
LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (LVIA01)

**Photovoltaic Facility
New Buildings Farm, Hilderstone, Staffordshire**

Revision A

August 2026



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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Document

- 1.1. Ubu Design Landscape Architects were commissioned by RE Projects Development Limited to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of an area of land identified for a photovoltaic facility at New Buildings Farm, Hilderstone, Staffordshire.
- 1.2. An LVIA Feasibility Report was produced in October 2021 to appraise a number of fields in the vicinity of New Buildings Farm for their ability to accommodate a solar farm. This has then been used to arrive at the current configuration of panels and associated mitigation planting and infrastructure.
- 1.3. The LVIA has been prepared by Chartered Landscape Architects from Ubu Design and presents the findings of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA): specifically, an assessment of the likely effects the Proposed Development may have upon the local landscape character and the visual amenity during the Construction, Operational and Decommissioning phases.
- 1.4. The assessment is based on guidelines put forward as part of the Guidance for Landscape and Visual Assessment - Third Edition, 2013 (GLVIA3). The Appendices include the methodology used for completion of the assessment and details the legislation, policy and guidance that is relevant in the preparation of the assessment.
- 1.5. The main body of this LVIA will present the baseline conditions as they presently exist for the landscape and visual amenity.
- 1.6. An assessment of potential effects on the landscape and visual amenity is undertaken to assess the significance of the likely effects associated with the Application Site including construction and decommissioning stages as well as the operational stage of the Proposed Development. It concludes by presenting an assessment of the likely significant environmental effects prior to any additional mitigation measures being applied (a number of design mitigation measures are embedded into the scheme and are therefore considered as part of the assessed Proposed Development).
- 1.7. Additional mitigation measures, if required, are then proposed in response to any significant effects identified and then the residual effects of the Proposed Development are presented taking into account the identified mitigation measures.

- 1.8. The revised Layout and Landscape and Ecology Mitigations and Enhancements Plan are included in the Appendices.

Aims of the Assessment

- 1.9. This assessment seeks to assess the effects on the landscape character and visual amenity that may arise from the impact of an embedded generation facility on sites in the vicinity of New Buildings Farm, Hilderstone, Staffordshire. The assessment investigates the landscape and visual issues relating to the site and its setting through a combination of desktop research and field survey work.
- 1.10. The assessment aims to:
- Establish a clear understanding of the site and its setting in respect of landscape character and visual amenity;
 - Establish an understanding of the proposed development in terms of its relation to landscape character and visual amenity;
 - Identify potential direct and indirect effects of the proposed development upon the landscape;
 - Identify potential effects on visual receptors;
 - Determine mitigation measures where necessary to reduce/eliminate any potential adverse effect on the landscape or visual amenity arising as a result of the proposed development;
 - Identify opportunities for enhancement measures; and
 - Establish the likely residual and cumulative effects of the proposed development.

Methodology

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Guidance Documents

- 1.11. The methodology used to carry out the landscape and visual assessment of the proposed development is primarily based upon that set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment – 3rd ed. 2013) and Technical Guidance Note 06/19 (17 September 2019). Sensitivity of the landscape has been determined by reference to the landscape character studies and Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21 'Assessing landscape value outside of national designations'. LITGN-2024-01 'Notes and clarifications on aspects of guidelines for LVIA 3rd edition (GLVIA3)' has also been considered in this assessment.
- 1.12. A full Methodology Statement is included in Appendix B of this report.

1.13. The process follows a standard approach, namely establishing:

- The baseline conditions, i.e. the character, quality, value and relative sensitivity of the landscape;
- The type and relative sensitivity of visual receptors;
- The sensitivity to change of the landscape in relation to the proposed development;
- The predicted magnitude of impact that the proposed development would bring, allowing for mitigation measures, upon the landscape and upon visual receptors; and
- Assessing the significance of effect that would occur, by aggregating the predicted magnitude of change with the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptors respectively. Furthermore, any potential cumulative effects from neighbouring solar farms are considered.

Site Visit and Equipment

- 1.14. A site visit was carried out on 8th February 2025 to undertake the assessment of the visual and landscape impacts of the proposed site. The conditions were initially misty but cleared as the morning progressed with a wide range of visibility.
- 1.15. The visits were preceded by a desktop study of landscape designations and analysis of the Zones of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). Field work focused on the site and surrounding roads and footpaths.
- 1.16. The assessments were carried out during winter when the deciduous trees surrounding the site had no leaf vegetation. The screening effect of the deciduous trees, hedgerows and under-storey shrubs will increase during the summer months. However, the density of the extensive surrounding vegetation will mostly retain the screening effects during the winter months due to the dense network of branches within the hedgerows and tree canopies.

Extent of Study Area

- 1.17. The study area for the LVIA is 3 km. This is considered to be the optimum range to enable a thorough and appropriate analysis of the landscape and visual receptors that could potentially be affected by the Proposed Development. The site boundary and the 3km boundary of the wider study area are included on all the relevant Supporting Figures.
- 1.18. The study area accounts for the broad and extensive surrounding landscape character as well as environmental, landscape and spatial designations. These contribute to the landscape value and help the assessor determine the susceptibility to change which allows a judgement to be made on the overall sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptors.

- 1.19. The study area is partially informed by the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) to allow consideration from potential close, medium and long-range visual receptors. The 3km Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) from the Application Site boundary is recorded on Figure 7 (within Supporting Figures).
- 1.20. The access and circulation networks that are present within the 3km study area are identified on Figure 1 (within Supporting Figures).
- 1.21. The landscape character types and areas (National and Local) within the 3km study area are identified on Figure 2 and Figure 3 respectively (within Supporting Figures).
- 1.22. Landscape and Heritage Designations, Figure 4 (within Supporting Figures) identifies Local Landscape designations, Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, Traditional Orchard, Woodpasture and Parkland within a 3 km study area.
- 1.23. Environmental Designations, Figure 5 (within Supporting Figures) identifies Ancient Woodland, Stoke Green Belt, and Local Nature Reserves, within a 3 km study area.
- 1.24. The general topography of the 3km study area is recorded on Figure 6 (within Supporting Figures). The site includes a varied landform including valley sides, and larger areas of reasonable level ground.

Limitations to the Assessment

- 1.25. Consideration has been given to the drawings and documents that have been provided for this planning application and this assessment has been carried out based on the General Layout.
- 1.26. The following qualifications and limitations apply to the ZTV:
 - There may be a number of areas from which there is the potential to view part of, or the entirety of, the Proposed Development however, these may be from areas which are not publicly accessible and to which it is unlikely that members of the public gain regular access, e.g. farmland and private property;
 - As the ZTV is generated using mainly topographical information and major settlements it does not account for localised obstructions to the view such as individual buildings, minor changes in the terrain and vegetation cover such as road or railway embankments, woodland and hedgerows, all of which may influence the degree of visibility of the Proposed Development; and

- The ZTV does not account for the likely orientation of a viewer as the mapped theoretical visibility assumes that the viewer is looking towards the Application Site.

Landscape

- 1.27. During the visits the sites and local character area were assessed through observation, recording of observations and through photographs. The assessment reviewed the sites and local landscape features, character and condition, and the key views into the site.

Visual Amenity

- 1.28. The viewpoints used in the assessment were selected in order to:
- Determine the visibility of the proposed development, utilising the results from the ZTV to guide field work;
 - Gain further understanding of the components which create the landscape character; and
 - Carry out the assessment of landscape and visual effects.
- 1.29. The following types of viewpoints were investigated:
- Representative viewpoints (for example representing views of users of a particular receptor, such as a public footpath);
 - Specific viewpoints (for example a key view from a specific residential dwelling or community asset);
 - Illustrative viewpoints (chosen to demonstrate a particular effect/specific issue); and
 - Any important sequential views (for example along key transport routes).
- 1.30. The potential visual receptors that would be affected at the chosen viewpoints include:
- Public footpath and cycle route users including pedestrians;
 - People living in, working in, or visiting the settlement and the neighbouring properties and farmsteads; and
 - People using roads.

Photography

- 1.31. Photographs were recorded using a Sony 50mm fixed focal length lens on a full frame Sony A7 mk4 digital camera.
- 1.32. Panoramic views were created by taking a series of overlapping photographs (as recommended for Type 1 visualisations in the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19). These have been stitched together using Photoshop, employing the 'Realignment' method.

Description of study area

- 1.33. The study area for the assessment of landscape and visual effects of the proposed development is shown in the Figures and generally covers an area extending up to approximately 3 km from the centre of the site. This is considered to be the maximum extent within which significant landscape and visual effects could occur for the type of development proposed.

Site location

- 1.34. The grid reference at the approximate centre of the site is: SJ 974362. The site is located to the north of Bromley Wood curving round to the east and west and on the west extending slightly north to New Buildings Farm.

Development Description

- 1.35. The proposed development is for the installation and operation of a photovoltaic facility with installed power. The solar panel units are spread over a number of agricultural fields. The total solar area within the security fence is 70.5 hectares with a total development area of approximately 84.44 hectares.
- 1.36. The ground mounted solar panels are up to 3m at their highest point (actual height may be lower but 3m has been used to assess the worst case) and angled to approximately 0.8m at their lowest point. They are oriented to gain the maximum solar gain across the panel surfaces. The parcels are contained by a 2m high post and wire security fence to the alignment shown on the layouts. The arrangement of the panels considers the existing landscape features such as woodlands and ecological elements and routes of public rights of way.
- 1.37. Access to the facility is to be taken from Cresswell Road to the west of the site utilising the existing track which serves both New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm and is also a Public Right of Way (PRoW) and part of the locally promoted Stone Circles Challenge. The access route leaves the PRoW at Blakelow Farm and continues along the eastern side of the farm again on an existing track which extends to the farm with further routes created to connect to all fields that are to house solar panels.
- 1.38. The majority of landscape features including the hedges that divide the fields will be retained as part of the installation and the existing boundary hedges will be retained and in-filled where necessary. In localised areas it may be necessary to create or widen access points between the fields but these will be kept to a minimum.
- 1.39. The fields will be planted as lowland meadows and other neutral grassland to enhance its biodiversity and the areas are generally between 10m wide at its narrowest and circa 20m wide

in areas where this can be achieved. This is indicated on the Landscape Mitigation Plan which demonstrates the full extent of wildlife planting around the perimeter of the boundaries.

- 1.40. This LVIA will assess the impact of the facility proposed as set out in the drawings in Appendix A of the Figures.

2. Legislation, Policy and Guidance

- 2.1. The landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) has been undertaken within the context of relevant legislation, planning policies and guidance documents.

Legislation

- 2.2. There is no legislation relevant to the landscape and visual aspects of the site.

National Policy

- 2.3. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides guidance relating to planning and new development in England and was revised on 7th February 2025.
- 2.4. The planning principles of relevance to landscape and visual amenity have been considered throughout the assessment.

Local Policy

- 2.5. The site falls within Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and East Staffordshire Borough Council.
- 2.6. The following are considered to be the relevant landscape related planning policies within the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Local Plan 2014 - 2033 - adopted September 2020:
- *SS1 - Development Principles*
 - *SD2 Renewable / Low Carbon energy*
 - *DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting*
 - *NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows*

SS1 Development Principles

- 2.7. *The Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, in partnership with other agencies and services: ... support development which secures high*

quality, sustainable environments, efficient and effective use of resources and contributes effectively to tackling climate change and reduced carbon emissions.

SD2 Renewable / Low-Carbon Energy

2.8. The following is the wording of the policy in full:

2.9. *The Council will strive to meet part of the District's future energy demand through renewable or low-carbon energy sources (which could be through a variety of technologies, for example solar energy, biomass etc), in line with current evidence which identifies the feasibility of these forms of energy across the District. The Council will assess wind turbine schemes in line with the Government's specific policy on wind turbines. For all other forms of renewable energy the Council will support small and large-scale stand alone renewable or low-carbon energy schemes subject to the following considerations:*

- *the degree to which the scale and nature of a proposal impacts on the landscape, particularly having regard to relevant Landscape Character evidence and impact on the Peak District National Park (taking into account both individual and cumulative effects of similar proposals);*
- *the degree to which the developer has demonstrated any environmental/economic/social benefits of a scheme, as well as how any environmental or social impacts have been minimised (e.g. visual, noise or smell);*
- *the impact on designated sites of European (or successor), national and local biodiversity and geological importance in accordance with policy NE 1;*
- *the impact on the amenity of residents and other interests of acknowledged importance, including the historic environment;*
- *the degree to which individual proposals reflect current local evidence regarding the feasibility of different types of renewable or low-carbon energy at different locations across the District;*
- *in the case of solar energy proposals that are not affixed to buildings or structures, applicants will be expected to demonstrate that they have examined whether previously developed land is available before greenfield land. Where agricultural land is proposed, poorer quality land should be utilised before higher quality agricultural land.*

DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting

2.10. *The policy states: The Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:*

1. *Resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement or important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence;*
2. *Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence;*
3. *Supporting developments which conserve or enhance the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape, such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, walls, watercourses or ponds;*
4. *Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape;*
5. *Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.*

NE2 Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

- 2.11. *The Council will protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, in particular, ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows from loss or deterioration.*
- 2.12. *This will be achieved by:*
 - *Requiring that existing woodlands, healthy trees and hedgerows are retained and integrated within a proposed development unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh their loss;*
 - *Requiring new developments to provide tree cover that secures a good level of sustainability through tree retention, planting and soft landscaping, including where possible the on site replacement of any trees that are removed with sufficient tree planting to replace or increase the canopy cover on-site as appropriate. Landscaping schemes will also be required to mitigate against negative landscape impact and complement the design of new development and make provision for future maintenance. Where it is not possible to secure this new or replacement tree planting within the site, the Council will work with applicants to ascertain if a suitable site(s) can be found off-site for replacement planting in the locality;*
 - *Resisting development that would directly or indirectly damage existing ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows.*
 - *The Council will refer to its adopted Tree Strategy in the consideration of proposals; and will in general seek to retain as many trees and as much hedgerow on site as possible.*

2.13. The following are considered to be the relevant landscape related planning policies within the East Staffordshire Borough Council Local Plan 2012-2031 – adopted October 2015:

- *SO11 – Prudent use of resources*
- *SO12 – Countryside*
- *SP28 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation*
- *SP30 – Locally Significant Landscape*

SO11 Prudent use of resources

2.14. The following is the wording of the policy in full:

2.15. *To promote the prudent use of finite resources and the positive use of renewable resources, through the design, location and layout of development and by optimising the use of existing infrastructure.*

SO12 Countryside

2.16. The following is the wording of the policy in full:

2.17. *To protect, conserve and enhance the local countryside, character, distinctiveness and quality of the landscape and the diversity of wildlife and habitats.*

SP28 Renewable and low carbon energy generation

2.18. The following is the wording of the policy in full:

2.19. *The Council will promote and encourage all technologies and types of renewable and low-carbon energy generation, appropriate to the location in the Borough. This includes schemes that:*

- *form part of proposed new developments (including stand-alone schemes);*
- *are incorporated into existing developments; and*
- *are community-led initiatives.*

The Borough Council will encourage technologies that provide the greatest renewable energy generation and carbon savings, whilst recognising the need to balance adverse impacts and location restrictions.

The Borough Council will prepare a Supplementary Planning Document with advice on the types of renewable energy technology and low carbon design that may be most appropriate in the different types of location in the Borough.

Opportunities where development can draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers will be encouraged.

To encourage the development of local wood fuel markets, which will, in turn, make it more viable for the woodlands of The National Forest to be brought into management, the Council will support the development of wood fuel systems which take advantage of the abundance of local woodland thinnings. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that fuel is being sourced as locally as possible to the installation with an expectation that fuel is to be sourced from within The National Forest.

Renewable and Low-Carbon energy generation applications will be approved if their impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Therefore all applications are subject to the following considerations:

- the degree to which the scale and nature of a proposal reflects the capacity and sensitivity of the landscape, townscape, natural, historical and cultural features and areas to accommodate the development*
- the degree to which the developer has demonstrated any wider environmental, economic, and social benefits of a scheme as well as to how any adverse impacts have been minimised (e.g. visual intrusion, noise or odour). This includes wider benefits arising from clean energy supply, reductions in greenhouse gas and other polluting emissions, and contributions towards meeting national targets for use of renewable energy sources*
- the proximity to, and impact on, transport infrastructure and the local highway network*
- the impact on designated sites of European, national, regional and local biodiversity and geological importance*
- the impact on relevant heritage assets*
- the impact on residential amenity*

In assessing whether or not adverse impacts are satisfactorily addressed, the Council will also take into account cumulative impacts

SP30 Locally significant landscape

2.20. The following is the wording of the policy in full:

2.21. *Within the locally significant landscape areas development will not be allowed which would adversely affect the quality, character, appearance or the setting of those areas. Development decisions across the Borough will be informed by the relevant sections of the Landscape Character Assessment for Staffordshire or any subsequent versions, and the Council will expect applicants to demonstrate that they have taken full account of the LCA and its guidelines to produce a scheme which reflects existing landscape character and where possible seeks to enhance landscape quality.*

DP8 Tree protection

2.22. The following is the wording of the policy in full:

2.23. *Proposals which relate to both protected and non-protected trees will be subject to the following:*
Protected trees

2.24. *Felling of protected trees will only be granted consent where either:*

- *the tree is in poor health and/or has lost its intrinsic visual amenity value; or*
- *the tree is causing demonstrable harm/damage to the structural integrity of a building or other built form, and the harm cannot be remedied by other reasonable means.*

2.25. *Following felling of protected trees replacement planting will be required unless there are exceptional circumstances which justify waiving this requirement.*

2.26. *Works to protected trees will only be granted consent where the tree is of public visual amenity value and the works would not adversely affect the appearance of the tree and the contribution it makes to the visual amenity of the locality.*

2.27. *Development will not be permitted that would directly or indirectly damage existing mature or ancient woodland, veteran trees or ancient or species-rich hedgerows.*

2.28. **Trees within development sites**

2.29. *Proposals where there are existing trees of value on site must ensure that new developments or extensions to existing developments are designed to:*

- *Retain as many existing trees and other natural features as possible;*
- *Minimise harm to existing trees and other natural features either in the short or long term;*
- *Minimise conflict between trees and buildings in the future through the design, layout and construction of the development*

2.30. *Where tree removals are exceptionally agreed, a greater number of replacements will be expected at an appropriate level of maturity to ensure the visual amenity of the locality is not unduly harmed by the loss of established trees.*

2.31. *Existing high quality woodland should be retained where possible within development designs to achieve an overall net gain in woodland area.*

2.32. The LVIA has taken account of the Local Plan policies when considering the sensitivity of the site within the baseline study. It has also made reference to the policies within the landscape and visual effects section.

3. BASELINE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Site description and Context

3.1. Site location and layout drawings are illustrated in the Figures and in Appendix A and demonstrate that the application site is located within a number of adjacent fields between New Buildings Farm, Blakelow Farm and Moorilow Moor Farm, Staffordshire.

3.2. Detailed descriptions of the existing site and Proposed Development are discussed within the Planning Design and Access Statement but key elements that are of relevance to this assessment are described in the following paragraphs.

3.3. The analysis below is informed by an assessment of the landscape character of the site with reference to published landscape character assessments and verified and refined through fieldwork. This includes the classification of the landscape into units of distinct and recognisable character at a site specific level.

- 3.4. This section considers the existing landscape character of the site and its context. In order to establish the degree of change arising from the development of the site and the extent to which the change will affect landscape receptors, it is important to understand the existing situation and site context in relation to the published landscape character areas.

Site Specific Landscape Character

- 3.5. From a study of both aerial photography and site based fieldwork the following observations have been made on the specific character of the site, its features and surrounding context.
- 3.6. The site is located on a tract of farmland to the north of Bromley Wood to the east of Cresswell Road. The farm settlements of New Buildings Farm, Blakelow Farm and Moorilow Moor Farm are located on the north west corner, north east corner and south east corner. The land comprises of a number of small irregular shaped arable and pastoral fields delineated by established hedgerows which are surrounded by more irregular farmed fields in the wider landscape, along with large blocks of irregularly shaped woodland.
- 3.7. There are several Public Rights of Way which run through the site. DM/24 runs east west and doubles as the access track to New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm. DM/25 runs north south through the eastern side of the site and these form part of the route for the Stone Circles Challenge. Other PRow lie within the vicinity of the site DM/23 and DM/33 to the NE of the site and L/59, L/61, L57 and L/58 etc to the south east. The routes link the site to Fulford, Draycott in the Moors and Moorilow Heath and beyond.
- 3.8. For the purposes of the baseline assessment the proposed development site has been considered as three related but distinct character areas within the overall site boundary and are described separately, and their landscape features and characteristics described in the following text, with an overview of the key landscape features made for the site in its entirety.

Western Ridge:

- 3.9. The western part of the Site comprises a series of irregular fields currently used as pastoral farmland. This area is crossed by the lane serving Blakelow Farm and Paynsley Hall, with the New Buildings Farm complex located to the west. The lane also forms PRow DM/24 and follows the ridge separating the valley sides, with the northern fields facing towards Draycott in the Moors and the southern fields falling towards and adjacent to Bromley Wood.
- 3.10. Views are available to both the north and south, although their openness varies depending on the viewer's position along the lane and the presence of gaps in the hedgerows or field gates. This part of the Site includes the highest point within the proposed development area, at approximately 210m AOD, located close to where the access track leaves the Site to the east.

- 3.11. The landform is rolling, with a notable fall towards the stream that separates the two southernmost fields in this parcel. A small pond, enclosed by scrub vegetation and small trees, is located in the north-westernmost field. The fields are generally well defined by mature hedgerows, with occasional semi-mature trees within the field boundaries.
- 3.12. The existing wind turbine is outside of the Site boundary but is visually prominent in many views from the PRow.
- 3.13. This character area lies wholly within Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

Bromley Wood and Moat:

- 3.14. This parcel is comprises irregular pastoral fields located immediately north and west of Bromley Wood. A degree of separation is maintained from Blakelow Farm, and the fields form the central part of the wider proposed development site. The eastern boundary is defined by the track leading to Blakelow Farm.
- 3.15. The moat is located along the southern boundary of this character area, although it is visually separated from the lane by surrounding vegetation and the falling landform. There are no public rights of way passing through or immediately adjoining the fields within this parcel; PRow DM/24 lies to the north.
- 3.16. The landform falls from approximately 190m AOD in the west of the area to approximately 160m AOD in the east. Internal field boundaries are less clearly defined than those within the Western Ridge character area. They are generally formed by mature hedgerows and lines of individual trees, including sections of overgrown hedgerow.
- 3.17. Some gaps are present within the field boundaries, providing opportunities for enhancement as part of the proposals.
- 3.18. This parcel lies wholly within Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

Blakelow Valley and Stone Circles Challenge:

- 3.19. This local character area comprises predominantly arable fields, divided by the valley bottom and brook, which run broadly east to west. PRow DM/25 crosses the area on an approximate north to south alignment through the field and pasture network. The fields are generally irregular in form, although they are larger and more rectilinear than those within the character areas to the west.

- 3.20. Field boundaries are generally well defined by hedgerows or trees. A hedgerow with a small pond, enclosed by surrounding vegetation, lies along the eastern boundary. A stream passes through the northern parcel, while the landform rises southwards towards the Moorilow Moor Farm complex.
- 3.21. Levels within this character area range from approximately 167m AOD to 202m AOD. Wide, long-distance views are available across the surrounding landscape, particularly from the southern section of the higher part of PRoW L/74, the Stone Circles Challenge. Along this section of the route there is little intervening vegetation, allowing open views in all directions.
- 3.22. This parcel lies partly within Staffordshire Moorlands and East Staffordshire Borough Council.

Key Landscape Features

Tree cover and vegetation

- 3.23. Within the site boundaries an established network of trees and hedgerows are found along field boundaries. These landscape features provide green links and corridors across the site and link to the pockets of established but relatively small woodland within the site and wider areas of woodland further afield. There is a pond and stream within the fields themselves, and land use is limited to farmland usage with a mix of arable and pasture.
- 3.24. The hedge tree cover and adjacent vegetation set the site into an open valley landscape defined by strong field patterns. Further detail can be found in the Arboricultural Appraisal by Salopian Consultancy submitted as part of the planning application.

Watercourses and ponds

- 3.25. There is a watercourse that runs along the northern edge of Bromley Wood linking Cresswell Road to Dairy House Farm, Upper Leigh. There are also several tributaries feeding into this watercourse, one to the north leading from just south of the access road and another from close to Moorilow Moor Farm running along the eastern side of Bromley Wood. There is a pond on site to the north east of New Buildings Farm. The watercourses are surrounded by trees and vegetation and form natural field boundaries. The pond is also surrounded by vegetation.

Topography

- 3.26. The topography of the site is locally undulating, the west parcel sits on the ridge with the access track broadly following the ridgeline and land dropping gently away on either side. The middle parcel lies in the valley with the watercourse running along the northern side of Bromley Wood and beyond. The south east parcel is low on the northern boundary which adjoins the watercourse and rises to the south. Local variations in landform and topography give the site

variation in character with open views possible from the higher ground to the north and south and a more contained and secluded character on the lower valley to the west of the site.

Public footpaths and recreation routes

- 3.27. The public footpath network in the vicinity of the proposed development site provides linkages from Fulford to the north west, Draycott in the Moors to the north east where there is an existing solar farm and Morrilow Heath to the south. The routes of the PRoW are plotted on Figure 1 Access and Circulation in the supporting Figures.

Landscape, ecological and historic designations

- 3.28. The site does not fall within any national or local designated areas and there are no statutory or non-statutory heritage designations within the site boundary. There is an adjoining ancient woodland to the south, Bromley Wood which is also designated as a Local Wildlife Site with a further patch adjoining the site to the north east known as Newclose Sprink. Another block of ancient woodland designated as a local wildlife site lies approximately 500m to the north of the site at Hosewood Farm. The nearest Listed building and Scheduled Ancient Monument lies further than 1km from the site.

National Landscape Character

- 3.29. The site and study area falls within National Character Area (NCA) 68: Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands as defined by Natural England, published in 2014 and superseding the previous Countryside Agency Character Area profile. Refer to Figure 2.
- 3.30. Key characteristics of this NCA pertinent to the site context are defined as:
- *The area, which is dissected by the river systems of the Trent, the Blithe and the Dove, forms a rolling glacial till plateau that slopes southeastwards from the southern edge of the Peak District to the valley of the River Trent. There is a distinctive scarp to the south of the Dove, whose broad flood plain divides the Staffordshire and Derbyshire elements.*
 - *The south is dominated by heavy, seasonally waterlogged soils derived from glacial till. In the north, red and pink soils underlain by Mercia Mudstones and Sherwood Sandstone are more amenable to cultivation.*
 - *A predominantly pastoral landscape of rolling countryside that is still largely rural and relatively tranquil, featuring distinctive field boundary patterns and characteristic hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Grassland for livestock is the dominant land use although dairy and cereal farming are also important. The majority of the farms are small- to medium-sized dairying and livestock holdings. Arable cultivation occurs on the better land north and south of the Dove and in the river flood plains.*

- *An overall wooded character derived from scattered ancient and seminatural woods, parkland and boundary trees. Some large woodland blocks are prominent in Needwood Forest; however, much consists of smaller, fragmented remnants. There is new woodland creation within The National Forest.*
- *Predominantly hedgerow bounded, the field pattern varies from small to medium-sized fields to the north of the Dove; mostly large-scale and rectilinear on the broad river flood plains; strongly rectilinear in Needwood Forest; and smaller and more irregular to the west.*
- *A wide range of habitats associated predominantly with pasture, varying from damp lowland grassland and marshland to drier neutral grassland. There are good surviving examples of watermeadows featured along the three main river valleys. Areas of open water such as Blithfield Reservoir and the major rivers are important for birds. Chartley Moss (a basin mire) and Pasturefields (an inland salt marsh) are internationally important examples of rare habitats.*
- *Wood pasture and designed parklands, often with veteran trees, are found throughout the area. They are generally associated with landscape parks and country houses, such as Sandon, Sudbury and Kedleston. Tutbury Castle and the internationally important Derwent Valley Mills, together with a variety of features such as moated sites and medieval settlements and the Trent and Mersey Canal, add to the historical richness of this landscape. Extensive earthworks relating to ridge and furrow and watermeadow systems survive, particularly around the Dove.*
- *A dispersed historical settlement pattern, particularly in the higher pastoral farmlands that fringe the Peak District to the north, with the older villages generally sited along the valleys or valley sides, and more recent crossroad settlements on the higher ground. Buildings are usually of red brick and clay tile roofs, and local sandstone. Timber frame buildings are rare with notable examples at Somersal Hall and the village of Abbots Bromley. There are market towns at Ashbourne, Stone, Tutbury and Uttoxeter, and the more significant urban areas of Burton-upon-Trent and the City of Derby extend into the eastern boundary of the NCA.*
- *The Trent and Dove valleys are major transport corridors. The Trent Valley includes the Trent and Mersey Canal, the West Coast Main Line railway and the A51 road, while the Dove Valley features the Derby to Stoke railway line and the A50 road. The A52 links Derby and Ashbourne.*

3.31. There are general references to renewable energy throughout the NCA document, but these are limited to biomass initiatives.

Local Landscape Character

Landscape Character Assessment - Staffordshire County Council

- 3.32. Written descriptions for the landscape character types of Staffordshire are published in Planning for Landscape Change: Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 - 2011 Landscape Descriptions.
- 3.33. The proposed site sits within Landscape Character Type Settled Plateau Farmland. Refer to Figure 3 Local Landscape Character.

Landscape Type: Settled Plateau Farmland

These are landscapes of rolling plateaux, on which boulder clay overlies Triassic mudstones. The soils, which are generally non-calcareous stagnogleys, support dairying with some mixed farming in a semi-regular pattern of hedged fields, with scattered woods, often of ancient origin, and areas of remnant heath. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads, with urban influences in places.

Visual character

This is an open landscape of large-scale regular and irregular fields with extensive views from the raised, undulating plateau landform out to the surrounding countryside, except where conifer and broadleaved plantations restrict views and act as constant skyline features. Few hedgerows and a generally low density of hedgerow trees emphasise this open nature, although locally, remnant heathy woodland of ancient origin, containing oak, holly and silver birch, or woodland estate planting, help to reduce the scale and contain views. There are belts of mature broadleaved trees which intersect the open areas, and new tree planting has been carried out along tracks, although the use of exotic species has sometimes been inappropriate. Intensive arable and improved pasture farming has reduced the level of diversity, with breakdown of field boundaries to wire fences, stunted individual oaks and individual thorn. There is little access into these areas except tracks to large isolated estate farms with large modern agricultural buildings. Characteristic landscape features Ancient heathy oak woodland and new plantations; pronounced rolling ridge and valley landform; large farms; intensive mixed pastoral and arable farming; large scale fields; parkland.

Incongruous landscape features

Large numbers of fence-lines replacing hedgerows; gappy hedgerows; large farm buildings; stunted hedgerow oaks; exotic tree species.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality.

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, and the introduction of incongruous features, as listed above. The representation of semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type (e.g. ancient woodland, wood pasture and unimproved grassland) is also relatively poor

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to decrease the scale of the landscape and restore some structure to an area of intensive farming losing much of its hedgerow pattern. The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate as would the strategic siting of new native woodland to reduce the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland. This landscape type therefore qualifies as a priority under two of the key actions in the government's England Forestry Strategy.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Large blocks of woodland could be planted in the more open areas, reducing to medium scale in those with a more intact field pattern, or associated with existing woodlands. Woodlands should retain an essentially broadleaved character although a conifer content is acceptable. Care should therefore be taken with edge design to reflect this and, because of the nature of the landform, views will be available into any new woodland, so internal design is also important. 'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

Local Landscape Character Assessment of Staffordshire Moorlands

Settled Plateau Farmland

- 3.34. In addition to the Staffordshire County Council Landscape Assessments, Staffordshire Moorlands has provided additional Landscape Studies. Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (LSCA) 2008 finds the site within LCT Settled Plateau Farmland.
- 3.35. *Key Characteristics*
- *Open large scale landscapes with extensive views from a rolling plateau*

- *Low grade pasture farmland with overgrazed poorly drained fields with rushes and rough grass*
- *Large scale regular and irregular field patterns with hedges and dry stone walls*
- *Hedges deteriorated to the extent that field boundaries marked by isolated trees, fencing and remnant thorn and holly*
- *Some blocks of mature broadleaf woodland*
- *Heathland*
- *Parkland*
- *Dispersed settlements*
- *Developing urban fringe character due to proximity to Stoke-on-Trent*
- *Busy road network surrounds the area; railway line*

Geology, Landform and Soils

Gentle slopes to the Churnet Valley edge with a rolling plateau lies on boulder clay overlying Triassic mudstones. In more northerly area views extend over Stoke on Trent and towards Biddulph. Non calcareous stagnogley soils are poorly drained and overgrazed. Hedgerows and some dry stone walls are aligned in a regular field pattern. Stone outcrops in higher areas.

Vegetation

A regular pattern of hedged fields have deteriorated in parts with isolated beech, birch, oak and holly trees demarcating field boundaries. Overgrazed, poorly drained fields have resulted in rushes and rough grass predominant in fields. Heathland is present in isolated areas on higher ground with stunted oak and birch trees. Blocks of woodland are associated with Consall Hall historic parkland. Bromley Wood on the southernmost part of the district is ancient semi natural woodland. Some introduction of exotic species.

Land use

The main land use is dairy farming although gradually replaced with horse grazing. Consall Hall and gardens provides a tourist attraction within the area. A number of fish ponds are associated with Consall Hall. Major overhead power lines crossing the southernmost tip of the district within Needwood Claylands Joint Character Area

Enclosure

Hedges and dry stone walls are in a poor state of repair and have been replaced extensively with poorly maintained post and barbed wire fence. Where hedgerows exist regular field patterns are clearly defined. Some lanes have banked hedgerows restricting views and creating a sense of enclosure.

Settlement and buildings

- 3.36. *This area is generally urban fringe to the City of Stoke-on-Trent. Old stone dwellings are intermixed with new style properties. A number of individual isolated properties have been improved creating a suburban feel to the area. Werrington, Cellarhead and Wetley Rocks are the main settlements within this character type. Major overhead power lines crossing*

Transport and Access

- 3.37. *The busy A52, A520 and A522 run through and alongside the boundaries of the character area with a network of busy minor roads within the area. Railway line crosses area.*

Incongruous landscape features

- 3.38. *Horseyculture and over grazing associated with urban fringe farming. Increasing use of post and wire fencing for stock control. Busy roads. Mainline railway line. Overhead power lines.*

Key Planning and Management Issues

- *Impact of conurbation; urban fringe farming and increase in horseyculture*
- *Powerlines*
- *Replacement of hedgerows and drystone walls by fencing.*
- *Busy roads and mainline railway*
- *Parklands*
- *Loss of some semi-natural vegetation (ancient woodland, heathland hedgerows and semi-natural grasslands)*

Capabilities and sensitivities of the landscape to accommodate change

- 3.39. *Planning for Landscape Change Supplementary Planning Guidance to Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan, identifies this landscape character area, the area south of Werrington and the area in the south west corner of the district as landscapes requiring regeneration; and the area east of Wetley Rocks as a landscape that requires restoration. Urban fringe pressures have had a particularly adverse impact on the landscape quality of this area due to the proliferation of incongruous features and the deteriorating condition of existing landscape features.*

Landscape Planning Guidelines

- 3.40. • *Urban fringe pressures can have an adverse impact on landscape quality with the proliferation of incongruous features and the deteriorating condition of existing landscape features. The landscape structure has deteriorated with the loss of vegetational features and the impact of the urban fringe. There are open views to the conurbation. This landscape requires a new vegetational structure to be created comprising of woodland, hedgerows and trees which will*

screen the conurbation and soften the impact of larger scale obtrusive features such as overheadlines and major transport routes.

- 3.41. • The planting of small woodlands, hedgerows with associated trees and tree groups can also help to restore the vegetational cover and re-articulate the scale of the landscape. The new vegetational structure should link to existing remnant vegetation and field pattern. It should create a mosaic of spaces, some open some wooded and of small to medium scale.*
- 3.42. • Where new development is proposed, the edge of the development and public open spaces associated with it should contain appropriate tree and shrub planting to reduce the visual impact of the development and to enable it to be more readily assimilated into the landscape.*
- 3.43. • Field boundaries should be retained, maintained and, in places, replaced to maintain the scale of the landscape. Stone walls or native hedgerows should be used as a means of enclosure dependent upon local character. Replacement of hedges and drystone walls by fencing should be discouraged.*
- 3.44. • The growth of horseculture has caused the subdivision of fields by fencing, loss of hedges and the erections of shelters for horses. Consideration should given to actions that can be taken to counteract the impact of this landuse on landcover and landscape scale.*
- 3.45. • Landowners should be encouraged to diversify land use away from the current low grade farming.*
- 3.46. • Heathland areas should be protected. Planting in the vicinity of heathland should avoid invasive species and create a transitional area of a heathland character around the edges that should aim to link visually with nearby heathland and extend heathland character out into the surrounding landscapes.*
- 3.47. • Development and new tree planting should take account of the setting of the historic parklands, of the setting of important buildings and of important local views. Any proposals for development or land use change which impacts upon the setting of an historic parkland must take account of the unique character of that designed landscape.*
- 3.48. • Any proposals for development or land use change within an historic landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape appraisal.*
- 3.49. • Historic landscapes contain introduced decorative tree species that are inherent to the design of the parkland and pleasure grounds and to its setting. It may be appropriate to introduce some*

of these species into the area identified as the setting of the parkland. Consideration should be given to protecting, in particular, individual specimen and groups of trees that are significant historically or visually to this landscape or to local settlement.

- 3.50. • *The grouping and form of new buildings should reflect the juxtaposition, scale, form, enclosure and materials of traditional local buildings characteristic of this area.*
- 3.51. • *The colour of prefabricated agricultural buildings should be determined taking careful account of position, predominant tones of adjacent vegetation, local materials and sky, so as to minimise the visual impact of the development.*
- 3.52. • *The loss of semi-natural vegetation should be checked and remaining habitats should be protected, managed and where possible extended to create sustainable communities*

Land Management Guidelines

The condition of the semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type is generally deteriorating. These habitats require protection, management and to be re established. The main issues are as follows:

Hedgerows

It is highly important that ancient and diverse hedgerows, particularly the hedgerow trees along them, are maintained and managed. Where hedgerows are planted or restored it is important that they should be species rich reflecting local indigenous hedge mixes and that the plants where possible should be grown locally. Consideration should be given to how the current practice of the erection of stock proof fencing rather than maintenance and management of hedgerows can be checked and the retention and maintenance of hedgerows be encouraged.

Ancient/semi-natural broad leaved woodland

It is of very high importance to the character and quality of the landscape that degraded ancient/ semi-natural broad leaved woodlands are restored and that new woodlands should be recreated or regenerated. Existing woodland should be maintained and enhanced. Ancient and semi-natural broadleaved woodland is generally particularly important to the form and character of historic parkland landscapes. Similarly the maintenance, safeguarding and restoration of wood pasture and parkland is also important. It is also likely that a number of veteran trees will be found within an historic parkland.

Wet Woodlands

It is highly important that further losses of wet woodlands are prevented and that existing woods are maintained, enhanced and restored. Efforts should be made to increase the number of wet woodlands

Lowland Heathland

It is of high importance that new heathlands are created and that areas previously heathland are recreated. Existing heaths should be protected from development and from damaging activities.

Lowland Acidic Grassland

It is highly important that action should be taken to prevent further losses of acidic grassland other than to lowland heathland restoration. This grassland habitat should be maintained, enhanced and restored, where possible by maintaining a buffer between it and other dominant/invasive habitats. The number of such sites should be increased and support given to the linking of fragmented sites through habitat creation.

Reedbeds

It is highly important that opportunities are taken to maintain and create reedbeds.

Rivers and Streams

It is highly important that the quality of all natural existing channel features is maintained and that the quality and quantity of water should be improved.

Lowland Wet Grassland

Existing lowland wet grassland should be maintained and enhanced. Degraded areas should be restored and opportunities taken to create new areas.

Unimproved and neutral grassland

Existing unimproved and neutral grasslands that are in poor condition should be restored. These habitats should be maintained and safeguarded and habitat creation should be used to link adjacent sites through the creation of new sites or re-creation of former areas.

Arable field margins

Arable field margins should be maintained, improved and restored where possible.

Summary of Site Landscape Character

- 3.53. Overall, the baseline assessment of landscape has concluded that the site displays characteristics which are consistent with the published landscape character assessments. These include the presence of hedgerow and field boundary trees, small blocks of woodland located at the boundaries of the site, rolling and locally undulating topography, a medium to large scale field pattern with an irregular patchwork of agricultural fields and network of footpaths.
- 3.54. The introduction of the proposed solar panels will inevitably change the land use, however, the retention of characteristic vegetation will allow a continuation of green infrastructure links across the landscape and the protection of all key landscape features.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 3.55. The local landscape character studies do not offer any guidance on sensitivity and this assessment deems the sensitivity as being **medium** based on the following determining factors, i.e. landscape condition, landscape value and susceptibility to accommodate change. The criteria for defining sensitivity are in the Methodology within the appendices.

Landscape Condition

- 3.56. The majority of land cover is farmland. The fields are bound by dense hedges and mature individual trees and belts of woodland. There is a wind turbine in close proximity to the site and pylons approximately 200m to the north of the site.

Landscape Value

- 3.57. For the purpose of this assessment the landscape value of the Application Site has been reviewed and is set out in the table below. The criteria for establishing the landscape value is drawn from a list of factors that are agreed to influence value as set out in Table 1 of TGN 02/21 Assessing Landscape Value outside of National Designations and GLVIA3, Box 5.1 page 84.

Table 3.1: Landscape Value

Factors to Establish Landscape Value	Comments
Designations	GLVIA3 advises that a review of existing designations is usually the starting point in understanding value. The site is not within any national or local designation such as a National Park, Area

	of Special Landscape or such like. The site is not within the Green Belt. Designations: Medium. Overall: Medium.
Landscape quality (condition)	The landscape character of the site is dominated by agricultural land use. The boundary vegetation to all the fields that make up the development parcels is in a good condition and will be retained. The pond and watercourse with associated native vegetation will also be retained and managed. The remainder of the site does not contain any notable landscape features or prominent physical attributes that set it apart in overall landscape terms. The is a wind turbine close to site and overhead high voltage cables and pylons are also a detracting feature of the overall landscape quality approximately 200m to the north of the site. The small woodland block on the eastern boundary and trees along the watercourse are a strong characteristic of the landscape within the wider study area. The tree surveys have not identified the presence of any trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order or protected hedgerows but there are two trees that could be classified as veteran. Landscape Quality: Medium
Scenic quality	The land within the site is comprised of agricultural fields with small groups of trees within the hedgerows within the site boundaries. The southern boundary is adjacent to Bromley Wood and Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Area. There are views across farmlands looking northwards to the landscape within the Tean Valley but these are mostly confined to views from the L74 footpath and the presence of mature vegetation restricts long distance views to the south. Through combining the field work and baseline data it is considered that the site and the immediate landscape does have a pronounced sense of scenic quality in a few localised places looking northwards but is mostly located on private land. The majority of views are short and contained by the field boundary vegetation. Scenic quality: Medium to Medium High
Rarity	The site is comprised of commonplace agricultural fields bound by Bromley Wood to the south.

	The land uses in the surrounding study area are varied but not out of the ordinary and are commonplace. Rarity: Low
Representativeness	The landscape of the site contains features that are typical to the landscape character as described in the Staffordshire Landscape Character publications and typical of the majority of the Staffordshire Countryside. Representativeness: Medium High
Conservation Interests	There are no wildlife or heritage designations, apart from a moat, within the site itself. However, this judgement is subject to further ecological and heritage assessments that will be carried out as part of the planning application. Conservation Interest: Low/Medium
Recreational Value	Two footpaths travel through or adjacent to the site boundaries. The paths are potentially used by walkers, families, farm workers and dog walkers. Some of the footpaths travel along access tracks to farms whilst other are simply tracks through fields and along hedge line boundaries. Many of the routes have little holistic visibility of the fields proposed for the solar panels due to the intervening blocks of woodland and field boundary vegetation, however there are gaps at field gates where more open views and a perception of the site are possible. Recreational value: Medium to High
Perceptual aspects: Wilderness/Tranquillity	The farm complex, wind turbine and pylons to the north are detracting features within the landscape of the site and adversely affects the tranquillity of the landscape. There is a sense of rural character that is obtained from walking on the footpaths that travel across the site, but these are mostly achieved when looking away from the site across the Tean Valley. Perceptual aspects: Not tranquil. Low
Associations (with art, literature or historical events)	There is no evidence of any art or literature associations that could contribute to its value. Associations: Low

For this assessment the overall Landscape Value is considered to be **Medium**

- 3.58. For this assessment, the Landscape Value is considered to be Medium. Based on the above it is likely that the susceptibility to change in terms of landscape character will be Medium and combined with a Medium value the overall sensitivity is likely to be Medium for the proposed development site.
- 3.59. In summary the fabric of landscape within the site represents a relatively intact agricultural/pastoral landscape and the mature field boundary vegetation is typical of that found within the local area and are common landscape features, as is the field pattern.
- 3.60. The site is not located within or adjacent to any national environmental or heritage statutory designations. The spatial designation of the Stoke Green Belt is to the north of the site as illustrated in Figure 5.
- 3.61. The site contains characteristic features in terms of boundary vegetation but none of which are considered particularly important examples. There are no vertical landscape features within the Site apart from a single wind turbine which is positioned in the adjacent field. The Site does not include uncommon characteristics or features that are considered rare.
- 3.62. There is a network of public rights of way and recreational facilities within close proximity to the site including: Draycott in the Moors 24 and 25 and L7 and these all form part of the Stone Circles Challenge.
- 3.63. There is no evidence that the landscape is connected with notable people, events or the arts.

Identified Landscape Receptors for Assessment

- 3.64. With regards to the site, the key Landscape Receptors which will be taken forward to be assessed are identified as the following:
- National Character Area 68: Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands;
 - Local Landscape Character: Planning for Landscape Change and also within the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment: Landscape Type: Settled Plateau Farmland;
 - In Site Character Areas, as identified by UBU, namely Western Ridge, Bromley Wood and Moat and Blakelow Valley and Stone Circles Challenge; and

- Landscape Features: Tree cover and vegetation, field pattern, land use, watercourses and topography.

4. BASELINE VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 4.1. The baseline visual study includes an understanding of the area in which the Proposed Development may be visible, the groups of people who may experience views and the viewpoints where they may be affected and the nature of these views. The study of theoretical and potential views of the Application Site for visual receptors has been undertaken in parallel with the baseline landscape study. This has determined those visual receptors within the landscape that may have views of the site, taking into account the combination of landform, vegetation and built form that may restrict or prevent actual visibility across the landscape.
- 4.2. The visual assessment has explored the nature of the existing visual amenity of the area and sought to establish the approximate visibility of the Application Site. A series of photo viewpoints have been selected which support this analysis. Figure 8 details the location of the finalised photo viewpoints. The viewpoints have been selected to capture an overall representation of the typical visual receptors within the locality.
- 4.3. Some viewpoints also represent areas which may be perceived to be sensitive to the visual impact of the Proposed Development due to their nature or proximity but have restricted views of the site. The focus has therefore been on representative viewpoints in locations where some degree of visibility does occur.

Potential visual receptors

- 4.4. From a review of the ZTV in Figure 7 and a desktop study, a series of representative viewpoints were chosen to provide coverage of potential views of the proposed development from a range of directions. The potential viewpoints were then tested through field study and those where no visibility of the development could be achieved were discounted. The selected viewpoints are representative of a range of receptors including residential, recreational, cultural and transport.
- 4.5. A number of potential visual receptors were identified to provide a detailed assessment of the visual effects of the proposed development.

Recreational receptors

- 4.6. Potential recreational receptors identified included the following public routes, which run in the vicinity of the site:

- Public Footpaths and Bridleways including: Draycott in the Moors 24 and 25 and L7 and these all form part of the Stone Circles Challenge.

4.7. There are a number of other long range promoted routes within the study areas as illustrated on Figure 1. However, the field survey demonstrated that there were few or no views of the site from these routes due to existing vegetation and landform or the distances were too great to distinguish the site. These potential receptors are therefore 'scoped out' of the assessment. Views to demonstrate any potential cumulative effects from the Blythe Solar Farm have been included even though there is no inter-visibility.

Residential receptors

- 4.8. Residential properties and other buildings in view of the sites have been considered including surrounding farmhouses.
- 4.9. Landform and vegetation within the landscape combined with the orientation of dwellings in Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath will prevent any significant visual connection with the proposed development sites.
- 4.10. The dwellings within the New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm are in close proximity to some of the proposed panels and the residential dwelling associated with the latter farm complex is likely to experience views of the development when viewing in a southerly direction.
- 4.11. The final layout has taken the residential amenity into consideration and set the panels back away from the residents' boundaries and provided landscape planting to provide screening between the proposed development and the dwellings. See Layout in Appendix A.

Transport Receptors

- 4.12. Travelling receptors include those using major and minor roads in close proximity to the site. In this case the roads in close proximity to the site are Cresswell Road and the farm track leading to New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm which doubles as a PRow.

Cultural receptors

- 4.13. There are a number of listed buildings and scheduled monuments within the study area, these are demonstrated in Figure 4. The field survey demonstrated that due to landform, vegetation and the surrounding built environment, the proposed development will not be visible to the majority of the cultural receptors.
- 4.14. The baseline study identified 24 potential viewpoint locations using the ZTV and Ordnance Survey mapping sources and the landscape character studies. The identified viewpoints have

been photographed and converted into Landscape Institute Type One photo panoramas using industry standard software. The main assessment was carried out in February 2025 for this LVIA when the deciduous trees and hedges, within and surrounding the site, were not in leaf and therefore illustrate the highest level of visibility. The summer months would provide more screening effects than is displayed in the representative viewpoints.

- 4.15. The identified viewpoints and sensitivity are listed in Table 4.1 below preceded by summary descriptions of each viewpoint.

Viewpoint Descriptions

- 4.16. Figure 8 identifies the locations of all the recorded viewpoints followed by the viewpoint photographs.

Viewpoints 01 to 06

- 4.17. These viewpoints are located on Draycott in the Moors 24 (DM24) public footpath and demonstrate that there may be some instances where the solar panels to the north and south of the lane are visible over the roadside hedge or between the rare gaps such as at field gates. In winter months when the foliage of the deciduous hedges is absent there may be opportunities for increased visibility through the hedge. However, the retained latticework of branches will screen most of the proposed development. Views of the vertical structure of the wind turbine are frequent but generally views across the existing fields are limited by the dense and tall hedges that align the lane.

Viewpoints 07 and 08

- 4.18. The viewpoints are located on DM24 public footpath to the east of viewpoint 06 and demonstrate that views of Bromley Wood and the far southern fields of the proposed development are visible to varying degrees. It is noted that the proposed panels will be set back from the lane at these locations and separated from the viewer by the field just south of the lane.

Viewpoint 09

- 4.19. This viewpoint represents the users of the recreational receptor, namely public footpath DM24. The view looks southerly down the access track to Blakelow Farm. The track is likely to be widened to allow for the required access to the solar farm development although it is not likely that the hedgerow or trees that align the track will be removed as part of the works.

Viewpoints 10 to 18

- 4.20. These viewpoints are located on public footpath L7 and represent the range of visibility of the proposed development that will be experienced by the users of the footpath and the Stone Circles Challenge. Generally, views are constrained by existing hedgerows that align the footpath but some long range views to the north east towards the Tean Valley can be experienced along the route and are dependent on the direction of travel.

Viewpoints 19 and 20

- 4.21. These views are located on public footpath L76 looking in a westerly direction towards the proposed development. The views represent walkers on the footpath, residents of Bitternsdale and visitors to the Blithewood Moated Site. The views demonstrate that there is little to no visual connectivity of the application site due to the intervening landform, hedges and trees within the landscape.

Viewpoints 21 to 24

- 4.22. These views are located on roads and public footpaths to the west and northwest of the application site and demonstrate that there is little to no visual connectivity of the application site due to the intervening landform, hedges and trees within the landscape.

Table 4.1: Visual Receptors

Viewpoint No.	Receptor Type	Location	Sensitivity
Viewpoint 1	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 2	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 3	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 4	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 5	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 6	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 7	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 8	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 9	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	High
Viewpoint 10	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High
Viewpoint 11	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High
Viewpoint 12	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High
Viewpoint 13	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM/32	High
Viewpoint 14	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High
Viewpoint 15	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High
Viewpoint 16	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High
Viewpoint 17	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High
Viewpoint 18	Recreational	Located on public footpath L7	High

Viewpoint 19	Recreational	Located on public footpath L76	Medium High
Viewpoint 20	Recreational	Located on public footpath L76	Medium High
Viewpoint 21	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM24	Medium
Viewpoint 22	Transport / Residential	Located on Cresswell Road opposite dwellings	Medium Low
Viewpoint 23	Recreational	Located on public footpath F18	Medium High
Viewpoint 24	Recreational	Located on public footpath DM14	Medium High

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 5.1. This section sets out the potential likely significant landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development on the basis of the assessment of the New Buildings Farm Solar PV General Layout and associated description within the Planning, Design and Access Statement. For clarity, the assessment assumes the inclusion of 'mitigation by design' as set out in the following Section 6. The visual assessment follows further below after the landscape effects.
- 5.2. The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition 2013 (GLVIA3) suggest that potential impacts on the landscape should be measured at three levels; i) impacts on the site; ii) impacts on the setting of the site and iii) impacts on the broader landscape context. It also offers guidance on measuring impacts during the operational stage i.e. at point of completion; and also residual impacts such as long term impacts after the introduction of additional mitigation.
- 5.3. The assessment has been carried out and the findings are laid out below and summarised in the conclusions. These record the potential impacts and the resultant predicted effects that the Proposed Development will have on the fabric and character of the immediate and surrounding landscape, followed by the visual effects. It provides an assessment at the **Construction** (preparation and site set up), **Operational** (day to day running of the facility) and **Decommission** (taking down and removal) stages. Consideration has been given to the sensitivity of the Application Site to change and the measured magnitude of change is set against the current baseline. This leads to an overall judgement on the likely significance of effects that the Proposed Development will have on the landscape character and visual amenity.

DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

- 5.4. The formal description of the proposed development is:
- 5.5. *“Installation of a solar farm with ancillary infrastructure, security fence, access, landscaping and designed to allow continued agriculture.”*
- 5.6. For additional context, the proposal is a ground-mounted solar farm capable of exporting approximately 40MW to the local distribution network, with a peak generation capacity of up to 60MWp. It is expected to generate approximately 57GWh of renewable electricity annually, equivalent to the electricity needs of around 15,400 homes. The panels are mono pitched and do not exceed 3m in height.
- 5.7. The development would operate for 40 years, with up to one additional year allowed for construction and one for decommissioning, giving a total development period of up to 42 years. Following decommissioning, all infrastructure would be removed and the land returned to agricultural use.
- 5.8. The proposed grid connection is to an existing 132kV pylon on the north-western side of the site.

DESIGN EVOLUTION

- 5.9. In 2021, UBU undertook an initial appraisal of the wider area surrounding New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm to identify potential landscape and visual receptors. This work informed a feasibility study that identified sensitive areas and notable landscape features, as well as parts of the site considered less visually intrusive and therefore more capable of accommodating solar development. The findings also informed the work of other consultants considering ecology and heritage matters, helping to establish an overview of the most appropriate locations for the proposed solar development. The following summary explains how this early appraisal informed the evolving design:
- The scheme has been designed around the existing landscape framework, retaining mature trees, hedgerows and established field boundaries rather than replacing or substantially altering them.
 - The historic moat was identified as an important heritage constraint. Although the initial advice indicated that an appropriate development buffer could be provided, the design went further by removing development from the entire field and proposing that area for ecological enhancement.

- Stand-off distances from Public Rights of Way and nearby residential properties (southeastern field in particular) have been increased where the site layout allows, improving the relationship between the development and sensitive receptors.
- Public Rights of Way are retained and kept open, with additional planting proposed to soften and filter views from these routes.
- The landscape proposals have been strengthened through new native hedgerows, reinforcement of existing boundaries, additional screening around Public Rights of Way and nearby dwellings, ecological corridors and habitat-creation areas.
- The proposal works with the existing field pattern and landscape structure, helping to contain the development within the established framework and reducing the need for wider landscape alteration.
- The layout has responded to ecological constraints by retaining woodland edges, field boundaries and all trees identified as having bat-roost potential. Known badger activity has also been accommodated within the design.
- The submitted landscape strategy is intended to provide a long-term framework for the establishment and management of landscape features, rather than functioning solely as an initial planting plan.

5.10. The design and landscape proposals deliver a substantial Biodiversity Net Gain, currently calculated at an overall uplift of approximately 86.9%, significantly exceeding the statutory 10% requirement.

5.11. Furthermore, the maintenance and management of all of the landscape proposals, especially new and existing hedgerows, can be controlled by a planning condition that requires a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan or suchlike to be provided for the entirety of the operational period of the proposed solar development.

5.12. Further information can be found on the layout and Planting Plans in the Appendix A and Appendix B of the supporting Figures for the LVIA.

LANDSCAPE – CONSTRUCTION PHASE

Localised Character Areas

Western Ridge

The landscape value is **Medium** as the farm and associated land are outside of any National or Local landscape designations, but the combined landscape features contribute to the overall character of the Staffordshire landscape.

- 5.13. The susceptibility to accommodate change is **Medium** as the current farm activities and management is adaptable and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility.
- 5.14. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.15. The character of the area will undergo a **Major** change with the erection of the 3m high arrays of solar panels and the construction of the access roads will take place within the field boundaries and temporary tree protection barriers installed. Any areas of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection.
- 5.16. The baseline condition which currently comprises the New Buildings Farm complex set within pastoral fields will undergo **Major** change on both the northern and southern side of the lane that hosts the PRow DM24 with the introduction of the fencing and solar panels. This will be directly obvious to the walkers (visual receptors) of the PRow and more description of the visual effects can be found in the Visual Section of this LVIA.
- 5.17. The magnitude of change will be **Major Temporary / Direct** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Major Adverse**.

Bromley Wood and Moat

- 5.18. The landscape value is **Medium** as the farm and associated land are outside of any National or Local landscape designations, but the combined landscape features contribute to the overall character of the Staffordshire landscape.
- 5.19. The susceptibility to accommodate change is **Medium** as the current farm activities and management is adaptable and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility.
- 5.20. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.21. The character of the area will undergo a **Moderate** change with the erection of the 3m high arrays of solar panels and construction of the access roads will take place within the field boundaries and temporary tree protection barriers installed. Any areas of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection.
- 5.22. The baseline condition which currently is comprised of the New Buildings Farm complex set within pastoral fields will undergo **Moderate** change within the fields with the introduction of the

fencing and solar panels however, it is noted that the development will provide considerable setback from the moat and also the northern boundary edge of Bromley Wood.

- 5.23. The magnitude of change will be **Moderate Temporary / Direct** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Adverse**.

Blakelow Valley and Stone Circles Challenge

- 5.24. The landscape value is **Medium High** as the footpaths form an important recreational feature within the landscape and the combined landscape features contribute to the overall character of the Staffordshire landscape.
- 5.25. The susceptibility to accommodate change is **High** as any permanent loss or long-term diversion of the potentially historic footpaths will be detrimental and cause harm for access to and enjoyment of the countryside. The current farm activities and management is adaptable, and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility.
- 5.26. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium High**.
- 5.27. The character of the area will undergo a **Major** change with the erection of the 3m high arrays of solar panels and the construction of the access roads will take place within the field boundaries and temporary tree protection barriers installed. Any areas of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection.
- 5.28. The baseline condition which currently comprises the Blakelow Farm complex set within pastoral fields will undergo **Major** change within the fields with the introduction of the fencing and solar panels however it is noted that the development will provide considerable setback from the Stone Circles Challenge PRoW.
- 5.29. The magnitude of change will be **Major Temporary / Direct** and the likely significance of effects will be **Major Adverse**.

Application Site

Topography, soils and geology

- 5.30. There is a risk of potential compaction of soils from construction vehicles during the setting up stages. There is a need for the transport of materials in and around the Application Site and there will be an erosion of the various grasslands if protective measures are not applied or

adhered to. Temporary tracks will be used for areas subject to heavy vehicle and pedestrian traffic to avoid the compaction of soils.

- 5.31. The underlying geology determines the soil types and vegetation and combined with the topographical properties of the landform provide a valuable part of the Staffordshire landscape and is therefore to be deemed to be of a **High** value.
- 5.32. The susceptibility to change is considered to be **Low** as changes to soils and geology usually occur over a considerable period and require major engineering to dramatically change the vegetation types that cover the ground and subsequently alter the overall landscape character over a long term.
- 5.33. The overall sensitivity of the landscape receptor is deemed to be **Medium**.
- 5.34. The setting up on the construction site and installation of the panels should cause very little disruption to the existing baseline condition and the magnitude of change is **Minor Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Adverse**.

Land Use

- 5.35. The installation of the solar farm will result in a change in farming practice from the current arable and pastoral usages of the fields to the harvesting and generation of solar energy, along with potential for grazing of sheep.
- 5.36. The landscape value is **Medium** as the farm and associated land contribute to character of the Staffordshire landscape.
- 5.37. The susceptibility to accommodate change is **Medium** as the current farm activities and management is adaptable and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility.
- 5.38. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.39. The magnitude of change is **Moderate Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Adverse**.

Woodland and trees

- 5.40. There is no risk that the existing trees and woodlands will be harmed or damaged as part of the construction stage as the erection of the panels and construction of the access roads will take place well within the field boundaries and temporary tree protection barriers installed. Any areas

of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection.

- 5.41. The landscape value of the trees is **High** as they are mostly native and mature. Some appear on ridgelines and are described in the various landscape character assessments.
- 5.42. The susceptibility is **High** as changes to distinctive woodland will erode and dramatically change the overall landscape character.
- 5.43. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **High**.
- 5.44. There will be little to no alteration of the current baseline of single trees, groups of trees or small woodland areas and therefore the magnitude of change is **Imperceptible Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Field Pattern

- 5.45. Various fields within the Application Site will be prepared for the new uses of the solar farm. This includes the laying down of tracking to ease compaction within vehicular and pedestrian areas. The field patterns will not undergo any change during the construction stage.
- 5.46. The landscape value is **Medium** as the field types and patterns are described in the LCA's. These are mostly those described as open, medium scale and bound by field hedges.
- 5.47. The susceptibility is **Medium** as changes to distinctive field patterns could erode and change the overall landscape character.
- 5.48. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.49. The magnitude of change is **Minor Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

Landform

- 5.50. The overall landform will remain unaltered through the construction phase as no major excavations or land shaping will be required to install the solar panels or access roads.
- 5.51. The landscape value is **Medium** as the landform references within the LCAs describe the small valleys between river courses.

- 5.52. The susceptibility is **Medium** as changes to landform can erode and change the overall landscape character.
- 5.53. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.54. The landform will not be altered and therefore the magnitude of change is **Imperceptible Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Footpaths and Bridleways

- 5.55. There is a wide network of footpaths and bridleways in the vicinity of the Application Site. DM24 and L7 public footpaths travel through the proposed development and form part of the route of the Stone Circles Challenge.
- 5.56. It is unlikely that any of the footpaths or bridleways will need to be closed or diverted during the construction stage and the edge of the proposed development will consist of 2m high temporary weldmesh fencing to protect the path and adjacent hedgerow vegetation from any construction operations. This will be removed following construction.
- 5.57. The landscape value is **Medium High** as the footpaths form an important recreational feature within the landscape and the boundary hedges and trees are mature and provide high ecological benefit.
- 5.58. The susceptibility is **High** as any permanent loss or long-term diversion of the potentially historic footpaths will be detrimental and cause harm for access to and enjoyment of the countryside.
- 5.59. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium High**.
- 5.60. The footpaths that travel within the site will be protected but will likely result in the route being located between corridors of tree protective fencing and temporary construction fencing such as Heras. The existing hedges will partially screen long-range views out towards the countryside. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

Setting of the Application Site

- 5.61. The boundaries of the Application Site are mostly adjacent to open countryside that extends northwards and easterly towards the Tean Valley and westerly towards the general Staffordshire Moorlands landscape. The wider landscape is comprised of varying field patterns demarcated by hedgerows and trees and woodland.

- 5.62. The southern boundary adjoins the Bromley Wood which is Local Wildlife Site and Ancient Woodland in part. Temporary tree protection fencing will be installed on the application site boundary with the woodland as well as adjoining any existing hedgerow boundaries or trees as part of the construction phase, and this will provide protection for all the boundary features.
- 5.63. The character of the fields on the development side will slowly undergo change as the panels are installed and this will have a **Minor Moderate** effect on the overall setting of the various boundaries that contribute to the setting of the site.
- 5.64. The landscape value is **Medium High** as the boundary hedgerows and trees contribute to the overall landscape and rural quality of the area.
- 5.65. The susceptibility is **Medium High** as the setting can accommodate a limited degree of change before detrimental changes to the overall character occur.
- 5.66. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium High**.
- 5.67. The magnitude of change is **Minor Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Adverse**

Broad and Local Landscape Context

National Character Area

- 5.68. The site and study area falls within **National Character Area (NCA) 68: Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands** as defined by Natural England, published in 2014.
- 5.69. The character of the landscape broadly concurs with the key descriptions set out within the Baseline Section of the assessment for these character areas and will undergo a relatively small-scale change within the Application Site Boundary during the construction stage.
- 5.70. The landscape sensitivity is **Medium** as the national character profiles contain very broad-brush and generalised descriptions of the landscape character with specific comments on the wider area around the Application Site. These mostly relate to the predominantly pastoral landscape of rolling countryside that is still largely rural and relatively tranquil however this is clearly not the case when considering detractors such as the A50 dual carriageway and the presence of high voltage cables and steel pylons. The landscape does feature distinctive field boundary patterns and characteristic hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Grassland for livestock is the dominant land use although dairy and cereal farming are also important. The majority of the

farms are small to medium sized dairying and livestock holdings. There is room to accommodate degrees of change with the wide areas without altering the overall key characteristics.

5.71. The magnitude of change is **minor Temporary/Direct**.

5.72. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Adverse**.

Local LCA – Staffordshire

5.73. At a county level there are two published assessments on landscape character that are considered, namely the 'Staffordshire County Council Planning for Change' and the 'Landscape and Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (LSCA) 2008' and both have identified the site to fall within LCT Settled Plateau Farmland. The character of the landscape broadly concurs with the key descriptions set out within the Baseline Section of this assessment for these character areas and will undergo a relatively small-scale change within the Application Site Boundary during the construction stage.

5.74. The site is located on farmland south of the A50 dual carriageway and to the east of Cresswell Road and Morrilow Heath is to the south east. There is a single wind turbine within the site boundary and other vertical structures are within the landscape such as overhead power lines supported by pylons but these are located further north of the A50. There are public footpaths that travel through the application site and the medium sized field patterns are bound by mature hedgerows with individual hedgerow trees.

5.75. The landscape value is **Medium** as determined within the baseline section of this report and susceptibility is **Medium** as the local LCAs cover a very large area and comments are generalised. There is room to accommodate degrees of change with the wider area without altering the overall key characteristics. This is especially the case since other solar farm complexes of a similar scale have been accommodated within the landscape character areas.

5.76. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium**.

5.77. The magnitude of change is **Minor Temporary/Direct**. The fields that form part of the Application Site will undergo change with the introduction of the solar panels, but the wider and greater area of the Staffordshire and Draycott in the Moors landscape will remain unaltered. The likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

LANDSCAPE – OPERATIONAL PHASE

General Comment

- 5.78. As with the construction stage most of the activity will happen within the Application Site boundary. The existing landscape features will be retained and the landform, areas of woodland and hedgerows will provide levels of landscape structure to assist with the integration of the solar panels, security fencing and internal tracks into the wider landscape character. There will be some landscape changes to the baseline condition of the open fields as the development is implemented and supplementary landscape planting, mainly additional hedgerows will be planted in strategic places to mitigate and assist in the offset of any potential adverse effects for residents and recreational users alike.
- 5.79. It should be noted that the operational stage is likely to persist for at least 40 years and the assessment below is made on the assumption that the landscape treatments as set out in Appendix B of the Figures have matured and are fully effectual after 10 years. Therefore, at year one the reported likely landscape effects may actually be slightly higher due to the embedded mitigation effects not being fully in place. See further comments in the Mitigation and Residual Effects section below.

Localised Character Areas

Western Ridge

The overall sensitivity is **Medium** as described in the Construction Phase narrative above.

- 5.80. During the operational stage the panels within the fields will have been successfully installed during the construction stage and the temporary tree protection panels will have been replaced with the long term security fencing which will be 2m high post and wire deer fence and a new hedge planted on the inside of the development where the existing hedges are not present.
- 5.81. The baseline condition which currently comprises the New Buildings Farm complex set within pastoral fields will undergo **Major** change on both the northern and southern side of the lane that hosts the PRow DM24 with the introduction of the access roads, fencing and solar panels. This will be directly obvious to the walkers (visual receptors) of the PRow and more description of the visual effects can be found in the Visual Section of this LVIA.
- 5.82. The magnitude of change will be **Major Long Term / Direct**, and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Major Adverse**.

Bromley Wood and Moat

- 5.83. The overall sensitivity is **Medium** as described in the Construction Phase narrative above.
- 5.84. The character of the area will undergo a **Moderate** change during the operational stage when the panels within the fields have been successfully installed during the construction stage and the temporary tree protection panels will have been replaced with the security fencing which will be 2m high post and wire deer fence and a new hedge planted on the inside of the development where the existing hedges are not present.
- 5.85. The baseline condition which currently comprises pastoral fields adjacent to Bromley Wood will undergo **Moderate** change within the fields with the introduction of the fencing and solar panels however it is noted that the development will provide considerable setback from the moat and also the northern boundary edge of Bromley Wood.
- 5.86. The magnitude of change will be **Moderate Long Term / Direct** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Adverse**.

Blakelow Valley and Stone Circles Challenge

- 5.87. The overall sensitivity is **Medium High**.
- 5.88. The character of the area will undergo a **Major** change with the erection of the 3m high arrays of solar panels, construction of the access roads and the long term security fencing which will be 2m high post and wire deer fence and a new hedge planted on the inside of the development where the existing hedges are not present.
- 5.89. The baseline condition which currently comprises the Blakelow Farm complex set within pastoral fields will undergo **Major** change within the fields with the introduction of the fencing and solar panels however it is noted that the development will provide considerable setback from the Stone Circles Challenge PRow. Users of the footpath network will experience a major change in view when travelling on the Stone Circle Challenge with parts of the PRow appearing 'corridor like' with restricted visibility of the wider and long range views of the countryside.
- 5.90. The magnitude of change will be **Major Long Term / Direct** and the likely significance of effects will be **Major Adverse**.

Application Site

Topography, soils and geology

- 5.91. The overall sensitivity of the landscape receptor is deemed to be **Medium**.
- 5.92. During the operational stage the panels within the fields will have been successfully installed during the construction stage and the temporary tree protection panels will have been replaced with the long term security fencing which will be 2m high post and wire deer fence and a new hedge planted on the development side of the Site where appropriate. The topography, soils and geology will remain unaltered from the existing baseline condition and the magnitude of change is **Minor Long Term/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Adverse**.

Land Use

- 5.93. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.94. The magnitude of change is **Moderate Long Term/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Adverse**.

Woodland and trees

- 5.95. There is little risk that the existing trees and woodlands will be harmed or damaged as part of the operation stage as the erection of the panels and construction of the access roads will be firmly installed and running well within the field boundaries. The temporary tree protection fencing will be replaced by the long-term security fencing and a new hedge.
- 5.96. The overall sensitivity is **High**.
- 5.97. There will be little to no alteration of the current baseline of single trees, groups of trees or small woodland areas apart from necessary removals that took place during the construction phase for the access routes and therefore the magnitude of change is **Imperceptible Long Term/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Field Pattern

- 5.98. Various fields within the Application Site will contain the new uses of the solar farm and the field patterns will not undergo any change during the operation of the solar farm. The temporary tree protection will have been replaced by the security fencing and landscape planting.
- 5.99. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.

- 5.100. The magnitude of change is **Minor Long Term/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

Landform

- 5.101. The overall landform will remain unaltered through the operation phase as no major excavations or land shaping will be required to run the solar panels or access roads.
- 5.102. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.103. The landform will not be altered and therefore the magnitude of change is **Imperceptible Long Term/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Footpaths and Bridleways

- 5.104. There is a wide network of footpaths and bridleways in the vicinity of the Application Site. DM 24 and L7 public footpaths travel through the proposed development and form part of the route of the Stone Circles Challenge.
- 5.105. It is unlikely that any of the footpaths or bridleways will need to be closed or diverted during the operational stage and the edge of the proposed development will consist of a new hedge and 2m high post and wire deer fencing to delineate the public right of way from the solar farm.
- 5.106. The overall sensitivity is **Medium High**.
- 5.107. The likely effects to the footpaths that travel within the site will result in little change to the lane of DM24 but L7 will be routed through a corridor between the existing hedgerows and the 2m security fencing of the solar panel parcels and this extends from 32 to 48m in the vicinity of Stone Circles Challenge. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Long Term/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

Setting of the Application Site

- 5.108. The boundaries of the Application Site are mostly adjacent to open countryside that extends northwards and easterly towards the Tean Valley and westerly towards the general Staffordshire Moorlands landscape. The wider landscape is comprised of varying field patterns demarcated by hedgerows and trees and woodland.
- 5.109. The southern boundary adjoins the Bromley Wood which is Local Wildlife Site and Ancient Woodland in part. The temporary tree protection fencing will be replaced with a new hedge and a 2m high post and wire deer fence on the application site boundary for the operational phase.

The fence will initially detract from the landscape character on the development side until the hedge grows and matures but will be mostly screened on the northern sides of the boundary vegetation and will be screened with further planting in sensitive areas such as locations that are visually exposed to the nearby public footpaths such as the Stone Circles Challenge.

- 5.110. The character of the fields on the development side will undergo change after the panels are installed and this will have a **Minor Moderate** effect on the overall setting of the northern boundary. The setting of the site is able to accommodate a certain degree of change especially if beneficial features are introduced such as increased planting and hedgerow reinforcement.
- 5.111. The overall sensitivity is **Medium High**.
- 5.112. The magnitude of change is **Minor Temporary/Direct**. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Adverse**.

Broad and Local Landscape Context

National Character Area

- 5.113. The site and study area falls within **National Character Area (NCA) 68: Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands** as defined by Natural England, published in 2014.
- 5.114. The landscape sensitivity is **Medium** as the national character profiles contain very broad brush and generalised descriptions of the landscape character with specific comments on the wider area around the Application Site. These mostly relate to the predominantly pastoral landscape of rolling countryside that is still largely rural and relatively tranquil however this is clearly not the case when considering detractors such as the A50 dual carriageway and the presence of high voltage cables and steel pylons. The landscape does feature distinctive field boundary patterns and characteristic hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Grassland for livestock is the dominant land use although dairy and cereal farming are also important. The majority of the farms are small to medium sized dairying and livestock holdings. There is room to accommodate degrees of change with the wide areas without altering the overall key characteristics.
- 5.115. The magnitude of change is **Minor Long Term/Direct**.
- 5.116. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Adverse**.

Local LCA – Staffordshire

- 5.117. At a county level there are two published assessments on landscape character that are considered, namely the **Staffordshire County Council Planning for Change** and the

Landscape and Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (LSCA) 2008 and both have identified the site to fall within **LCT Settled Plateau Farmland**. The character of the landscape broadly concurs with the key descriptions set out within the Baseline Section of this assessment for these character areas and will undergo a relatively small-scale change within the Application Site Boundary during the operational stage.

- 5.118. The landscape value is **Medium** as determined within the baseline section of this report and susceptibility is Medium as the local LCA cover a very large area and comments are generalised. There is room to accommodate degrees of change with the wide areas without altering the overall key characteristics.
- 5.119. Therefore, the overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.120. The magnitude of change is **Minor Long Term/Direct**. The fields that form part of the application site will undergo change with the introduction of the solar panels and the alteration in character will be similar to the installation of the Blythe Valley Solar Farm to the south of the A50. The wider and greater area of the Staffordshire and Draycott in the Moors landscape will remain unaltered. The likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

LANDSCAPE – DECOMMISSION STAGE

Localised Character Areas

Western Ridge

- 5.121. The overall sensitivity is **Medium** as described in the Construction Phase narrative above.
- 5.122. During the decommission of the development the panels within the fields will be removed as well as the security fencing and access roads. The ground will be made good and fully restored to the current baseline condition, resulting in pastoral farmland. The new hedges that will have been introduced as part of the landscape mitigation will have fully matured and become integral to the field boundary network.
- 5.123. Walkers along the PRoW DM24 will gain clear views across the fields and towards Bromley Wood when looking south and towards Draycott in the Moors when looking northerly.
- 5.124. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Long Term / Direct**, and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Beneficial** due to the enhanced benefits of the landscape treatments that will remain and contribute to the overall character.

Bromley Wood and Moat

- 5.125. The overall sensitivity is **Medium** as described in the Construction Phase narrative above.
- 5.126. During the decommission of the development the panels within the fields will be removed as well as the security fencing and access roads. The ground will be made good and fully restored to the current baseline condition, resulting in pastoral farmland. The new hedges that will have been introduced as part of the landscape mitigation will have fully matured and become integral to the field boundary network.
- 5.127. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Long Term / Direct**, and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Beneficial** due to the enhanced benefits of the landscape treatments that will remain and contribute to the overall character.

Blakelow Valley and Stone Circles Challenge

- 5.128. The overall sensitivity is **Medium High**.
- 5.129. During the commission of the development the panels within the fields will be removed as well as the security fencing and access roads. The ground will be made good and fully restored to the current baseline condition, resulting in pastoral farmland. The new hedges that will have been introduced as part of the landscape mitigation will have fully matured and become integral to the field boundary network.
- 5.130. Walkers on the Stone Circles Challenge will experience similar quality of views which can be achieved in the current baseline condition.
- 5.131. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Long Term / Direct**, and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Minor Beneficial** due to the enhanced benefits of the landscape treatments that will remain and contribute to the overall character.

Application Site

Topography, soils and geology

- 5.132. Any compaction of soils that resulted from the installation of the panels and tracking of maintenance vehicles will be treated with agricultural techniques to ensure the ground is de-compacted. Bare earth will be re-seeded or ploughed to fit in with future land use.
- 5.133. The overall sensitivity of the landscape receptor is deemed to be **Medium**.

- 5.134. The land will be returned to the baseline condition, so the magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Land Use

- 5.135. The removal of the solar farm will provide potential for the return of the baseline farming practice.
- 5.136. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.137. The land could be returned to the baseline condition, so the magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Woodland and trees

- 5.138. There is no risk that the existing trees and woodlands will be harmed or damaged as part of the decommission stage as the removal of the panels, security fence and access roads will take place within the field boundaries. Any areas of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the removal works will be temporarily fenced off to provide protection. The trees that were introduced as mitigation in the early operational stages will have matured and provided a beneficial effect over the years.
- 5.139. The overall sensitivity is **High**.
- 5.140. The magnitude of change is **Moderate** due to the increased beneficial effects of the matured landscape scheme that was implemented as part of the construction phase of the development. The likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Major Beneficial**.

Field Pattern

- 5.141. The field patterns within the Application Site were not altered as a result of the operational stage and the removal of the panels, fencing and access track will not undergo any further change during the decommission stage.
- 5.142. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.143. The magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Landform

- 5.144. The overall landform will remain unaltered through the decommission phase as no major excavations or land shaping will be required to remove the solar panels, fencing or access roads.

5.145. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.

5.146. The magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Footpaths and Bridleways

5.147. It is unlikely that any of the footpaths or bridleways will need to be closed or diverted during the decommission stage and some may be protected with hoarding to protect the path from any deconstruction operations.

5.148. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.

5.149. The magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Setting of the Application Site

5.150. It is unlikely that any of the setting will undergo change during the decommission stage and no hoardings or protective fencing will be required, apart from where listed above in proximity to public right of ways including the Stone Circles Challenge to remove risk of public access into the removal zone. The planting installed at the operation stage will have matured and provided some beneficial effects to setting of the site. The character of the setting will therefore revert to the baseline condition.

5.151. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.

5.152. The magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Broad and Local Landscape Context

National Character Area

5.153. The site and study area falls within National Character Area (NCA) 68: Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands as defined by Natural England, published in 2014.

5.154. The character of the landscape broadly concurs with the key descriptions set out within the Baseline Section of the assessment for these character areas and the application site will revert back to the baseline conditions during the decommission stage.

- 5.155. The landscape sensitivity is **Medium**. The magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Local LCA – Staffordshire

- 5.156. At a County level there are two published assessments on landscape character that are considered, namely the Staffordshire County Council Planning for Change and the Landscape and Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (LSCA) 2008 and both have identified the site to fall within LCT Settled Plateau Farmland Slopes. The character of the landscape broadly concurs with the key descriptions set out within the Baseline Section of this assessment for these character areas and will undergo a relatively small-scale change within the Application Site Boundary during the operational stage.
- 5.157. The overall sensitivity is **Medium**.
- 5.158. The magnitude of change is **Imperceptible**. The solar farm will be removed and the landscape within the LCA will be restored to the baseline condition. The likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS – CONSTRUCTION STAGE

General Comment

- 5.159. During the construction stage most of the activity will happen within the Application Site boundary. The main effect outside of this will occur on the road network due to various deliveries of materials and operatives. The existing landscape features will be retained and the landform, areas of woodland and hedgerows will provide levels of visual screening to the construction of the solar panels, security fencing and access roads. There will be some visual changes to the open fields as the development is implemented and supplementary temporary weldmesh fencing will be placed in strategic places, however these are visually permeable and therefore a degree of visibility will be maintained for residents and recreational users alike.

Residential Receptors

New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm

- 5.160. Residential properties and other buildings in view of the sites have been considered including surrounding farmhouses. Landform and vegetation within the landscape combined with the orientation of dwellings in Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath will prevent any significant visual connection with the proposed development sites. The dwellings within

the New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm are in close proximity to some of the proposed panels and the residential dwelling associated with the latter farm complex is likely to experience views of the development when viewing in a southerly direction.

- 5.161. The receptors are considered to be of **Medium High** sensitivity. This accounts for some principal rooms, such as living rooms overlooking the proposed development site. However, the main development site to the west of Blakelow Farm is predominantly out of view, due to landform and vegetation.
- 5.162. The viewpoints demonstrate that during the Construction Stage there will be a moderate change in view as the solar farm infrastructure is installed. The tree protection fencing will initially be installed running along the northern boundary of the site perimeter and this will partially screen any lower level views of activity within the site boundary when viewed from the residential areas of Blakelow Farm.
- 5.163. The magnitude of change will be **Moderate Temporary** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Major Adverse**.

Residents of nearby settlements

- 5.164. There will be little to no visual connectivity of the Proposed Development and the residents of Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath.

Recreational Receptors - Public Footpaths / Bridleways / Restricted Byways

- 5.165. Potential recreational receptors identified included the following public routes, which run in the vicinity of the site and these include Draycott in the Moors 24 and 25 and L7 and these all form part of the Stone Circles Challenge.
- 5.166. There are a number of other long range promoted routes within the study areas as illustrated on Figure 1. However, the field survey demonstrated that there was little or no views of the site from these routes due to existing vegetation and landform or the distance was too great to distinguish the site. These potential receptors are therefore 'scoped out' of the assessment. Views to demonstrate any potential cumulative effects from the Blythe Solar Farm have been included even though there is no inter-visibility. The following is an itemised assessment for each receptor. Generally, the footpaths travel through open fields and a lane from Cresswell Road with dense roadside hedges. Bromley Wood screens visibility of the proposed development to the south east from the DM24 lane. There are locations where this is not the case and the following assessment has indicated the worst case scenario in terms of likely significance of effects.

Public Footpath DM24

- 5.167. This is a public footpath that follows on to the east of Cresswell Road providing a link to the north to south footpath L7 which travels alongside and through parts of the eastern parcels of the proposed development. Views across the Tean Valley and fields that are accommodating the solar panels are mostly restricted by the dense hedges and vegetation that travel either side of the footpath / lane.
- 5.168. Viewpoints 01 to 08 look towards the proposed development from locations where there are either gaps in the hedgerow or from a field gate that provide access to the proposed Development. At the construction stage the temporary fencing will be evident at the forefront of the views and this will partly screen the upper portions of the solar panels once installed.
- 5.169. The view will undergo change from the location of viewpoint 09 for the receptor when looking south due to the road widening exercise however, the hedge and trees will be retained and these will assist in screening the construction fencing and activities that will be occurring on the development side of the hedges.
- 5.170. The sensitivity of the receptor is deemed to be **High** due to the PRoW forming part of the Stone Circles Challenge as well as other local promoted walks as indicated on Figure 1 Access and Circulation. The magnitude of change at the locations of the viewpoints will be **Moderate Temporary** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Major Adverse**.
- 5.171. The magnitude of change for the general views that are achieved for the receptors travelling along the footpath / lane will be **Minor Temporary** and the likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

Public footpath L7 and the route of the Stone Circles Challenge

- 5.172. The public footpath is a continuation in a south to north direction of DM24 and travels mostly through the southeastern portions of the proposed development apart from where it enters the site at one of the fields at the location of Viewpoint 10. The receptors that travel along the route are represented by viewpoints 10 to 18. The tree protection fencing will be aligned against the public footpath and hedge within the development site and therefore will be visible to walkers that travel along it in both directions. It is unlikely that any view of the protective fencing will be visible from the footpath that travels outside of the proposed development site.
- 5.173. The sensitivity of the receptor is deemed to be **High**. The magnitude of change will be **Moderate Temporary** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Major Adverse**.

Public Footpath L76

- 5.174. Viewpoints 19 and 20 are located on the public footpath L76 and represents walkers on the footpath network as well as residents of Bitternsdale and visitors to the Blithewood Moated Site. The views demonstrate that there is little to no visual connectivity of the application site due to the intervening landform, hedges and trees within the landscape. Viewpoints 19 and 20 look towards the proposed development and demonstrate that visual connection will be low or non-existent.
- 5.175. The sensitivity of the receptor is deemed to be **Medium High**. The magnitude of change will be **Imperceptible Temporary** and the likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Medium and Long Range Recreational Receptors

- 5.176. The footpath network further afield and to the north of the A50 has been considered and examined through field study and it is concluded that the proposed New Buildings Solar Farm facility will have limited to no visual connection with these receptors. Public footpath Draycott in the Moors FP14 travels through the existing Blythe Valley Solar Farm and views southwards and in the direction of the proposed New Buildings Solar Farm are restricted by the proximity of the solar panels. Public footpath Draycott in the Moors FP26 travels across the landscape to the south of the Blythe Valley Solar Farm and Paynsley Hall and views of the Proposed New Buildings Solar Farm are restricted by the intervening vegetation associated with the A50 and field boundaries. The rolling landform of the valley also further restricts views and therefore the tree protection fencing and new access roads will not be visible for users of the footpath network. Viewpoint 24 generally demonstrates the lack of visual connectivity from these locations.
- 5.177. The sensitivity of the receptor is deemed to be **Medium High**. The magnitude of change will be **Imperceptible Temporary** and the likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Transport Routes

- 5.178. The nearest road to the proposed Solar Farm is Cresswell Road and that connects to the lane that provides access to New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm. Apart from these, there are no main roads nearby to the development.
- 5.179. The A50 dual carriageway travels some distance to the north of the proposed development and generally there will be no visual connectivity with the proposed development due to the road being set into a densely vegetated cutting. There is also a railway line with associated vegetation between the site and the A50 and this reinforces the screening effects within the landscape.
- 5.180. Viewpoints 21 and 22 generally demonstrate the lack of visual connectivity between the site and users of the road network. It is unlikely that the fencing or panels will be visible during the construction phase.

- 5.181. The sensitivity of the road receptor is deemed to be **Medium Low**. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Temporary** and the likely significance of effects will be **Minor Adverse**.

ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS – OPERATIONAL STAGE

General Comment

- 5.182. As with the construction stage most of the activity will happen within the Application Site boundary. The existing landscape features will be retained and the landform, areas of woodland and hedgerows will provide levels of visual screening to the solar panels, security fencing and internal tracks. There will be some visual changes to the baseline condition of the open fields as the development is implemented and supplementary landscape planting, mainly additional hedgerows will be planted in strategic places to mitigate and offset any potential adverse effects for residents and recreational users alike.
- 5.183. It should be noted that the operational stage is likely to persist for at least 40 years and the assessment below is made on the assumption that the landscape treatments as set out in Appendix B of the Figures have matured and are effective after 10 years. Therefore, at year one the reported likely landscape effects may actually be slightly higher due to the embedded mitigation effects not being fully in place. See further comments in the Mitigation and Residual Effects section below.

Residential Receptors

New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm

- 5.184. The dwellings within the New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm are in close proximity to some of the proposed panels and the residential dwelling associated with the latter farm complex is likely to experience views of the development when viewing in a southerly direction.
- 5.185. The receptors are considered to be of **Medium High** sensitivity. This accounts for some principal rooms such as living rooms overlooking the proposed development site. However, the main development site to the west is predominantly out of view, due to landform and vegetation.
- 5.186. During the Operation Stage there will be a discernible change in view when the solar farm infrastructure is installed. The tree protection fencing will be replaced with 2m high post and wire deer fencing and will be installed at the boundary of the site perimeter. A mixed native hedge will be planted along the fence line to provide a continuous screen that will increase as the plants mature and will partially screen any lower level views of activity within the site boundary.

- 5.187. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Long Term** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Adverse**.

Residents of nearby settlements

- 5.188. There will be little to no visual connectivity of the Proposed Development and the residents of Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath. Therefore, it is considered that there will be no significant effects for these receptors arising as a result of the proposed Development.

Recreational Receptors - Public Footpaths / Bridleways / Restricted Byways

Public Footpath DM24

- 5.189. This is a public footpath that follows on to the east of Cresswell Road providing a link to the north to south footpath L7 which travels alongside and through parts of the eastern parcels of the proposed development. Views across the Tean Valley and fields that are accommodating the solar panels are mostly restricted by the dense hedges and vegetation that travel either side of the footpath / lane.
- 5.190. Viewpoints 01 to 08 look towards the proposed development from locations where there are either gaps in the hedgerow or from a field gate that provide access to the proposed Development. At the operational stage the security fencing and adjacent solar panels will be evident at the forefront of the views.
- 5.191. Furthermore, during the operation stage the majority of the solar panels will barely be visible due to the height of the panels being screened by the height of the intervening newly introduced hedges when viewed from outside of the proposed development parcels as indicated on the Landscape and Ecology Mitigations and Enhancements Plan (See Appendix B of the Supporting Figures).
- 5.192. The sensitivity of the receptor is deemed to be **High**.
- 5.193. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Long Term** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Adverse** for the receptor viewing the proposed Development at the viewpoint locations.
- 5.194. As with the construction phase, the viewpoint locations represent a worst-case scenario and the magnitude of change for the general views that are achieved for the receptors travelling along the footpath / lane will be **Minor Long Term** and the likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Adverse**.

Public footpath L7 and the route of the Stone Circles Challenge

- 5.195. The public footpath is a continuation in a south to northerly direction of DM24 and travels mostly through the southeastern portions of the proposed development. The receptors that travel along the route are represented by viewpoints 10 to 18. The Tree protection fencing will be replaced with 2m high post and wire deer fencing and will be installed at the boundary of the site perimeter. A mixed native hedge will be planted along the fence line to provide a continuous screen that will increase as the plants mature and will partially screen any lower level views of activity within the site boundary.
- 5.196. The post and wire deer fencing and adjacent solar panels will be set back from the public footpath to provide a substantial buffer for users of the Stone Circles Challenge. The layout in Appendix B demonstrates that the buffer and set back ranges from 43 to 48m in width. It is anticipated that some or part of the long range views that can currently be achieved in Viewpoints 14 to 18 will be maintained above the set back panels from the public footpath, albeit in a curtailed perspective.
- 5.197. The sensitivity of the receptor is deemed to be High. The magnitude of change will be **Moderate Long Term** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Major Adverse**.

Public footpath L76

- 5.198. Viewpoints 19 and 20 are located on the public footpath L76 to the east of the proposed Development and represent walkers on the footpath network as well as residents of Bitternsdale and visitors to the Blithewood Moated Site. The views demonstrate that there is little to no visual connectivity of the application site due to the intervening landform, hedges and trees within the landscape. Viewpoints 19 and 20 look towards the proposed development and demonstrate that visual connection will be low or non-existent.
- 5.199. The sensitivity of the receptor is deemed to be **Medium High**. The magnitude of change will be **Imperceptible Long Term**, and the likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Transport Routes

- 5.200. The nearest road to the proposed Solar Farm is Cresswell Road and that connects to the lane that provides access to New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm. Apart from these there are no main roads nearby to the development.
- 5.201. Viewpoints 21 and 22 generally demonstrate the lack of visual connectivity between the site and users of the road network. It is unlikely that the fencing or panels will be visible during the operational phase.
- 5.202. The sensitivity of the road receptor is deemed to be **Medium Low**. The magnitude of change will be **Minor Long Term**, and the likely significance of effects will be **Minor Adverse**.

ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS – DECOMMISSION STAGE

General Comment

- 5.203. During the decommission stage most of the activity will happen within the Application Site boundary. The main effect outside of this will occur on the road network due to road traffic associated with the carting off site of the redundant panels and fencing. The existing landscape features will be retained and the landform, areas of woodland and hedgerows will provide levels of visual screening to the removal of the solar panels, security fencing and access roads. There will be some visual changes to the open fields as the development is returned to the baseline condition and the screening effects of the introduced planting from the operational stage.

Residential Receptors

Newfields Farm and Blakelow Farm

- 5.204. The visual amenity of the dwellings will be returned to the baseline condition apart from the additional planting, specifically the new hedges planted on the parcel boundaries of the development that will have matured since implementation at the operational stage. This will be reflective of the current field pattern and therefore in keeping with the landscape character.
- 5.205. The sensitivity is **Medium High**. The magnitude of change will be **Minor** and the likely significance of effects will be **Minor Moderate Neutral**.

Residents of nearby settlements

- 5.206. There is little to no visual connectivity of the Proposed Development and the residents of Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath. The baseline condition will be returned at the decommission stage and it is unlikely that the residents will notice any discernible change.

Recreational Receptors - Public Footpaths / Bridleways / restricted Byways

Public Footpaths DM24, L7 and L76

- 5.207. The remaining sections of the receptor located outside of the former development parcels will return to the baseline condition. The quality of views from this receptor will be restored apart from the visibility of matured vegetation implemented at the operational stage.
- 5.208. The sensitivity of the receptors is deemed to be **High** and **Medium**. The magnitude of change will be **Minor** and the likely significance of effects will be **Moderate Beneficial** due to the beneficial effects of the new hedgerows that were implemented at the operational stage.

Medium and Long Range Recreational Receptors

- 5.209. The quality of views from this footpath network will be restored to the baseline condition apart from the matured vegetation where visible implemented at the operational stage.
- 5.210. The sensitivity is **Medium**. The magnitude of change will be **Imperceptible**, and the likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

Transport Routes

- 5.211. The quality of views from Cresswell Road will be restored to the baseline condition apart from the visibility of matured vegetation comprising of a double lined hedge implemented at the operational stage.
- 5.212. The sensitivity is **Medium Low**. The magnitude of change will be **Minor** and the likely significance of effects will be **Minor Neutral**.
- 5.213. The magnitude of change will be **Imperceptible** and the likely significance of effects will be **Negligible Neutral**.

6. MITIGATION AND RESIDUAL EFFECTS

Mitigation by Design

- 6.1. This section describes those mitigation measures which have been 'designed' into the development through an iterative process of assessment and redesign. This section reflects measures that have been incorporated into the Landscape and Ecology Mitigations and Enhancements Plan (Appendix B of the Figures). Mitigation by design does not include any measures that must be secured through planning conditions/obligations, management plans or further survey (although there may be planning conditions on related matters).
- 6.2. Furthermore, the maintenance and management of all of the landscape proposals, especially new and existing hedgerows, can be controlled by a planning condition that requires a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan or suchlike to be provided for the entirety of the operational period of the proposed solar development.
- 6.3. Specifically, the layout and design of the solar farm facility is designed to minimise impacts by optimising the existing natural Application Site features, such as the topography, and avoiding and protecting important vegetation. In particular, early identification of areas of good quality

habitat and likely areas for protected species have been avoided, along with identification of sensitive visual receptors.

- 6.4. As a consequence, the suggested mitigation has become integral and embedded into the overall design and is therefore considered sufficient to negate the requirement for further mitigation to enable the scheme to successfully integrate into the immediate setting or offset any identifiable adverse impact on the landscape and visual amenity.
- 6.5. The solar farm has been carefully designed and programmed to minimise landscape and visual impact through the incorporation of embedded mitigation measures. The long-term proposals have given rise to the potential for adverse and significant visual effects at the Post Construction stage. These can be removed and reduced with appropriate mitigation measures.
- 6.6. The main mitigation that is embedded into the design is as follows:
- Setting back of panels from property and field boundaries. This is particularly evident in locations in proximity to Blakelow Farm and New Buildings farm complex. This also occurs on the section of the Stone Circles Challenge in the south east of the proposed Development where the distance between the PRoW and the nearest panel is between 43 m and 48 m with a hedge on the site boundary to soften the visual effects.
 - Management of roadside hedges to increase height.
 - Inclusion of meadow grasses and rough grassland corridors surrounding the panels and the opportunity for sheep grazing within the development fields.
 - New hedge and tree planting will be along all external perimeters where they do not already exist and will be managed to at least 3 m high.
 - Gap filling of hedges and additional planting to perimeters.
- 6.7. All construction works would be carried out in accordance with best practice procedures to minimise adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity. This is to ensure good working practices are carried out and are in line with the appropriate standards. This will include methods to protect all trees that are to be retained, following guidance contained within BS 5837: Trees in Relation to Construction.
- 6.8. Further detail is illustrated on the Landscape and Ecology Mitigations and Enhancements Plan found in Appendix B of the Figures and it is suggested that a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan be conditioned as part of a planning consent to ensure the mitigation measures will be adhered to throughout the operational phases of the development.

Residual Effects

- 6.9. Residual effects are a second stage assessment that takes the initial conclusions of the predicted likely significant effects on the landscape and visual amenity during the operational phase and draws a final conclusion after any additional mitigation measures have been applied. In this case the mitigation has become integral and embedded into the overall design and therefore considered sufficient to negate the requirement for further mitigation to enable the scheme to successfully integrate into the immediate setting or offset any identifiable adverse impact on the landscape and visual amenity. Therefore, there is no requirement for further assessment as the maturing of the designed planting has been accounted for in the assessment of the operational stage effects and assumed that the long-term management measures will be adhered to throughout the lifespan of the development.

7. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

- 7.1. The Blythe Valley Solar Farm is in operation on land to the north of the proposed Development and to the south of the A50 and the facility has gained consent for an extension known as the Blythe Valley Solar Farm Extension. The existing and proposed developments are all located within the surrounding area to the application site and therefore the study has considered whether there are any potential significant cumulative effects that could arise as a result of the New Buildings Solar Farm being consented and constructed in the vicinity of the existing and consented extension of the Blythe Valley facility.
- 7.2. As a result of the simultaneous development the field patterns would remain intact and associated boundary treatments retained where possible and would therefore sit comfortably in their setting. There would be an increase in the effects on the landscape character, but the addition of the proposed site would not be significant and changes to the overall landscape character would be minimal.
- 7.3. As described in the previous sections the application site is visually contained by dense mature hedgerows and trees, which will visually separate the sites and it was concluded that there would be no, or extremely limited, intervisibility between the existing and proposed solar farms. There are no public viewpoints from which the sites would be visible simultaneously with proximity as demonstrated with the viewpoints and figures in this study.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

- 8.1. This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has presented findings of the anticipated effects that the Proposed Development may have on the local landscape character and the visual amenity.
- 8.2. The LVIA described the methodology used in the assessment and details of relevant legislation, policy and guidance used in its preparation. The baseline conditions were described as they presently exist within the landscape and visual amenity.
- 8.3. The assessment into the potential effects at the construction, operational and decommission phases of the Proposed Development led to mitigation measures being proposed in response to any identified significant effects. The residual effects were then presented taking into account the identified mitigation measures.

Baseline Conditions

- 8.4. The Application Site is located at New Buildings Farm, Hilderstone, Staffordshire. The land comprises a number of irregular shaped pastoral fields delineated by mature hedges and trees. The grid reference at the approximate centre of the site is: SJ 974362. The site is located to the north of Bromley Wood curving round to the east and west and on the west extending slightly north to New Buildings Farm.
- 8.5. The assessment concluded that the local landscape character assessments of Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council identify that the site is in the character areas of Settled Plateau Farmland. This assessment has deemed the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptors as **medium**.
- 8.6. There are no heritage assets on the site or within the immediate vicinity of the proposed development and other heritage assets are assessed in the Heritage Statement that accompanies the planning application.
- 8.7. There are two publicly accessible footpaths, DM24 and L7 that travel adjacent or through parts of the proposed Development.

- 8.8. There are several key visual receptors that have been identified and these have been recorded under the categories of residential, recreational and transport receptors as follows:
- Residential Receptors
 - Recreational Receptors
 - Transport Receptors

Likely Significant Effects – Landscape and Visual

- 8.9. The Proposed Development has been designed so that the majority of significant effects are reduced or avoided during the construction, operational and decommission phases of the proposed development.
- 8.10. The findings of the assessment demonstrated that there are some likely significant effects during the construction phase, but these are all temporary as identified in the summary tables of Appendix A of this report.

Landscape Effects

- 8.11. The assessment has determined that the likely operational effects on the landscape character and site features generally do not exceed Moderate Adverse in terms of the effects within the site boundary. The effects on the setting of the site and the broad landscape character will not exceed Minor Moderate Adverse and the effects are not considered to be significant. The effects on the local landscape character areas are Major for the eastern area, Blakelow Farm and Stone Circles Challenge and this is due to the extensive cover of the proposed Development and the high sensitivity of the PRow network.

Visual Effects

- 8.12. There are a range of Minor Moderate and Moderate Major visual effects during the operational phase, and the nature of the effects will be adverse. Although the magnitude of change in the quality of the views ranges from minor to moderate the likely significance of effects tend to be high due to the high sensitivity of the receptors, especially those travelling along the Stone Circles Challenge and other footpaths. The remaining routes have likely effects that are considered to be at the lower end of the threshold of significance due to the lack of intervisibility and distance between the viewer and the proposed Development.

Mitigation

8.13. The solar farm development has been carefully designed and programmed to minimise landscape and visual impact through the incorporation of embedded mitigation measures. These include:

- Setting back of panels from property and field boundaries. This is particularly evident in locations in proximity to Blakelow Farm and New Buildings Farm complex. This also occurs on the section of the Stone Circles Challenge in the southeast of the proposed Development where the distance between the PRoW and the nearest panel is between 43 m to 48 m with a hedge on the site boundary to soften the visual effects.
- Management of roadside hedges to increase height.
- Inclusion of meadow grasses and rough grassland corridors surrounding the panels and the opportunity for sheep grazing within the development fields.
- New hedge and tree planting will be along all external perimeters where they do not already exist and will be managed to at least 3m high.
- Gap filling of hedges and additional planting to perimeters.

8.14. All construction works will be carried out in accordance with best practice procedures to minimise adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity. This is to ensure good working practices are carried out and are in line with the appropriate standards. This will include methods to protect all trees and vegetation.

Cumulative Effects

8.15. The Blythe Valley Solar Farm is in operation on land to the north of the proposed Development and to the south of the A50 and the facility has gained consent for an extension known as the Blythe Valley Solar Farm Extension. The existing and proposed developments are all located within the surrounding area to the application site and therefore the study has considered whether there are any potential significant cumulative effects that could arise as a result of the New Buildings Solar Farm being consented and constructed in the region of the existing and consented extension of the Blythe Valley facility.

8.16. As a result of simultaneous development, the field patterns would remain intact and associated boundary treatments remained where possible and would therefore sit comfortably in their setting. There would be an increase in the effects on the landscape character, but the addition of the proposed site would not be significant and changes to the overall landscape character would be minimal.

8.17. As described in the previous sections the application site is visually contained by dense mature hedgerows and trees, which will visually separate the sites and it was concluded that there

would be no, or extremely limited, intervisibility between the existing and proposed solar farms. There are no public viewpoints from which the sites would be visible simultaneously with close proximity as demonstrated with the viewpoints and figures in this study.

Overall Conclusion

- 8.18. The findings of the assessments of effects for landscape and visual matters demonstrate that the Proposed Development results in some significant and adverse effects that arise during the operation stage and these can mostly be reduced through mitigation resulting in **Moderate Adverse** effects.
- 8.19. There are no adverse significant cumulative or in combination effects. In conclusion the proposed Development within the boundaries of the Application Site boundary will lead to localised areas of adverse effects but generally it will not be causing undue harm to the wider landscape character and visual amenity.
- 8.20. Furthermore, the proposal does not contravene any of the landscape related policies set out in the Local Plan.

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APPENDIX A

Summary Tables



SUMMARY OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS - Photovoltaic Facility at New Buildings Farm, Hilderstone, Staffordshire									
Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Geographical Importance	Sensitivity Value Susceptibility	Magnitude of Effect Construction Stage	Magnitude of Effect Operation Stage	Magnitude of Effect Decommission Stage	Nature of Effect	Likely Significance of Effects	Significant (Please note this development is not subject to EIA but the following judgements would apply if it was based on the long term operational stage when mitigation was in full effect)
LOCAL SITE CHARACTER AREAS									
Western Ridge: The western part of the Site comprises a series of irregular fields currently used as pastoral farmland. This area is crossed by the lane serving Blakelow Farm and Paynsley Hall, with the New Buildings Farm complex located to the west. The lane also forms PRow DM/24 and follows the ridge separating the valley sides, with the northern fields facing towards Draycott in the Moors and the southern fields falling towards Bromley Wood.	The character of the area will undergo change with the erection of the 3m high arrays of solar panels and construction of the access roads will take place within the field boundaries and temporary tree protection barriers installed. Any areas of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection. The baseline condition which currently is comprised of the New Buildings Farm complex set within pastoral fields will undergo change on both the northern and southern side of the lane that hosts the PRow DM24 with the introduction of the fencing and solar panels.	Local	Value: Medium The landscape value is Medium as the farm and associated land are outside of any National or Local landscape designations, but the combined landscape features contribute to the overall character of the Staffordshire landscape. Susceptibility: Medium The susceptibility to accommodate change is Medium as the current farm activities and management is adaptable and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility. Sensitivity: Medium	Major	Major	Minor	Construction: Temporary /Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate Major Adverse Operation: Moderate Major Adverse Decommission: Minor Moderate Beneficial	Significant
Bromley Wood and Moat: This parcel comprises irregular pastoral fields located immediately	The character of the area will undergo change with the erection of the 3m high arrays of solar panels and construction of the	Local	Value: Medium The landscape value is Medium as the farm and associated land are outside of any National or	Moderate	Moderate	Minor	Construction: Temporary /Direct Operation:	Construction: Moderate Adverse Operation:	Significant

north and west of Bromley Wood. A degree of separation is maintained from Blakelow Farm, and the fields form the central part of the wider proposed development site. The eastern boundary is defined by the track leading to Blakelow Farm. The moat is located along the southern boundary of this character area, although it is visually separated from the lane by surrounding vegetation and the falling landform.	access roads will take place within the field boundaries and temporary tree protection barriers installed. Any areas of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection. The baseline condition which currently is comprised of the New Buildings Farm complex set within pastoral fields will undergo moderate change within the fields with the introduction of the fencing and solar panels however it is noted that the development will provide considerable setback from the moat and also the northern boundary edge of Bromley Wood.		Local landscape designations, but the combined landscape features contribute to the overall character of the Staffordshire landscape. Susceptibility: Medium The susceptibility to accommodate change is Medium as the current farm activities and management is adaptable and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility. Sensitivity: Medium				Long Term Direct	Moderate Adverse Decommission: Minor Moderate Beneficial	
Blakelow Valley and Stone Circles Challenge: This local character area comprises predominantly arable fields, divided by the valley bottom and brook, which run broadly east to west. PRow DM/25 crosses the area on an approximate north to south alignment through the field and pasture network. The fields are generally irregular in form, although they are larger and more rectilinear than those within	The character of the area will change with the erection of the 3m high arrays of solar panels and construction of the access roads will take place within the field boundaries and temporary tree protection barriers installed. Any areas of woodland or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection. The baseline condition which currently is comprised of the Blakelow Farm complex set within pastoral fields will		Value: Medium High The landscape value is Medium High as the footpaths form an important recreational feature within the landscape and the combined landscape features contribute to the overall character of the Staffordshire landscape. Susceptibility: High The susceptibility to accommodate change is High as any permanent loss or long-term diversion of the	Major	Major	Minor	Construction: Temporary /Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Major Adverse Operation: Major Adverse Decommission: Minor Moderate Beneficial	Significant

the character areas to the west. Field boundaries are generally well defined by hedgerows or trees. A hedgerow with a small pond, enclosed by surrounding vegetation, lies along the eastern boundary. A stream passes through the northern parcel, while the landform rises southwards towards the Morrilow Moor Farm complex.	undergo change within the fields with the introduction of the fencing and solar panels however it is noted that the development will provide considerable setback from the Stone Circles Challenge PRoW.		potentially historic footpaths will be detrimental and cause harm for access to and enjoyment of the countryside. The current farm activities and management is adaptable, and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility. Sensitivity: Medium High						
Receptor / Receiving Environment SITE	Description of Effect	Geographical Importance	Sensitivity Value Susceptibility	Magnitude of Effect Construction Stage	Magnitude of Effect Operation Stage	Magnitude of Effect Decommission Stage	Nature of Effect	Likely Significance of Effects	Significant (Please note this development is not subject to EIA but the following judgements would apply if it was based on the long term operational stage when mitigation was in full effect)
Topography, soils and geology: The underlying geology determines the soil types and vegetation and combined with the topographical properties of the landform provide a valuable part of the Staffordshire landscape.	There is a risk of potential compaction of soils from construction vehicles during the setting up stages. There is a need for the transport of materials in and around the Application Site and there will be an erosion of the various grasslands if protective measures are not applied or adhered to. Temporary tracks will be used for heavily vehicle and pedestrian trafficked areas to avoid the compaction of soils.	Local	Value: High The underlying geology determines the soil types and vegetation and combined with the topographical properties of the landform provide a valuable part of the Staffordshire landscape and is therefore to be deemed to be of a high value. Susceptibility: Low The susceptibility to change is considered to be Low as changes to soils and geology usually occur over a	Minor	Minor	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary /Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate Minor Adverse Operation: Moderate Minor Adverse Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant

			considerable time and require major engineering to dramatically change the vegetation types that cover the ground and subsequently alter the overall landscape character over a long term. Sensitivity: Medium						
Land Use: The installation of the solar farm will result in a change in farming practice from the current pastoral usages of the fields to the harvesting and generation of solar energy.	The fields associated with grazing etc can still allow for grazing of some livestock. Vegetation boundaries and woodlands will be protected throughout the duration of the three stages.	Local	Value: Medium - The farm and associate land contribute to character of the Staffordshire landscape. Susceptibility: Medium The susceptibility to accommodate change is influenced by the current farm activities and management being adaptable and new practices can be set up to accommodate the extents of change arising from the energy generation facility. Sensitivity: Medium	Moderate	Moderate	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary /Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate Adverse Operation: Moderate Adverse Decommission: Negligible	Significant
woodland and trees: There is no risk that the existing trees and woodlands will be harmed or damaged as part of the construction stage as the erection of the panels and construction of the access roads will take place well within the field boundaries. Any areas of woodland	The woodlands and trees will remain unaffected and undamaged during the three stages.	Local	Value: High - The landscape value of the woodlands is High as they are mostly native and mature. Many appear on ridgelines and are described in the various landscape character assessments. Susceptibility: High The susceptibility is High as changes to distinctive woodland	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Moderate	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction and operation Stages: Negligible Decommission: Moderate Major Beneficial (due to the increased beneficial effects of the matured landscape scheme that was implemented as part of the	Not Significant

or trees that may be in the vicinity of the works will be fenced off to provide long term protection			will erode and dramatically change the overall landscape character. Sensitivity: High					construction phase of the development)	
Field patterns: Various fields within the Application Site will be prepared for the new uses of the solar farm. This includes the laying down of tracking to ease compaction within vehicular and pedestrian areas. The field patterns will not undergo any change as a result of the proposals.		Local	Value: Medium The landscape value is Medium as the field types and patterns are described in the LCA's. These are mostly those described as open, medium scale and bound by field hedges. Susceptibility: Medium Changes to distinctive field patterns could erode and dramatically change the overall landscape character. Sensitivity: Medium	Minor	Minor	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Minor Moderate Adverse Operation: Minor Moderate Adverse Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant
Landform: The overall landform will remain unaltered as no major excavations or land shaping will be required to install the solar panels or access roads.		Local	Value: Medium – The landscape value is Medium as the landform are described in the LCA's. Susceptibility: Medium Changes to distinctive landform can erode and change the overall landscape character. Sensitivity: Medium	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Negligible Operation: Negligible Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant

Footpaths and Bridleways: There is a wide network of footpaths and bridleways in the vicinity of the Application Site. DM 24 and L7 public footpaths travel through the proposed development and form part of the route of the Stone Circles Challenge.	It is unlikely that any of the footpaths or bridleways will need to be closed or diverted during the construction stage and some may be fenced with 2m weldmesh to protect the path from any construction operation.	Local	Value: Medium High -The footpaths form an important referenced to the history of the landscape. The boundary hedges and trees are mature and provide high ecological benefit. Susceptibility: High Any damage, alteration or long-term diversion of the historic footpaths will be detrimental and unacceptable. Sensitivity: Medium High	Minor	Minor	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Minor Moderate Adverse Operation: Minor Moderate Adverse Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant
Receptor / Receiving Environment SETTING	Description of Effect	Geographical Importance	Sensitivity Value Susceptibility	Magnitude of Effect Construction	Magnitude of Effect Operation	Magnitude of Effect Decommission	Nature of Effect	Likely Significance of Effects	Significant
The boundaries of the Application Site are mostly adjacent to open countryside that extends northwards and easterly towards the Tean Valley and westerly towards the general Staffordshire Moorlands landscape. The wider landscape is comprised of varying field patterns demarcated by hedgerows and trees and woodland.	The southern boundary adjoins the Bromley Wood which is Local Wildlife Site and Ancient Woodland in part. Temporary tree protection fencing will be installed on the application site boundary with the woodland as well as adjoining any existing hedgerow boundaries or trees as part of the construction phase, and this will provide protection for all the boundary features. The character of the fields on the development side will slowly undergo	Local	Value: Medium High -The boundary hedgerows and trees contribute to the overall landscape and rural quality of the area. Susceptibility: Medium High The setting change can accommodate a certain degree of change especially if beneficial treatments such as increased planting and hedgerow reinforcement is introduced as part of the proposals. Sensitivity: Medium High	Minor	Minor	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate Minor Adverse Operation: Minor Moderate Adverse Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant

	change as the panels are installed and this will have a effect on the overall setting of the various boundaries that contribute to the setting of the site.								
Receptor / Receiving Environment BROADER LANDSCAPE CONTEXT	Description of Effect	Geographical Importance	Sensitivity Value Susceptibility	Magnitude of Effect Construction	Magnitude of Effect Operation	Magnitude of Effect Decommission	Nature of Effect	Likely Significance of Effects Construction: Operation: Decommission:	Significance (Please note this development is not subject to EIA but the following judgements would apply if it was based on the long term operational stage when mitigation was in full effect)
National Character Areas: NCA Profile 68: Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands	NCA 68: The character of the landscape broadly concurs with the key descriptions set out within the Baseline Section of the Assessment for these character areas and will undergo a range of small scale changes within the Application Site boundary during the stages.	National	Value: Medium - The NCA's contain very valuable descriptions of the very broad landscape character with specific comments on the area around the Application Site. Susceptibility: Medium The NCA tend to cover a very large area and comments are broad brush and generalised. There is room to accommodate degrees of change with the wide areas without altering the overall key characteristics. Sensitivity: Medium	Minor	Minor	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate Minor Adverse Operation: Minor Moderate Adverse Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant
Local LCA: - Staffordshire County Council Planning for	The character of the landscape broadly concurs with the key descriptions set out within the	Local	Value: Medium - The landscape value is Medium as determined within the baseline section	Minor	Minor	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/Direct	Construction: Moderate Minor Adverse	Not Significant

Change and the Landscape. - Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008) At a county level there are two published assessments on landscape character that are considered, namely the Staffordshire County Council Planning for Change and the Landscape and Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (LSCA) 2008 and both have identified the site to fall within LCT Settled Plateau Farmland.	Baseline Section of this assessment for these character areas and will undergo a relatively small-scale change within the Application Site Boundary during the construction stage		of this report and susceptibility is Medium as the local LCA cover a very large area and comments are generalised. There is room to accommodate degrees of change with the wide areas without altering the overall key characteristics Susceptibility: Medium Sensitivity: Medium				Operation: Long Term Direct	Operation: Minor Moderate Adverse Decommission: Negligible	
SUMMARY OF VISUAL EFFECTS									
Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Geographical Importance	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Effect Construction	Magnitude of Effect Operation	Magnitude of Effect Decommission	Nature of Effect	Significance of Effects Construction: Operation: Decommission:	Significant
Residential Receptors									
New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm.	Residential properties and other buildings in view of the sites have been considered including surrounding farmhouses. Landform and vegetation within the landscape	Local	The receptors are considered to be of Medium High sensitivity. This accounts for some principal room such as living rooms overlooking the proposed the development site. However, the main development area is	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate major Adverse Operation: Moderate Adverse Decommission: Minor Moderate Neutral	Significant

	combined with the orientation of dwellings in Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath will prevent any significant visual connection with the proposed development sites. The dwellings within the New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm are in close proximity to some of the proposed panels and the residential dwelling associated with the latter farm complex is likely to experience views of the development when viewing in a southerly direction.		predominantly out of view, due to landform and vegetation. Medium High						
Residents of nearby Settlements such as Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath.	Due to intervening vegetation along the perimeter of the road and the property boundaries there will be little to no visual connectivity of the Proposed Development and the residents of Upper Tean, Fulford, Hilderstone and Morrilow Heath	Local	Medium	None	None	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: None Operation: None Decommission: None	Not Significant
Recreational Receptors - Public Footpaths / Bridleways / restricted Byways									
Public Footpath DM24	This is a public footpath that follows on to the east of Cresswell Road providing a link to the north to south footpath L7 which travels alongside and through parts of the eastern parcels of the proposed development. Views across the Tean	Local / Regional	High (Due to the PRoW forming part of the Stone Circles Challenge)	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate Major Adverse Operation: Moderate Adverse Decommission: Moderate Beneficial	Significant

	Valley and fields that are accommodating the solar panels are mostly restricted by the dense hedges and vegetation that travel either side of the footpath / lane.								
Public footpath L7 and the route of the Stone Circles Challenge	The public footpath is a continuation in a south to northerly direction of DM24 and travels mostly through the southeastern portions of the proposed development.	Local	High	Moderate	Moderate	Minor	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Moderate Major Adverse Operation: Moderate Major Adverse Decommission: Moderate Beneficial	Significant
Public Footpath L76 In proximity to Blithewood Moated Site	There is no visual connectivity between the receptor and the proposed development	Local	Medium High	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Minor	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Negligible Operation: Negligible Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant
Medium and Long Range Recreational Receptors The footpath network to the north of the A50 includes Draycott in the Moors FP14 and Draycott in the Moors FP26	Public footpath Draycott in the Moors FP14 travels through the existing Blythe Valley Solar Farm and views southwards and in the direction of the proposed New Buildings Solar Farm are restricted by the proximity of the solar panels. Public footpath Draycott in the Moors FP26 travels across the landscape to the south of the Blythe Valley Solar Farm and Paynsley Hall and views of the Proposed New Buildings Solar Farm are restricted by the intervening vegetation	Local	Medium High	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Negligible Operation: Negligible Decommission: Negligible	Not Significant

	associated with the A50 and field boundaries.								
Transport Receptors									
Cresswell Road and the A50	The nearest road to the proposed Solar Farm is Cresswell Road and that connects to the lane that provides access to New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm. Apart from these there are no main roads nearby to the development. The A50 dual carriageway travels some distance to the north of the proposed development and generally there will be no visual connectivity with the proposed development due to the road being set into a densely vegetated cutting. There is also a railway line with associated vegetation between the site and the A50 and this reinforces the screening effects within the landscape.	Local	Medium Low	Minor	Minor	Minor	Construction: Temporary/ Direct Operation: Long Term Direct	Construction: Minor Adverse Operation: Minor Adverse Decommission: Minor Neutral	Not Significant

APPENDIX B

Methodology



LVIA Assessment Approach

Methodology

1. The following is an overview of the methodology used in identifying the likely significance of effects arising from the impact of the Proposed Development. Generally, the methodology adopted is in line with best practice for the production of LVIA's based on the Guidance for Landscape and Visual Assessment - Third Edition produced by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (GLVIA3). The guidance offers clarification on use of terms within LVIA's and within this assessment we have adopted the suggested definitions on the terms impact and effects:

"The third edition attempts to be clearer on the use of terminology. The emphasis should be on the identification of likely significant environmental effects, including those that are beneficial and adverse, direct and indirect, long, medium and short term and reversible and irreversible, as well as cumulative effects. This edition encourages professionals to recognise this and assess accordingly." (Preface to GLVIA3).

2. In this section, the following distinction is made between landscape and visual effects:
 - Landscape effects are defined as physical changes in the fabric, character and quality of the landscape as a result of the Proposed Development;
 - Visual effects are defined as changes in quality of the views of the landscape and changes to visual amenity as a result of the Proposed Development and the effects of those changes on the perceptions of visual receptors when experienced from available viewpoints.
3. GLVIA3 also states under the heading impacts, effects and significance that:

"Terminology can be complex and potentially confusing in this area, particularly in the use of the words 'impact' and 'effect' in LVIA within EIA and SEA. The process is generally known as impact assessment, but the European Union Directive refers to assessment of the effects, which are changes arising from the development that is being assessed. This guidance generally distinguishes between the 'impact', defined as the action taken, and the 'effect', defined as the change resulting from that action, and recommends that the terms should be used consistently in this way." (GLVIA3, para 1.5)

4. This LVIA chapter therefore considers the Proposed Development as the impact and the changes that occur to the baseline condition of the landscape and visual amenity as a result of the development as being the effects.

Assessment of Significance Criteria

5. Significance is a function of the combination of the sensitivity of a receptor (or the receiving environment) and the magnitude of change to produce the potential effect. The significance is judged based on the degree of change that will occur on the receptor. Further details on the factors that should be considered in the assessment of significance are presented below.

Significance Criteria for Landscape Effects

6. To successfully assess the significance of landscape effects requires the consideration of the nature of the landscape receptors, also known as sensitivity, and the nature of the effect, also known as magnitude of change, that the Proposed Development will have on the receptor.
7. The nature of the receptor should be assessed in terms of the value of the receptor and its susceptibility to the particular change caused by the type of proposed development. The change, or level of effect is measured in terms of scale, size, geographical coverage, duration and reversibility.
8. The landscape receptors that have been assessed at the three stages (Construction, Operation and Decommission) are some or all as follows:
 - **Localised Site Character Areas** (Identified by UBU)
 - Western Ridge
 - Bromley Wood and Moat
 - Blakelow Valley and Stone Circles Challenge
 - **Site**
 - Topography, soils and geology
 - Land Use
 - Woodland and Trees
 - Field Pattern
 - Landform

- Footpaths and Bridleways
- Roads and Tracks
- Buildings
- Water
- **Site Setting**
 - North
 - South
 - East
 - West
- **Broad Landscape Context**
 - National character areas – National Character Area (NCA) 68. Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands;
 - County Landscape Character Area – Staffordshire are published in Planning for Landscape Change: Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 - 2011 Landscape Descriptions – Landscape Character Type Settled Plateau Farmland;
 - District Landscape Character Area – Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (LSCA) 2008 - LCT Settled Plateau Farmland.

Nature of Receptor (Sensitivity)

9. GLVIA3 recommends that the landscape receptors need to be assessed firstly in terms of their sensitivity, which is a combination of the value of the landscape and the susceptibility to change. Susceptibility is: *“The ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and / or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue circumstance for the maintenance of the baseline situation and / or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.” (GVLA3 Page 88; Para 5.40)*
10. Furthermore, the GLVIA3 indicates in the Glossary that susceptibility is “the ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences.” (GLVIA Page 158). Judgements on the susceptibility of the receptor to change are recorded as high, medium or low (Page 89; Para 5.43). A description of how susceptibility is evaluated for each receptor type is included in GLVIA3 (para 5.40) and outlined below:

- **High** – undue consequences are very likely to arise from the Proposed Development;
 - **Medium** – there could be some undue consequences arising from the Proposed Development; and
 - **Low** - undue consequences are unlikely to arise from the Proposed Development.
11. The landscape receptors that have been assessed at the three stages (Construction, Operation and Decommission) are some or all as follows
 12. The value of a landscape is established through the baseline study based on review of:
 - The value of the Landscape Character Types or Areas that may be affected;
 - Individual contributors to landscape character, especially the key characteristics, which may include individual elements of the landscape, particular landscape features, notable aesthetic, perceptual or experiential qualities, and combinations of these contributors.
 13. Within this chapter we have considered the value at national and regional/local level.
 14. Landscape Value is “**the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society**” (GLVIA3, Glossary page 157). The following is an example of how the value would be rated on a range of landscapes:
 - **High** - National/International – Designated landscapes which are nationally or internationally designated for their landscape value, including National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, World Heritage sites, Heritage Coast and National Scenic Areas;
 - **Medium High** - Local – Locally or regionally designated landscapes (e.g. Area of High Landscape Value, Regional Scenic Areas); also areas which local evidence indicates as being more valued than the surrounding area;
 - **Medium** - Community – ‘everyday’ landscape which is appreciated by the local community but has little or no wider recognition of its value;
 - **Low** – despoiled or degraded landscape with little or no evidence of being valued by the community.
 15. However, it should be noted that the value of landscapes is complex, and the actual scale of relative value will be made clear in the main body of the assessment.

16. GLVIA3 states “Judgements about susceptibility of landscape receptors to change should be recorded on a verbal scale (for example high, medium or low), but the basis for this must be clear, and linked back to evidence from the baseline study.” (Page 89; Para 5.43)
17. Judgements on the sensitivity of the receptor are recorded as high, medium or low and combine the value of the landscape with the susceptibility to change and the final opinion is made by professional judgement of the assessor making reference to the criteria tables.

Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change)

18. Each effect on landscape receptors will need to be assessed in terms of its size or scale; the geographical extent of the area influenced; and its duration and reversibility. In terms of size or scale, judgements are made to determine the extent of the changes in the landscape that is likely to be experienced by each effect.
19. For landscape types and areas, the scale or size depends on the degree to which the character of the landscape is changed through the removal of the existing landscape components, or the addition of new components. For landscape features and elements, it depends on the extent of these that will be lost or changed, the proportion of the total extent that this represents and the contribution of that element to the character of the landscape.
20. Within this chapter the size / scale will be described as Major, Moderate, Minor or Imperceptible as advised in GLVIA3 (Para 5.49). These are defined further below with examples applied based on professional judgement:
 - **Major** – Total or distinctive alteration to key elements, features, qualities or characteristics, such that post development, the baseline situation will be fundamentally changed;
 - **Moderate** – Partial alteration to key elements, features, qualities or characteristics, such that post development the baseline situation will be noticeably changed;
 - **Minor** – Small alteration to key elements, features, qualities or characteristics, such that post development the baseline situation will be largely unchanged despite discernible differences;
 - **Imperceptible** – A change that is barely noticeable or cannot be perceived.

21. The GLVIA3 (Para 5.50) recommends that the geographical extent of the likely effects on the landscape be measured as follows:
- At site level, within the development;
 - At the immediate setting of the site;
 - At the broader landscape context of the site i.e. at the local landscape character type / area and also on a larger scale where several landscape types or character areas are potentially affected.
22. This approach has been adopted for this assessment as it also tests the likely significance of effects for various stages of the Proposed Development, such as the set up/preparation at the construction stage, operational stage and the decommissioning stage. Mitigation measures are then considered, and a further assessment has taken place which considers the likely residual effects after mitigation is applied.
23. Duration of effect is assessed for all landscape and visual receptors and identifies the period over which the change to the receptor as a result of the development would arise. It is rated on the following scale:
- **Permanent** – the change is expected to be permanent and there is no intention for it to be reversed;
 - **Long-term** – the change is expected to be in place for 10-45 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe;
 - **Medium-term** – the change is expected to be in place for 5-10 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe;
 - **Temporary**– the change is expected to be in place for 0-5 years and can be reversed or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe.

Judging the Significance of Landscape Effects

24. GLVIA3 acknowledges that there are no hard and fast rules for making judgements as to whether an effect is significant but does suggest some approaches that could be adopted. For this chapter we have sequentially combined the identified effects that potentially change or influence each receptor to assess the overall significance.
25. Susceptibility to change and value are combined to ascertain the sensitivity of each receptor, and size/scale, geographical extent, duration and reversibility has been combined into an assessment of magnitude of change for each effect. The sensitivity and magnitude of change are combined to provide an overview of the distribution of

judgements for each aspect to make an informed professional assessment of the overall level of the effect, drawing on guidance within GLVIA3. Therefore, a mechanistic matrix approach or a numerical scoring system will not be solely relied on for the assessment. In addition, professional judgement will be used in reaching a conclusion on the overall level of the effect by considering the relative importance of each aspect.

26. Levels of effect are identified as **negligible**, **minor**, **moderate** or **major** or in some instances intermediate levels have been assigned such as **moderate-major**.
27. The resulting significance matrix is set out below in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1 Significance of Landscape Effects Matrix

Magnitude of Change (Nature of Effects)	Sensitivity (Nature of Receptor)		
	Low	Medium	High
Imperceptible	Negligible Effect	Negligible/Minor Effect	Minor Effect
Minor	Negligible/Minor Effect	Moderate/Minor Effect	Moderate Effect
Moderate	Minor/Moderate Effect	Moderate Effect	Moderate/Major Effect
Major	Moderate Effect	Moderate/Major Effect	Major Effect

28. Although an overall judgement has been made for the effect on a receptor the accompanying text has included commentary regarding the individual effects of the various components such as infrastructure, temporary and permanent structures and buildings and planting. These components or combination may be considered as having a beneficial or adverse effect; permanent or temporary; direct or indirect and this has been recorded where appropriate.
29. In terms of EIA Regulations significant landscape effects resulting from the Proposed Development are the effects which result in a 'moderate' or 'major' level of effect. It should be stressed that the effects that have been identified as significant could be beneficial or adverse. Effects that are deemed not to be significant i.e. those that are negligible, minor and moderate/minor are not ignored, and commentary is provided to explain the reasoning behind the judgement.

30. Furthermore, professional judgement has been used to determine whether the duration of the effects is either permanent or temporary and a conclusion is provided as to whether the direction of the effects is beneficial or adverse. The judgement of beneficial and adverse is determined in relation to the degree to which the proposal fits with the landscape character and the contribution that the development makes to enhance the landscape, even if it is in contrast to the existing character.

Definition of Levels / Grades of Effect

31. The level or grade of effect identified within this assessment reflects the professional judgement of the assessor, taking account of the sensitivity of the landscape or visual receptor and the magnitude of change that would arise as a result of the proposed development. Effects may be described as adverse, beneficial or neutral, depending on the nature of the change experienced by the receptor.
32. An **adverse effect** is one that would result in a deterioration in the existing landscape character, visual amenity, scenic quality, perceptual qualities, or the relationship between the receptor and its surroundings. Adverse effects may arise where the proposals introduce elements that are uncharacteristic, discordant, visually intrusive, or otherwise reduce the quality, coherence, tranquillity, openness or distinctiveness of the existing baseline condition.
33. A **beneficial effect** is one that would result in an improvement to the existing landscape character, visual amenity, scenic quality, perceptual qualities, or the relationship between the receptor and its surroundings. Beneficial effects may arise where the proposals restore, reinforce or enhance existing landscape features, improve landscape structure, introduce appropriate new planting, screen or soften existing detracting features, improve management, or create a more coherent and attractive setting.
34. A **neutral effect** is one where the proposals would result in no material change to the receptor, or where any changes would be so limited, balanced or localised that the overall character, quality or experience of the receptor would remain broadly comparable to the baseline condition. Neutral effects may also occur where adverse and beneficial elements of change are judged to broadly balance one another.
35. The following descriptions provide a guide to the terminology used to describe the overall level or grade of effect. They are not intended to be applied mechanistically; rather, they provide a framework for transparent and consistent professional judgement.

Major Effect

36. A **major adverse effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a substantial deterioration in the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. The development would become a defining or highly prominent element, leading to a marked loss or alteration of key characteristics, valued features, scenic qualities or visual amenity. Such effects are likely to be readily apparent and may alter the receptor to the extent that its baseline condition or experience is fundamentally changed.
37. A **major beneficial effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a substantial improvement to the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. The proposals would deliver a clear and notable enhancement, restoration or strengthening of key landscape features, landscape structure, visual amenity or perceptual qualities, such that the receptor would be materially improved compared with the baseline condition.
38. A **major neutral effect** would be unusual, but may occur where the scale of change is substantial, yet the changes are judged to be neither materially adverse nor beneficial overall. This may apply where large-scale change occurs in a context that is capable of accommodating it without a deterioration or improvement in landscape or visual terms.

Moderate Effect

39. A **moderate adverse effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a noticeable deterioration in the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. The development would form a clear new or altered element within the landscape or view and would affect some key characteristics, valued features or aspects of visual amenity, but would not fundamentally alter the receptor as a whole.
40. A **moderate beneficial effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a noticeable improvement to the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. The proposals would provide a clear enhancement to landscape structure, management, visual amenity or the setting of the receptor, although the improvement would not be sufficient to transform the receptor as a whole.
41. A **moderate neutral effect** may occur where the proposed development would give rise to noticeable change, but where the overall balance of change is neither adverse nor beneficial. This may apply where the proposals introduce new elements that are broadly

consistent with the receiving landscape or visual context, or where adverse and beneficial aspects of change are broadly equivalent.

Minor Effect

- 42. A **minor adverse effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a limited deterioration in the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. The change would be perceptible but small in scale, localised, partially screened, temporary, or otherwise limited in its influence. The receptor would remain largely comparable to the baseline condition.
- 43. A **minor beneficial effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a limited improvement to the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. The change would be perceptible but modest in scale or extent, such as localised landscape enhancement, limited improvement to visual amenity, or incremental strengthening of existing landscape features.
- 44. A **minor neutral effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a small but perceptible change that does not materially improve or worsen the receptor. The receptor would remain substantially similar to the baseline condition.

Negligible Effect

- 45. A **negligible adverse effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a barely perceptible deterioration in the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. Any change would be very small in scale, highly localised, largely screened, distant, temporary or otherwise of very limited consequence.
- 46. A **negligible beneficial effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in a barely perceptible improvement in the existing character, quality or experience of a landscape or visual receptor. Any enhancement would be very limited in scale, extent or influence.
- 47. A **negligible neutral effect** would occur where the proposed development would result in change that is barely perceptible and neither adverse nor beneficial. The receptor would remain effectively unchanged from the baseline condition.

No Effect

- 48. No effect would occur where there would be no discernible change to the landscape or visual receptor as a result of the proposed development. This may be because the

receptor has no visibility of the development, is physically unaffected by the proposals, or is otherwise not influenced by the change.

49. This assessment will offer judgements to balance the overall conclusions by considering the adverse and beneficial effects that may arise from the works involved in the construction, operational and decommissioning stages of the solar farm. These may be provided in the design as mitigation measures to offset any potential adverse effects. This may be further qualified if any of the proposed elements can be viewed as being potentially beneficial through policy and design guidance provided by Staffordshire Moorlands and East Staffordshire Councils.

Significance Criteria for Visual Effects

50. To successfully assess the significance of visual effects requires the consideration of the nature of the visual receptors, also known as sensitivity, and the nature of the effect, also known as the magnitude of change.
51. The nature of the receptor should be assessed in terms of the value of the receptor and its susceptibility to the particular change of views and the visual amenity caused by the type of proposed development. The change, or nature of effect, is measured in terms of scale, size, geographical coverage, duration and reversibility.
52. The receptors are generally grouped into residential, recreational and transport receptors for the visual assessment and these categories are represented by several viewpoints and specific reference is made to these in the assessment. The visual receptors that have been assessed at the three stages (Construction, Operation and Decommission) are as follows:
- Residential Receptors:
 - Recreational Receptors:
 - Public footpaths
 - National Cycle Routes
 - Transport Receptors:
 - Roads and Lanes.

Nature of Visual Receptor (Sensitivity)

53. GVLA3 recommends that the visual receptors need to be assessed firstly in terms of their sensitivity, which is a combination of the value of the view and the susceptibility to change.
54. "The susceptibility of different visual receptors to changes in views and visual amenity is mainly a function of:
- The occupation or activity of people experiencing the view at particular locations; and
 - The extent to which their attention or interest may therefore be focused on the views and the visual amenity they experience at particular locations." (GVLA3 page 113 para 6.32)
55. The visual receptors most susceptible to change are generally likely to include, residents at home, people engaged in outdoor recreation including uses of public rights of way, visitors to heritage assets or other attractions, communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area.
56. Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes tend to fall into an intermediate category of moderate susceptibility to change but where travel involves recognised routes of high scenic quality then the awareness of views is likely to be high.
57. Visual receptors likely to be less sensitive to change include people engaged in outdoor sport or recreation that does not involve appreciation of views of the landscape, people at place of work and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life." (GLVIA3 Page 113 paras 6.33-6.34)
58. The value attached to views is established through the baseline study based on review of: "Recognition of the value attached to particular views, for example in relation to heritage assets, or through other planning designations; Indicators of the value attached to views by visitors, for example through appearances in guidebooks or on tourist maps, provision of facilities for their enjoyment (such as parking places, sign boards and interpretive material) and references to them in literature or art (for example 'Ruskins View' over Lunedale, or the view from the Cob in Porthmadog over Traeth Mawr to Snowdonia which features in well-known Welsh paintings and the 'Queens View' in Scotland)." (GLVIA3 Page 114 paras 6.37)

59. For this assessment we have considered the value at regional and local level and judgements on the susceptibility of the receptor is recorded as High, Medium or Low.

Nature of Effect (Magnitude of Change)

60. Each effect on visual receptors needs to be assessed in terms of its size or scale; the geographical extent of the area influenced; and its duration and reversibility. In terms of size or scale, judgements are made to determine the extent of the changes in the view and visual amenity that is likely to be experienced by each effect.
61. For views within the landscape and areas, the scale or size depends on the degree to which the view is changed through the removal of the existing landscape components, or the addition of new components. For landscape features and elements, it depends on the extent of these that will be lost or changed, the proportion of the total extent that this represents and the contribution of that element to the visual character of the landscape.
62. Within this chapter the size/scale is described as Major, Moderate, Minor or Imperceptible. These are defined further below:
- **Major** – Large change in view, especially when the development is in close proximity in the main focus of views, or affecting a substantial part of the view, or providing contrast within the existing view;
 - **Moderate** – Clearly perceptible change in view, where the development is relatively close but not necessarily in the main focus of the view, creating a distinct new element in the view;
 - **Minor** – A small change in view, where the development is at a distance, mostly screened from view or where the scale of the landscape absorbs the development well;
 - **Imperceptible** – A change in view that is barely noticeable or cannot be perceived.
63. The GLVIA3 (para 6.39) suggests that the geographical extent of a visual effect varies with different viewpoints and is likely to reflect:
- The angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor;
 - The distance of the viewpoint from the Proposed Development;
 - The extent of the area over which the changes would be visible.

64. Duration and reversibility of effects have also been measured as part of this assessment as the nature of the development is predominately temporary. The approach for the definition of temporal duration of effects is as follows:
- **A temporary effect:** An effect that will be experienced for 0-5 years;
 - **A medium term effect:** An effect that will be experienced for 5-10 years;
 - **A long term effect:** An effect that will be experienced for 10 years onwards; and
 - **Permanent effect:** The change is expected to be permanent and there is no intention for it to be reversed.
65. The LVIA also tests the likely significance of effects for the construction, operational and decommissioning stages of the Proposed Development. The majority of the Proposed Development is operational for 40 years when consideration of decommission or renewal will take place.
66. The site construction process is temporary and therefore the main significance in landscape and visual terms will comprise of the following type of work for approximately 8 months:
- Mobilisation, site establishment and access routes
 - Fencing work
 - Solar array erection
 - Cabling
 - Inverter units and DNO termination cabinet
 - Final commissioning;
 - Traffic management on the local road network to facilitate safe operation of cars and trucks.
67. The operational phase is long term, lasting at least 25 years, but likely to be 40 years in this case. The main significance in landscape and visual terms during this time will comprise of the following:
- The use of solar panels to provide natural energy to the grid;
 - Ongoing environmental monitoring and management; and
 - Traffic management in the surrounding area for the safe management of maintenance vehicles.

68. The assessment is based on the indicative locations that are proposed within the land use areas identified in the New Buildings Farm PV General Layout (Appendix A in LVIA Figures). The parameters include:
- Zones for solar panels arrays;
 - Zones for specific ecological management; and
 - Existing vegetation, structures and buildings.
69. The decommissioning stage will take place after the operational stage. It will occur in the reverse order to the installation and include the following that will relate to landscape and visual issues:
- Site clean-up;
 - Removal of solar panels and other structures, sets and signage;
 - Transport and removal of all rubbish;
 - Any necessary ecological and agricultural reinstatement where required. This includes the removal of the scalplings for the construction of the roads, recovering with topsoils and then re-sowing with grass seed.

Judging the Significance of Visual Effects

70. As with the landscape effects we have sequentially combined the identified effects that potentially change or influence each receptor to assess the overall significance. Susceptibility to change and value are combined to ascertain the sensitivity of each visual receptor, and size/scale, geographical extent, duration, reversibility has been combined into an assessment of magnitude for each effect. The sensitivity and magnitude are combined to provide an overview of the distribution of judgements for each aspect to make an informed professional assessment of the overall level of the effect, drawing on guidance within GLVIA3. Therefore, a mechanistic matrix approach or a numerical scoring system was not solely relied on for the assessment. Instead, professional judgement was used in reaching a conclusion on the overall level of the effect by considering the relative importance of each aspect. Levels of effect are identified as negligible, minor, moderate or major or in some instances intermediate levels have been assigned such as moderate-major. Although an overall judgement has been made for the effect on a receptor, the accompanying text has included commentary regarding the individual effects of the various components such as infrastructure, buildings, green infrastructure and the overall visibility and quality of the view. In some instances, these components or combination may be considered as having a beneficial, neutral or adverse effect; permanent or temporary; direct or indirect and this has been recorded where appropriate.

71. Significant visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development are the effects which result in a 'moderate' or 'major' level of effect. It should be stressed that the effects that have been identified as significant could be beneficial or adverse. Effects that are deemed not to be significant i.e. those that are moderate/minor, negligible, and minor, are not ignored and commentary is provided to explain the reasoning the judgement.
72. Furthermore, professional judgment has been used to determine whether the duration of the effects is either permanent, long term or temporary and a conclusion is provided as to whether the direction of the effects is beneficial or adverse.
73. The judgement of beneficial and adverse is determined in relation to the degree to which the proposal fits with the quality of the view or wider visual amenity and the contribution that the Proposed Development makes to enhance the visual quality of the landscape, even if it is in contrast to the existing character.
74. The assessment will offer judgements on whether the Proposed Development has adverse or beneficial effects and will balance the overall conclusion by considering the temporary introduction of appropriate building materials and green infrastructure as well as mitigation measures to offset any potential adverse effects.
75. The resulting significance matrix is set out below:

Table 5.2: Significance of Visual Effects Matrix

Magnitude of Change (Nature of Effects)	Sensitivity (Nature of Receptor)		
	Low	Medium	High
Imperceptible	Negligible Effect	Negligible/Minor Effect	Minor Effect
Minor	Negligible/Minor Effect	Moderate/Minor Effect	Moderate Effect
Moderate	Minor/Moderate Effect	Moderate Effect	Moderate/Major Effect
Major	Moderate Effect	Moderate/Major Effect	Major Effect

Legislative and Policy Framework

Legislation

76. The European Landscape Convention (ELC 2000) provides a foundation for closer co-operation on landscape issues across Europe and was ratified in the UK on the 21 November 2006 and became binding on 1 March 2007. The Convention identifies the need to recognise landscape in law, to develop and promote landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes, and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the evolution and implementation of landscape policies. It also encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, economic and social policies.