant policies of the NPPF.

Highways, Parking, Waste:

NPPF paragraph 115 states:

Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Local Plan policy TA5 requires all new development to maximise the potential for sustainable transport.

Local Plan policy TA6 requires the Somerset County Council Parking Strategy standards be applied to all new development.

The proposed development would make use of the existing access from Camp Road, visibility splays for which will be temporarily increased during the construction phase. A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) accompanies the application which sets out details of the construction phase including a temporary reduction in the 60 mph speed limit on the road to 30 mph. The Highways Team have been consulted on this application and have no objections subject to condition.

Whilst it is recognised that the proposal will result in construction traffic for the 6 months (approximately) that it will take to implement the development, once completed the development will only require very occasional maintenance visits, around 20 visits a year.

With the proposed temporary works included within the CTMP, the proposed development is considered, subject to conditions, capable of compliance with policies TA5 and TA6 of the South Somerset Local Plan and paragraph 115 of the NPPF.

Ecology and Biodiversity:

Local Planning Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that the impact of development on wildlife is fully considered during the determination of a planning application under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Habitats Regulations 2017).

In May 2019 South Somerset District Council formally recognised a climate and ecological emergency.

Local Plan policy EQ1 encourages renewable and low carbon energy development, *providing there are no significant adverse impacts upon ... biodiversity.*

Policy EQ4 of the Local Plan also require proposals to pay consideration to the impact of development on wildlife and to provide mitigation measures where appropriate.

Local Plan policy EQ5 seeks the enhancement of existing green infrastructure and the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and access to the countryside for mental and physical wellbeing, biodiversity enrichment and the creation of new habitats and wildlife connectivity, climate change mitigation and reduced disturbance of designated conservation areas.

The Council's Ecologist has been consulted on this application and has no objections subject to conditions.

Natural England has been consulted on this application and have raised no objections.

A Biodiversity Net Gains (BNG) Metric has been submitted, this notes that the scheme would result in an 88.33% gain in habitat units and a 39.44% gain in hedgerow units. This would result in an overall gain well in excess of the 10% requirement due to be introduced January/February 2024 under the Environment Act 2021.

The Council's Ecologist has considered the submitted ecology appraisals and is satisfied with the contents.

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) has been submitted in support of this application that notes:

'The Proposed Development does not require the removal or pruning of any of the surveyed trees, except potentially some localised pruning to facilitate the installation of the perimeter fence to secure the proposed solar panel areas.'

The Proposed Development does require the partial removal of 4no. hedgerows, though the extent of removal is limited only to the end portions of the affected hedgerows.

The Proposed Development is considered to carry a low residual risk of harm to the retained trees, based on the information that is currently available. '

Given that no trees will be removed and only very limited pruning is required, the proposals are considered to be acceptable in relation to impact upon trees. It is further noted that a large area of woodland planting is proposed to the south-east of the site.

The proposed solar arrays are to be installed above ground level on piles allowing for retention of the existing grass cover. The submitted Planning Statement notes that sheep can be kept within the solar park to graze.

Subject to the mitigation proposed in the submitted documents, no harm to protected species would ensue from the proposal.

By reason of the nature of the proposed development and the separation distance to

the nearest SSSI and SPA, the scheme is not considered to give rise to harm to the designated areas in terms of ecological harm.

Should the Council be minded to approve this application then it would be reasonable to impose conditions regarding the retention and protection of existing trees and hedges, biodiversity mitigation and enhancements as recommended by the submitted documents.

For the above reasons, the scheme is considered capable of policy compliance, subject to conditions, with regard to protected species and biodiversity net gains, in accordance with Local Plan policies EQ1, EQ4 and EQ5, the NPPF, and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Phosphates:

The application site is within the fluvial catchment (Parrett Catchment Area) of the Somerset Levels & Moors Ramsar Site. The Somerset Levels & Moors is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The designated sites are considered to be in unfavourable condition or at risk due to high levels of phosphorus.

However, the form of development is not identified by the Natural England informative guidance that could be considered one that may require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). The development would not result in an increase in user numbers and as such is considered to be nutrient neutral.

As such, it is considered the proposal would not be to the detriment of the Ramsar Site, and the approval of a scheme would accord with Policy EQ4 of the South Somerset Local Plan as the proposal would not affect the biodiversity value of the protected site in this regard.

Flood Risk, Drainage, Contamination:

Local Plan policy EQ1 states, among other criteria:

- *Development will be directed away from medium and high flood risk areas through using South Somerset's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment as the basis for applying the Sequential Test. The area of search to which the Sequential Test will apply will be South Somerset wide, unless adequately justified otherwise in relation to the circumstances of the proposal;*
- *Where appropriate, the Exception Test can be applied if this is consistent with wider sustainability objectives;*

- *Development should reduce and manage the impact of flood risk by incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems, and through appropriate layout, design, and choice of materials...*
- *Susceptibility to climate change should be taken into account on all proposals to develop sites with biodiversity interest.*

Local Plan policy EQ7 controls air, light, noise, water quality or other environmental pollution or harm to amenity, health or safety arising from new development.

The site lies within Flood Zone 1 and beyond any source protection zones, it is not designated as being at risk from surface water flooding.

The LLFA has been consulted on this application and following the submission of additional information raises no objections subject to conditions.

The proposed development primarily involves the installation of solar arrays with some landscaping elements and infrastructure. The solar panels would be supported 0.8-3m above ground level by a metal frame set on piles.

The associated infrastructure would introduce some non-permeable built form into a greenfield area. The proposed tracks would be of permeable construction.

It is considered that a pre-commencement drainage condition would be reasonable to address surface water disposal.

The Council's Environmental Health Team has been consulted on this application and no comments have been received.

The site has not been identified as having potential for land contamination. In terms of contamination risk from the site, the form of development is not considered to be of a contaminating nature during the operational phase. However, there is potential for land, air and water contamination during the construction and decommissioning phases. As such, it is considered reasonable to impose a pre-commencement condition to control this aspect via a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP).

For the above reasons, the proposal is considered, subject to conditions, capable of compliance with Local Plan policies EQ1 and EQ7 and the NPPF in this regard.

Sustainable Construction:

Local Plan policy EQ1 states, among other criteria:

- *New development will ensure that carbon dioxide emissions are minimised through energy efficiency measures, renewable and low carbon energy*
- *Climate change should be considered in the design of new development, incorporating measures such as solar orientation, maximising natural shade and cooling, water efficiency and flood resilience*

Paragraph 158a) of the NPPF notes that that even small-scale renewable energy projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

The proposed scheme would not involve the erection of any buildings for residential, employment, education, leisure, retail or other use. Therefore, sustainable construction design regarding future occupiers/users' amenity, such as heating and cooling, is not a material consideration in this case.

The scheme involves the installation of renewable energy generating equipment and associated infrastructure for a temporary period of approximately 40 years, after which the site would be fully remediated.

Flood and Climate Change resilience are discussed in the previous section. The Planning Statement advises that that *'the development contains mostly recyclable materials including non-reflective recyclable glass, copper, aluminium, steel, and silicon in semi-conductors'*. *It is acknowledged that the scheme comprises a renewable energy project that would, in itself, provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.*

For the above reasons, the scheme is considered acceptable in terms of Local Plan policy EQ1 and the NPPF in this regard.

Economic Impact:

The site is classified as Grade 2 Agricultural land.

NPPF paragraph 180 states that decisions should recognise the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV), which is defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.

The recent changes to the NPPF include a footnote to paragraph 180 which advises *'Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary,*

areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside the other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development.' However, no advice is given as to what is considered 'significant development'.

In order to address this issue, the applicants have submitted a Sequential Location Assessment. This details how the site was chosen after using a series of constraints such as topography, heritage and landscape designations, airfield safety zones. This result in the application site being chosen. The report concludes that:

'Following a comprehensive site identification and selection process undertaken by Conrad Energy, it became evident that the optimal site for the proposed development within the connection distance was located on land which is considered to be Grade 2 agricultural land quality and therefore is classified as 'best and most versatile' agricultural land. This report was therefore prepared to demonstrate that the site represents the most optimal location for the proposed development, and there is no alternative site within the connection distance which is suitable or viable.

Analysis initially included a study into the area around Yeovil which is within a realistic distance to connect directly to Leonardo's local grid supply. The assessment reviewed landscape sensitivity, the historic environment, agricultural land value, flood risk, aerodrome safety, strategic urban expansion, terrain and topography of land surrounding Yeovil. The exercise was then refined through more detailed analysis of three shortlisted sites.

Site 1 was considered unsuitable due to part of the site being located within an emergency landing area to the airstrip for disaster mitigation in the event of a crash landing. This is an aerodrome operational constraint safeguarded by local planning policy and therefore presents an obstacle that rules out the site for development.

Site 2 was too exposed to the village of Odcombe presenting visual impact issues, and too close to / within the setting of important local heritage assets.

Site 3 was identified as most suitable due to the clear lack of significant technical and environmental constraints, the elevation of the land for sun irradiation, the topography of the land and surrounding landscaping which screened it from surrounding views and the available suitable distance for the battery storage element of the project from closest noise receptors. The site is also sufficiently large enough to ensure substantial biodiversity net gain and additional landscape planting opportunities.

The land grading of Site 3 may be considered Grade 2 agricultural land. However, in the absence of any other more suitable land of a lesser grade quality due to constraints, Site 3 (the Application Site) has been identified as the most suitable location for the siting of the proposed development.'

As noted above, in this case, the change of use is proposed for a temporary duration of 40 years, after which the land would be fully remediated. During the operational phase, the grassland beneath and around the installations would be capable of grazing by sheep. The submitted documents note that this would result in an overall improvement in the grassland over the longer term through the reduction in agricultural use. Therefore, the agricultural land use would be reduced temporarily, albeit for a relatively long period of time, rather than irrevocably lost.

As such, it is the Officer's view that the economic impact in agricultural terms would be neutral overall.

Representations have been received concerning the negative impact on tourism resulting from the harm to visual amenity arising from the large-scale solar farm proposed.

It is the Officer's view that some degree of harm would arise with regard to the attractiveness of the area in which the scheme would be visible. However, given that this impact would be difficult to measure, it would not be considered to weigh heavily against the proposal and could be viewed as a moderate disbenefit overall.

In terms of employment opportunities, the economic benefits of the scheme are set out under the 'Principles' section of this report, this includes supporting 45 direct FTE construction jobs and a further 60 indirect/induced jobs in the supply chain and related services during the peak phase of the anticipated build period. This is considered a benefit.

Public Rights of Way (PROWs)

Local Plan policy HW1 states that PROWs form aspects of Green Infrastructure that need to be given full consideration.

NPPF paragraph 104 states that planning decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users.

As noted above, 2no. public footpaths would be affected by the proposed

development, namely Footpaths Y29/8 which runs through the centre of the site and Y29/6 which runs along the western boundary outside of the site.

The County Public Rights of Way Officer has been consulted on this application and has no objections subject to informatives.

The footpath running through the site will be made into a 12m (approx.) wide lane with parallel hedgerow planting will be incorporated into the scheme to create a 'green lane' through the site for walkers. The footpath running along the western boundary will be unaffected as there is no proposal to change the hedgerow in this location.

For the reasons above, the scheme is considered capable of policy compliance in this regard, subject to conditions.

Airfield safeguarding

The MOD have considered the application and advised that they have no objections subject to the planting in all areas should be designed to minimise the use of fruit/berry bearing species. This can be included within the relevant landscaping condition.

Other Matters

Battery Storage and Fire Risk - A number of objectors and the Divisional member have raised this as a concern. The local Fire Service has been consulted and has chosen not to make any comments. The agents have supplied details and advised that they would accept the imposition of a condition to secure a Battery Safety Management Plan.

An appeal decision in Devon in December 2022 (which was 'called in' and considered by the Secretary of State) considered this issue (ref. APP/Y1138/W/22/3293104). The following is of note:

'the Secretary of State agrees with the Inspector that there is nothing in relation to the safety of the BESS (Battery Energy Storage System) which should weigh against the proposal in the planning balance. He therefore agrees with the Inspector in affording the safety of the BESS neutral weight in the planning balance.'

The Inspector's consideration in relation to battery storage were as follows:

'The safety of the BESS was raised by CPRE in its evidence as a major source of concern [83, 84]. It became clear from that the evidence and from answers in cross-examination the CPRE's concern was founded on opposition to battery storage

systems in general, which they consider to be a risk to local communities and to the environment generally, and was only related to this proposal to a limited extent. CPRE acknowledged at the Inquiry that their approach is not supported by policy or guidance at any level.

142. The appellant submitted extensive evidence on this matter, including that from an expert in the field, who explained the benefits and operation of BESS systems [64]. The rationale for a BESS system is to provide flexibility for the grid, storing off-peak energy and deploying it during peaks. Co-location with the solar farm is sensible in terms of economies of scale and minimising land take. The convincing evidence, supported by numerous policy references, was that BESS is a critical element in reaching a secure low carbon energy situation. This position is wholly in line with national policy.

143. CPRE was particularly concerned with the safety of such a system, and pointed in particular to two instances of catastrophic failure of such systems [84]. However the appellant correctly pointed out that these events, one of which was in the UK, were some time ago, and gave uncontested evidence to the effect that BESS technology and safety measures had moved on since those events [65]. Perhaps most tellingly, it is clear that national policy and guidance supporting that technology was produced subsequently - no doubt in full awareness of the incidents. This was accepted by CPRE.

144. From the evidence it is clear that this is not untested technology and although the detail of the systems is doubtless still evolving, there is very little to suggest that there is a substantial risk of thermal runaway leading to explosion or fire.

145. There was criticism from CPRE that no detail of the BESS has been fixed at this stage and the chemistry of the batteries has not yet been decided [80-82]. However in the context of evolving technology, this is not an unreasonable approach, and the proposal considered at the Inquiry is for solar panels to generate up to 49.9MW and a battery storage facility. It is reasonable that the final choice of technology will be fixed later.

146. Underlying all these matters is the fact that other regimes operate in this field to regulate the safe operation of such installations. National policy is clear that the focus of planning decisions should be on whether a proposal is an acceptable use of land, rather than the control of processes where these are subject to separate regimes. Planning decisions should assume that these regimes will operate effectively.

147. For the above reasons there is nothing in relation to the safety of the BESS which should weigh against the proposal in the planning balance.'

Given this decision and with the imposition of an appropriate condition, it is considered that this issue is not one that could be used to refuse planning permission.

Use of Leonardo site for solar energy - In response to objectors comments that the existing site and buildings could be used for solar installations instead of agricultural land, the agent has provided an Addendum to Sequential Location Assessment which outlines the reasons why land and / or buildings either within the control of, owned by, or used by Leonardo cannot be used in place of the Application Site at Camp Road to accommodate the solar farm proposal. All of the buildings on the site have been assessed for the potential to house solar systems but due to a range of factors, including the age, structure/materials and orientation of the majority buildings, have been found unsuitable for such installations. The report concludes:

'In the light of the above, a small-scale solar PV proposal across a multitude of small roof spaces / car parking areas would not be practical or indeed commercially achievable in so far as the requirements of the Leonardo operation to secure a meaningful amount of renewable energy generation to serve the operations and contractual expectations of the business's principal customers.'

A number of objectors have asked why the new warehouse building has not been used for solar panels and the report advises that *'This building is not owned by Leonardo and therefore a Lease would have to be negotiated with the commercial landlord to use the space above the roof. This will be considered for the next phase of the project.'*

It is, therefore, accepted that appropriate consideration has been given to the use of the Leonardo site, but various factors do not make this a suitable location. As such, it is not considered that this issue would justify refusal of the planning application.

Site Security - The comments of the Designing Out Crime Officer (DOCO) are noted however it is not considered to be appropriate to require full security fencing on either side of the public footway as this would be highly visually intrusive within this rural landscape resulting in an adverse impact upon the users of the footpath. It is considered that the applicants have adequately demonstrated their experience in dealing with security at similar sites and as such the concerns of the DOCO have been adequately addressed.

Engagement with Local Community - The Statement of Community Involvement which occupied the application advises that the consultation process involved:

The consultation process involved:

- Distributing letters to West Coker Village twice (370 letters in total, 170 for the first meeting and 200 for the second letter drop)
- Emailing residents and counsellors
- Putting up posters in the village
- Holding 2 consultation events in the West Coker Village hall
- Meeting with Brympton and West Coker Parish Councils
- Meeting with Yeovil Town Planning Council offered
- Advertising the consultation responses and feedback in the Parish magazine
- First Consultation 19th April 2023 4pm - 8pm
- Second Consultation 1st June 2023 4.30pm - 6.30pm

It is understood that a total 66 people attended the two sessions.

As such, it is considered that appropriate consultation has taken place with the local community.

Devaluation of property - This is not a material planning consideration that can be given any significant weight in the determination of a planning application.

Grid challenges - It is recognised that the National Grid is struggling to meet the demands of additional supply from renewable energy projects. However, in this case, the application proposes that the energy generated from the scheme will go direct to Leonardo rather than into the Grid.

Covenant - It is understood that this matter is being resolved between the relevant parties but the presence of restrictive covenants is not an issue that can be used to refuse planning permission, it will need to be resolved outside of the planning system.

SUMMARY:

It is acknowledged that the development would result in a change to the application site and the surrounding area. This would predominantly relate to the visual impact of the solar arrays which would be distributed across a relatively large area of existing grassland.

The application site is characterised by its pastoral appearance comprising agricultural fields bounded by hedgerows and trees. The scheme would alter the appearance of parcels within the site from rural grassland to more industrial-looking

rows of dark glass panels, together with some infrastructure that would be generally contained within metal sheeting.

As noted above, the proposed retention of all existing trees and the majority of the hedgerows, together with the proposed planting would be considered to substantially mitigate the visual impact of the scheme. The landscaping strategy would also be considered to represent substantial betterment over the existing situation and result in long-term landscape enhancements.

The scheme would be considered acceptable with regard to protected species and to deliver significant biodiversity net gains overall.

As such, the residual impact on the landscape and protected species during the lifetime of the scheme would be considered neutral overall following mitigation. Following the removal and remediation of the solar panels and infrastructure, the landscape enhancements and significant biodiversity net gains would be considered benefits, which are afforded considerable weight.

The development would also result in benefits relating to carbon reduction and renewable energy production, generating approximately 26% of the annual energy required to operate Leonardo Helicopter's Yeovil facility and 16% of the company's output across all UK operations. Given the Climate emergency declared by the council and the government, together with the local and national support for renewable energy schemes, this benefit is afforded substantial weight.

The scheme would result in economic benefits both during the construction phases and in the support that the scheme would give to an important local employer through reducing their carbon footprint and in terms of supporting their bids for future government contracts. These are afforded moderate weight.

Given the above, it is the Officer's view in this case that the impacts of the application have been made acceptable subject to conditions. As such, it is recommended that the scheme be approved in accordance with paragraph 163 of the NPPF and Local Plan policy EQ1.

Overall, the scheme is not considered to give rise to any adverse impacts that would outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Development Plan and the NPPF when taken as a whole.

For the reasons above, the proposal is considered, on balance, to represent sustainable development in terms of the economic, social and environmental objectives of NPPF paragraph 8 and Local Plan policy SD1.

The development would, therefore, accord with the Development Plan and the policies of the NPPF and conditional approval is recommended in line with NPPF paragraph 11 c).

Recommendation

Approve for the following reason:

01. The proposal, by reason of the substantial benefits resulting from the provision of renewable energy, together with the landscape enhancements and biodiversity net gains, which cumulatively outweigh the 'less than substantial harm' to heritage assets and the adverse impact to the visual amenity and landscape character, is considered to comprise sustainable development in accordance with the aims and objectives of the South Somerset Local Plan and the NPPF.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To accord with the provisions of section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

02. The permission hereby granted shall be limited to a period of 40 years and 6 months (with the final six months to be used for the decommissioning and restoration of the site) from the date when electricity is first exported from the solar panels to the electricity network (The First Export Date). Written notification of the First Export Date shall be given to the Local Planning Authority within 14 days of the event occurring.

Reason: As sought by the application.

03. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Drawing ref.

CRE001 SP-01 Rev 07 Site Location Plan 1:5000

CRE001 PL-01 Rev 18 Site Layout Plan 1:2500

CRE001 PL-10 Rev 03 Panel Elevation 1:100

CRE001-SD-01 Rev 01 Switch Room 1:100
CRE001-SD-02 Rev 01 Battery container 1:50
CRE001-SD-03 Rev 01 Battery Inverter 1:50
CRE001-SD-04 Rev 01 MV Substation Transformer 1:50
CRE001-SD-05 Rev 01 Deer Fencing for solar farm 1:50
CRE001-SD-06 rev 01 Palisade fencing for batteries 1:50
CRE001-SD-07 Rev 1 Gateway Plan 1:25
CRE001-SD-08 CCTV Rev 1 Post Detail 1:20
CRE001-SD-09 Rev 1 Access Track Plan 1:20
CRE001-SD-10 Rev 01 PV Array Cross Section 1:50
Western Ecology Landscape and Ecology Management Plan May 2023

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

04. If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to operate for a continuous period of 12 months, then a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the solar farm and ancillary equipment shall be submitted within 6 months of the end of the cessation period to the local planning authority for its written approval. The scheme shall make provision for the removal of the solar panels and associated above ground works approved under this permission. The scheme shall also include the management and timing of any works and a traffic management plan to address likely traffic impact issues during the decommissioning period, an environmental management plan to include details of measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife and habitats, and details of site restoration measures.

Reason: To ensure the removal of the equipment and decommissioning in the interests of the character of the area.

05. Within 6 months of the cessation of the export of electrical power from the site, or within a period of 40 years following the first export date, a Scheme for the decommissioning of the solar farm and its ancillary equipment and how the land is to be restored, to include a programme for the completion of the decommissioning and restoration works, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure the removal of the equipment and decommissioning in the interests of the character of the area.

06. The solar farm and its ancillary equipment shall be dismantled and removed from the site and the land restored in accordance with the approved Scheme

and, in any event shall be removed within a period of 40 years and 6 months following the first export date.

Reason: To ensure the removal of the equipment and decommissioning in the interests of the character of the area.

07. Prior to the commencement of development, details of the access including visibility splays for both construction phases and the completed development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall take place in full accordance with the submitted details.

NOTE: As approval of the construction either on or directly adjacent to the highway will require an Agreement or Licence with this Authority, no discharge of this condition will be agreed until either technical approval or the licence has been granted.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

08. Any entrance gates erected shall be hung to open inwards, shall be set back a minimum distance of 20 metres from the highway edge and shall thereafter be maintained in that condition in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interests of Highway Safety.

09. The access track between the edge of carriageway and the entrance gate(s) shall be properly consolidated and surfaced (not loose stone or gravel) for the first 20m and drainage installed in accordance with details, which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once constructed the access shall thereafter be maintained in that condition in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interests of Highway Safety.

10. The Development hereby permitted shall not be operated until the relevant number of parking spaces for the development and a properly consolidated and surfaced turning space for vehicles have been provided and constructed within the site in accordance with details which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such parking and turning spaces shall be kept clear of obstruction in perpetuity and shall not be used other than for the parking and turning of vehicles in connection with the development hereby permitted.

Reason: In the interests of Highway Safety.

11. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with: the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) by Local Transport Projects Ltd (LTP) June 2023. The approved CTMP and construction routing therein shall be adhered to during the full period of construction.

Reason: In the interests of Highway Safety and residential amenity.

12. Prior to their installation/implementation or the siting of any solar panels on site, whichever is the sooner, the following information shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning:
 - a) a boundary treatment plan
 - b) a Landscape Plan and associated Planting Schedule;
 - c) a full set of soft and hard landscape details including:
 - i. planting plan(s) showing locations, species and number of new trees and native hedge/shrub planting and extent of new grass areas, together with existing trees, hedgerow, and habitat to be retained/removed;
 - ii. plant schedule indicating the species, form, size, numbers, and density of proposed planting;
 - iii. Soft landscape specification covering clearance, soil preparation planting and sowing; mulching and means of plant support and protection during establishment period and 5-year maintenance schedule;
 - iv. tree pit and tree staking details;
 - v. a method statement for creation and maintenance of species rich grassland and wetland habitats.
 - d) Details of proposed colour finishes to housing for inverters, storage units and sub-stations;
 - e) Details of proposed under and over ground cable routes together with method statements for taking underground cables through any hedge banks;
 - f) details of finishes of framing elements of proposed pv panels;
 - g) details of proposed gates and alterations to existing gateways. This shall include an overall site plan(s) showing the locations of new and replacement gates and any existing gateways to be infilled with new hedging. The plan should clearly distinguish between different gate types. Elevation details of each proposed gate type shall also be provided;
 - h) construction details for proposed hardstanding's, trackways and associated drainage provision including location, extent, associated grading and specification for material finishes.

NOTE: In accordance with the advice of the MOD the planting in all areas should be designed to minimise the use of fruit/berry bearing species.

The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details. In relation to the soft landscaping, this shall be implemented before the end of the first planting season following installation of the solar panels and any new planting or grass areas which fail to make satisfactory growth or dies within five years following completion of the development shall be replaced with plants of similar size and species to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To control the appearance of the development in the interests of the character of the area.

13. Notwithstanding the submitted details and prior to the commencement of the development a detailed Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The AMS shall include all relevant details to protect the retained trees and hedgerows, including a detailed Tree and Hedgerow Protection Plan. Relevant details may include but are not limited to construction methods, construction traffic management, finished levels, ground protection, landscaping methods and materials, material storage, service runs and tree and hedgerow protection barrier fencing. The AMS will also include details of a clerk of works schedule that specified arboricultural supervision at appropriate stages of the development process. Any variations to the details of the AMS must only be undertaken after the proposed variations have been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To control the appearance of the development in the interests of the character of the area.

14. Prior to, during, and post construction activities associated with the development site, no lighting will be operational past the hours of dusk and before the hours of dawn during the bat activity period of April to October inclusive. Additionally, no new external lighting shall be installed within the boundary of the application site unless in accordance with details that shall have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such details shall include the location, number, luminance, angle of illumination and type of each luminaire or light source and a lux diagram showing the light spill from the scheme, as well as being in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals Guidance Note

08/23. The lighting shall thereafter be installed, operated and maintained operated in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of the 'Favourable Conservation Status' of populations of European protected species and in accordance with South Somerset District Council Local Plan.

15. No groundwork on the application site shall commence until the Local Planning Authority has been provided with the great crested newt District Level Licence issued by Natural England (pursuant of regulation 55 of the Habitats Regulations 2017) and the respective District Level Licence payment receipt.

Reason: A pre-commencement condition in the interest of the strict protection of European protected species and in accordance with policy EQ4 of the South Somerset District Council Local Plan.

16. The development hereby approved shall be implemented in full accordance with the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) undertaken by Western Ecology, dated May 2023, incorporating all of the recommendations set out in Sections 3, 4 and 5 under the supervision of a competent Ecologist. A report prepared by the Ecological Clerk of Works or similarly competent person certifying that the required habitat and protected species mitigation and compensation measures identified in the LEMP have been completed to their satisfaction, and detailing the results of site supervision and any necessary remedial works undertaken or required, shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval before completion of the development.

Reason: In the interests of the strict protection of UK protected and priority species and in accordance with Somerset District Council Local Plan - Policy EQ4 Biodiversity.

17. The following will be incorporated into the site proposal with photographs of the installed features submitted to the Local Planning Authority prior to completion:

1. Installation of at least 4 x 2F Schwegler Bat Boxes (or similar) will be installed on to mature trees on site, facing south or west, at a height above 3m.
2. Installation of 4 x Vivara Pro Woodstone Bird Boxes (a combination of open front design and 32mm hole versions) or similar mounted between 1.5m and 3m high on the northerly facing aspect of trees and maintained thereafter.

Reason: In accordance with Government policy for the enhancement of biodiversity within development as set out in paragraph 174(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill 2018.

18. No development shall be commenced until details of the sustainable surface water drainage scheme for the site, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Such scheme should aim to meet the four pillars of SuDS (water quantity, quality, biodiversity, and amenity) to meet wider sustainability aims as specified by The National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018) and the Flood and Water Management Act (2010). The development shall include measures to control and attenuate surface water and once approved the scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and maintained at all times thereafter unless agreed otherwise in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure the development is properly drained in accordance with the NPPF.

19. No development approved by this permission shall be occupied or brought into use until a plan for the future responsibility and maintenance of the surface water drainage system has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. This should include a maintenance plan and a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). The approved drainage works shall be completed and maintained in accordance with the details agreed.

Reason: To safeguard the long-term maintenance and operation of the proposed system to ensure development is properly drained in accordance with the NPPF.

20. Development of the battery storage compound shall not commence until a Battery Safety Management Plan (BSMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The BSMP must prescribe for measures to facility safety during the construction, operation and decommissioning of the battery storage facility, including the transport of new, used and replacement battery cells both to and from the authorised development. The Local Planning Authority must consult with the Health and Safety Executive and the Devon Fire and Rescue Service before approving the BSMP. The BSMP must be implemented as approved.

Reason: To ensure that the battery storage compound is constructed and operated in a safe manner.

21. No development shall commence until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The programme of archaeological work should provide a field evaluation of the site to determine date, extent, and significance of any archaeological deposits or features, the WSI shall include provision for reporting and publication of the results of the evaluation and shall be carried out by a competent person and completed in accordance with the approved written scheme of investigation.

Reason: The site is within an area of potential archaeological interest and the Council will wish to evaluate the significance and extent of any archaeological remains.

22. No development shall commence until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has presented the results of the archaeological field evaluation to the Local Planning Authority, and has secured the implementation of a subsequent programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has first been agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The agreed programme of archaeological work shall include the implementation of a programme of post-excavation analysis in accordance with a publication plan be carried out by a competent person and completed in accordance with the approved written scheme of investigation.

Reason: The site is within an area of potential archaeological interest and the Council will wish record and protect any archaeological remains.

Informatives:

01. 1. Rights of Way Team advise:

Surfacing Authorisation Required:

Where the proposed access crosses the footpath Y 29/8, surfacing authorisation will be required from SCC Rights of Way team as part of any surface improvements. Associated infrastructure may also be required. I have attached a form that should be completed and returned to Debbie Ebsary (Rights of Way Officer email: debbie.ebsary@somerset.gov.uk).

If any changes are proposed to the existing path furniture, particularly where footpath Y 29/8 meets Camp Road at the site entrance, then the applicant should contact Debbie Ebsary to discuss the changes.

Temporary closure for the public footpath Y 29/8 will be required for the duration of the works. Further information on applying for a temporary closure can be found on Somerset Council's webpage at: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/apply-for-the-temporary-closure-of-a-right-of-way/> If there will be an alternative route across the site for the public, then we will require appropriate safety warning signs/systems to be installed.

Development, insofar as it affects the rights of way should not be started, and the rights of way should be kept open for public use until the necessary Order (temporary closure/stopping up/diversion) or other authorisation has come into effect/ been granted. Failure to comply with this request may result in the developer being prosecuted if the path is built on or otherwise interfered with.

Should the applicant choose to enclose the footpath then under section 36(4) Highways Act 1980 the obligation to maintain the path in the future may rest with the landowner. Once enclosed the landowner may be responsible for the upkeep of the path and the highway authority has power to recover the necessary expenses in maintaining the path under section 57 Highways Act 1980. There must be no barbed wire adjacent to the path and no protruding injurious fencing encroaching into the width of the footpath.

The local planning authority needs to be confident that the applicant can demonstrate that they have an all-purpose vehicular right to the property over path Y 29/8. If they are unable to and permission is granted, then the local planning authority could potentially be encouraging criminal activity through permitting driving on a public path without lawful authority.

Please also note that we have received an application to modify the Definitive Map and Statement (Modification ref. 707). This seeks to add a public bridleway to the Definitive Map and Statement. Further details on the modification process can be found on the relevant SCC webpage: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/apply-to-add-delete-or-upgrade-a-public-right-of-way/>

General Comments

Any proposed works must not encroach onto the width of the PROW.

Development, insofar as it affects the rights of way should not be started, and the rights of way should be kept open for public use until the necessary Order (temporary closure/stopping up/diversion) or other authorisation has come into effect/ been granted. Failure to comply with this request may result in the developer being prosecuted if the path is built on or otherwise interfered with.

The health and safety of the public using the PROW must be taken into consideration during works to carry out the proposed development. Somerset Council (SC) has maintenance responsibilities for the surface of a PROW, but only to a standard suitable for the public use. SC will not be responsible for putting right any damage occurring to the surface of a PROW resulting from vehicular use during or after works to carry out the proposal. It should be noted that it is an offence to drive a vehicle along a public footpath, public bridleway or restricted byway unless the driver has lawful authority (private rights) to do so.

If it is considered that the development would result in any of the outcomes listed below, then authorisation for these works must be sought from Somerset Council Rights of Way Group:

- A PROW being made less convenient for continued public use.
- New furniture being needed along a PROW.
- Installing any apparatus within or across the PROW.
- Changes to the surface of a PROW being needed.
- Changes to the existing drainage arrangements associated with the PROW.

If the work involved in carrying out this proposed development would:

- make a PROW less convenient for continued public use; or
- create a hazard to users of a PROW,

then a temporary closure order will be necessary and a suitable alternative route must be provided. For more information, please visit Somerset Council's Rights of Way pages to apply for a temporary closure: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/apply-for-the-temporary-closure-of-a-right-of-way/>
