Botley West Solar Farm

Environmental Statement

Volume 3

Appendix 8.1: Landscape Character

November 2024

PINS Ref: EN010147
Document Ref: EN010147/APP/6.5
Revision P0
APFP Regulation 5(2)(a); Planning Act 2008; and Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations

Approval for issue

Jonathan Alsop	15 November 2024

Prepared by:

RPS
20 Western Avenue,
Milton Park, Abingdon,
Oxfordshire, OX14 4SH
United Kingdom

Prepared for:

Photovolt Development Partners GmbH, on behalf of SolarFive Ltd.

Contents

Tables

1 Landscape Character

1.1 Landscape Character Baseline

Introduction

1.1.1 The landscape of the Project Site and the 5 km radius Study Area has been assessed at various levels of detail, from national to local landscape character, to the site specific (i.e. physical landscape features). Notwithstanding the 5 km extent of the LVIA Study Area, the focus of assessment is on sensitive landscape receptors lying within the ZTV (see Figure 8.7 to 8.11) in proximity to the Project Site.

1.1.2 Relevant published landscape character assessments are summarised in paragraphs 8.4.12 to 8.4.40 of the LVIA ES chapter, with further detail of relevant character areas affected, directly or indirectly, by the Project given below.

1.1.3 This appendix should referred to / read in conjunction with to section 8.4 of the LVIA ES chapter; Figure 8.128: National Landscape Character Areas and Figures 8.129 to 8.131 Landscape Character Areas.

1.2 National Landscape Character

1.2.1 At the national level, the Project Site is located within National Character Area (NCA) 107: Cotswolds, 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales and 109: Midvale Ridge (Figure XX).

NCA 107: Cotswolds

1.2.2 The key characteristics of NCA 107: Cotswolds relevant to the Application Site and the Study Area include:

- *"Defined by its underlying geology: a dramatic limestone scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combes, and outliers illustrating the slow erosion of escarpments. The limestone geology has formed the scarp and dip slope of the landscape, which in turn has influenced drainage, soils, vegetation, land use and settlement.*
- *Open and expansive scarp and high wold dipping gently to the south-east, dissected by river valleys.*
- *Arable farming dominates the high wold and dip slope while permanent pasture prevails on the steep slopes of the scarp and river valleys with pockets of internationally important limestone grassland.*
- *Drystone walls define the pattern of fields of the high wold and dip slope. On the deeper soils and river valleys, hedgerows form the main field boundaries.*
- *Ancient beech hangers line stretches of the upper slopes of the scarp, while oak/ash woodlands are characteristic of the river valleys. Regular*

blocks of coniferous and mixed plantations are scattered across the open high wold and dip slope.

- *Large areas of common land, important for unimproved calcareous grassland, are characteristic of the scarp and high wold around the Stroud valleys and along the crest of the scarp to Cleeve Hill.*
- *The majority of the principal rivers flow south-eastwards forming the headwaters of the Thames with the exception of rivers in the west which flow into the River Avon and then the Severn Estuary.*
- *Rich history from Neolithic barrows, iron-age hill forts and Roman roads and villas to deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and Second World War airfields. The field patterns largely reflect both the medieval open field system, with fossilised areas of ridge and furrow, and later planned enclosures.*
- *Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls, giving the area a strong sense of unity for which the Cotswolds are renowned. Bath stone is also famous and has been used for building since Roman times, both locally in the principal buildings and streets of Bath and more widely, for example for Buckingham Palace in London. Parkland, gardens and historic designed landscapes are features particularly of the dip slope and broad lowland, such as Lawrence Johnston's garden at Hidcote, and Heather Muir's garden at Kiftsgate, parkland at Stanway, Chastleton and Blenheim Palace.*
- *Prominent natural and built features in the landscape include the City of Bath WHS, Brailes Hill, Broadway Tower, Cleeve Hill, the Tyndale monument, Freezing Hill, Kelston Round Hill and Blenheim Palace WHS".*

NCA 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales

1.2.3 The key characteristics of NCA 108: Upper Thames Clay Vales relevant to the Application Site and the Study Area include:

- *"Low-lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits, including alluvium and gravel terraces, spread over 40 per cent of the area, creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands of the gravel.*
- *The large river system of the River Thames drains the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north or emitting from the springline along the Chilterns and Downs escarpments. Where mineral extraction takes place, pits naturally fill with water, and limestone gravels from the Cotswolds give rise to marl formation. There are a high number of nationally important geological sites.*
- *Woodland cover is low at only about 3 per cent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by*

lines of willows and, particularly in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.

- *Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls. The Vale of White Horse is made distinct by large arable fields, and there are relict orchards on the Greensand.*
- *In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. There are two areas of flood meadow designated for their importance at a European level as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). There are also rich and extensive ditch systems.*
- *Gravel extraction has left a legacy of geological exposures, numerous waterbodies and, at the Cotswold Water Park, a nationally important complex of marl lakes.*
- *Wetland habitat attracts regionally important numbers of birds including snipe, redshank, curlew and lapwing and wintering wildfowl such as pochard. Snake's head fritillary thrives in the internationally important meadows. The area also supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl, tree sparrow and skylark.*
- *Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, including its Capability Brown landscape, is the finest of many examples of historic parkland in this NCA. There are many heritage features, including nationally important survivals of ridge and furrow, Roman roads, deserted medieval villages and historic bridges.*
- *Brick and tile from local clays, timber and thatch are traditional building materials across the area, combined with limestone near the Cotswolds and occasional clunch and wichert near the Chilterns.*
- *Settlement is sparse on flood plains, apart from at river crossings, where there can be large towns, such as Abingdon. Aylesbury and Bicester are major urban centres, and the outer suburbs of Oxford and Swindon spread into this NCA. Market towns and villages are strung along the springlines of the Chilterns and Downs. Major routes include mainline rail, canals, a network of roads including the M40 and M4 and The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails".*

NCA 109: Midvale Ridge

1.2.4 The key characteristics of NCA 109: Midvale Ridge relevant to the Application Site and the Study Area include:

- *"Low, irregular wooded limestone ridge giving way to a series of isolated steep-sided tabular hills in the east which rise from the surrounding clay vales.*
- *Contrast between the moderately elevated limestone hills and ridges and the surrounding low-lying clay vales.*

- *Drained mostly by small springs and streams which run into the Thames, Thame and Ock.*
- *Well wooded – a third of the woodland is designated ancient woodland.*
- *Mixed pastoral and arable landscape with large, geometric fields divided by hedges and regularly spaced hedgerow trees punctuated by blocks of woodland.*
- *Fragmented but rare and important semi-natural habitats, including acid grassland, calcareous fens and flushes, wet woodland and calcareous grass heaths particularly around Frilford and Cothill.*
- *Evidence of previous land use such as iron-age and Romano-British settlements and ridge and furrow through to old quarries still visible in the landscape.*
- *Locally quarried limestone commonly used as building material for local houses.*
- *Settlement pattern of nucleated villages on the hill tops and along the springline with low density of dispersed settlement.*
- *Recreational opportunities include the Thames Path National Trail".*

1.3 Regional Landscape Character

Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) (2004)

1.3.1 The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) is a county-wide study that explores the interrelationship between landscape character and biodiversity. It identifies nine Regional Character Areas (RCA's) that are part of the National Joint Character Areas which fall within Oxfordshire. Three Regional Character Areas are located within the Study Area, cover the Project Site and are of relevance to this assessment. They are illustrated on Figure x and detailed below:

- Cotswolds
- Midvale Ridge
- Upper Thames Vale

1.3.2 The study identifies 24 landscape types (LT) within the County that are made up of individual landscape description units. Information relating to the LT's of relevance to landscape character includes the: Key Characteristics, Local Character Areas, Forces For Change, Landscape Strategy, Guidelines and Key Recommendations and this is used within this assessment. Information relating to Forces For Change, Landscape Strategy, Guidelines and Key Recommendations will be utilised to inform the landscape proposals for this Project

1.3.3 There are eight LT located within the Project Site and within the Study Area that are of relevance to this assessment. These are detailed below, and their locations are illustrated on Figure x:

- Alluvial Lowlands

- Estate Farmlands
- Lowland Village Farmlands
- River Meadowlands
- Rolling Farmland
- Vale Farmland
- Wooded Estatelands
- Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes

1.3.4 Relevant information regarding the Key Characteristics, Forces For Change and Landscape Strategy guidelines are detailed below for the eight LT to be considered within this assessment.

1. Alluvial Lowlands LT

1.3.5 The Alluvial Lowlands LT covers part of the Project Site (fields x) in the middle of the Study Area and the key characteristics features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

"This landscape type includes flat landscapes of lowland river valleys, associated with alluvial soils. It is characterised by a regular pattern of medium-sized hedged fields with permanent pasture and arable cropping.

- Broad alluvial plains.
- Mixed farming pattern with regular fields with both arable cropping and pasture.
- Densely scattered hedgerow trees of ash and willow.
- Dense willow corridors bordering a large number of ditches.
- Sparsely settled".

1.3.6 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *"Overall, the hedgerow pattern is becoming fragmented and there are many overgrown and gappy hedges. In the more intensively managed arable areas the hedges are much lower, with fewer hedgerow trees and, in places, replaced by fences.*
- *The tranquil character of the landscape is disturbed by the busy transport network of railway lines and main roads including the A40, M40, and A34.*
- *A number of features are visually intrusive, particularly in the more open arable areas, and they include sewage treatment works, overhead pylons that are particularly visible to the west of Drayton and to the south of Oxford, large modern farm buildings and small-scale industrial development to the north of Grove and west of Steventon.*
- *Although there is an obvious vernacular character in most of the villages, this has been eroded to some extent by modern residential development in places like Yarnton and Hampton Poyle. In the more intensive arable*

areas to the southeast of Oxford, the lack of hedges and hedgerow trees accentuates the urban edge of the city.

- Gravel pits, with their processing plants and machinery, can be visually intrusive in places such as Caversham and Lower Radley although some are being restored to a more appropriate range of after-uses including grassland and plantations".

1.3.7 The landscape strategy for the Alluvial Lowlands LT is summarised as:

"Maintain the tranquil nature of the landscape and promote the restoration and enhancement of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses.

1.3.8 Guidelines:

- *There are a number of important examples of species-rich neutral grassland, marshy grassland, flood meadows and wet grassland within certain parts of the landscape type. Many of these are designated as statutory or non-statutory wildlife sites and the priority must be to ensure that they are in suitable condition and management through agreement with the landowner. Opportunities for successfully expanding and maintaining these habitat types in parts of the landscape type where there is already good existing habitat are considerable, and they should be promoted through the use of agri-environment schemes.*
- *Species-rich rivers and ditches are also very important and the aim should be to establish and maintain diverse banksides and aquatic vegetation through sympathetic management and the use of agri-environment schemes.*
- *Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of the landscape type. Priority should be given to safeguarding, maintaining and expanding this resource particularly in those local character areas where they remain a notable feature.*
- *Tree-lined watercourses are a feature throughout the landscape type. They should be safeguarded and enhanced by planting species such as ash and willows, pollarding willows where appropriate, and establishing buffer strips/field margins to potentially benefit small mammals, invertebrates and birds.*
- *Flooded gravel pits can make a significant contribution to biodiversity, particularly bird species, and the sympathetic restoration and management of these sites through agreement between landowners, mineral operators and the minerals planning authority should be strongly promoted through the use of planning conditions and obligations.*
- *Opportunities for the establishment of other locally important habitats, such as semi-improved grassland and small deciduous woodlands, should be promoted in order to strengthen wildlife corridors and enhance the local landscape character.*
- *Promote the use of agri-environment schemes such as conservation headlands, overwintered stubbles and winter-sown crops to benefit farmland birds such as skylarks and yellowhammers.*

1.3.9 Key Recommendations:

- *Maintain the tranquil nature of the landscape and promote the restoration and enhancement of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses.*
- *Ensure that all priority habitats, particularly grasslands, are in favourable condition and management.*
- *Promote the management and expansion of these priority habitats through the use of agri-environment schemes".*

4. Estate Farmlands LT

1.3.10 The Estate Farmlands LT covers part of the Project Site (fields x) in the north of the Study Area and the key characteristics features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"This is a rolling agricultural landscape characterised by parklands and a well ordered pattern of fields and estate plantations.*
- *Medium to large, regularly shaped hedged fields.*
- *Small, geometric plantations and belts of trees.*
- *Large country houses set in ornamental parklands.*
- *Small estate villages and dispersed farmsteads"*

1.3.11 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *"Overall, the hedgerow pattern is in decline with many low or overgrown, gappy hedges. This is particularly evident in the open, intensively managed arable land around Ipsden, where much of the hedgerow pattern is either fragmented or lost. The field boundary pattern is also weak along main roads and on the fringes of main settlements such as Witney and Carterton. Where stone walls occur, they are often in poor condition and frequently overgrown with scrub.*
- *The landscape type has a largely unspoilt rural character. Residential development is moderate in scale, particularly in some settlements to the west of Chinnor. In places there has been some suburbanisation, particularly around the fringes of Carterton and Witney, where there is ribbon development, development that is out of character as well as expansion of settlements into the open countryside. Similarly, the impact of industrial estates and business parks, with their intrusive large buildings on the urban fringe, is significant in places.*
- *Unrestored mineral workings and their associated infrastructure can sometimes be an eyesore. This is true of quarries at Chinnor and Shipton-on-Cherwell. Concrete structures at the disused quarry at Shipton-on-Cherwell are visually intrusive.*
- *Intensively managed amenity landscapes, such as golf courses and playing fields on the edge of built-up areas like Witney, can have a negative impact on landscape character by introducing suburban*

influences including car parks, lighting and incongruous buildings into the rural environment.

- *Disused airfields, such as the one to the south of the Cotswold Water Park, may appear rather derelict, but this can be mitigated to some extent by a strong pattern of hedgerows".*

1.3.12 The landscape strategy for the Estate Farmlands LT is summarised as:

- *"Conserve the planned estate character of this landscape type through maintenance and enhancement of the parklands, woodlands and field boundaries.*

1.3.13 Guidelines:

- *Conserve and restore the pastoral character of existing parklands and promote the replacement of veteran and mature trees where appropriate.*
- *Promote the sustainable management of existing woods and plantations, and the establishment of new tree belts and plantations with a significant proportion of deciduous tree and shrub species characteristic of this area.*
- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up new or gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn.*
- *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering where necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.*
- *Priority should be given to safeguarding and maintaining existing species-rich hedges through coppicing, layering and replanting where necessary with shrub species such as blackthorn, field maple, dogwood and spindle.*
- *Protect stone walls from deterioration.*
- *Conserve surviving areas of permanent pasture.*
- *Protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape and the integrity and vernacular character of the estate villages.*
- *Minimise the potential visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Where appropriate, mitigate the potential visual impact of mineral extraction and landfill sites with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*

1.3.14 Key Recommendations:

- *Safeguard and enhance the estate character of this landscape type through the protection, management and enhancement of its parklands, woodlands and hedgerow network.*

- *Ensure that remaining priority and other important habitats are in favourable condition and management".*

8. Lowland Village Farmlands LT

1.3.15 The Lowland Village Farmlands LT covers part of the Project Site (fields x) in the middle of the Study Area and the key characteristic features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"A variable, often large scale farmed landscape closely associated with village settlements.*
- *A varied, gently rolling and almost flat topography.*
- *Medium to large-sized arable and hedged fields.*
- *Thinly scattered hedgerow trees, which are mostly ash.*
- *Ash, willow and poplars fringing ditches and streams.*
- *Prominent village settlements scattered throughout the area".*

1.3.16 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *"Overall, the field pattern is in good condition, particularly roadside hedges which can be very dense, tall and intact, and also where they enclose pastureland. However, in areas of intensively managed arable land, the internal field hedges are often very low, fragmented and in some cases removed altogether, resulting in an open landscape. This weakening of the landscape structure exacerbates the intrusion of built development and roads.*
- *Although the vernacular character is generally strong in the villages, most of them have varying amounts of modern residential development. In some villages, such as Harwell, East and West Hagbourne, there is a significant proportion of modern housing. Ribbon development is also a feature along main roads such as the A417, and urban fringe development is more noticeable around main towns such as Didcot.*
- *Large-scale agricultural barns can also be visually dominant, particularly when located on roadsides.*
- *Motorways and main roads such as the A4130 and A417, with their associated junctions and roundabouts, have a major impact, particularly in the area around Didcot. Along the A34, landscaping and tree planting helps to mitigate the impact of continuous traffic.*
- *Large-scale industrial estates, such as those to the north of Brighthampton and south of Eynsham, have a strong negative visual impact, particularly in open areas with a weak or fragmented landscape structure.*
- *Didcot power station is visually prominent throughout the whole area.*
- *Gravel extraction and major landfill sites to the south of Stanton Harcourt and east of Sutton Courtenay have a significant impact on the landscape, but this is mitigated to some extent by screen planting and landscaping.*

- *Brize Norton airfield and its associated premises are very visible, particularly where the field pattern is weak.*

1.3.17 The landscape strategy for the Lowland Village Farmlands LT is summarised as:

- *"Conserve and enhance the vernacular character of the villages and strengthen the existing pattern of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses.*

1.3.18 Guidelines:

- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as willow and ash.*
- *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.*
- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses.*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses, such as industrial estates, gravel pits, landfill sites, airfields and the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain the vernacular character of settlements and promote the use of local building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type. This ranges from limestone and stone tiles at Garsington and Merton through to the red bricks and tiles associated with the clay vales.*

1.3.19 Key Recommendations:

- *Safeguard and enhance the landscape character of the hedgerow network, and tree-lined watercourses.*
- *Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management".*

10. River Meadowlands LT

1.3.20 The River Meadowlands LT covers part of the Project Site (fields x) in the north and south of the Study Area and the key characteristic features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"This is a linear riverine landscape with a flat, well defined alluvial floodplain. It has pastoral character with meadows, wet and semi-improved pasture.*
- *Flat, low-lying topography with seasonally flooded alluvial floodplains.*

- *Meandering river channels.*
- *Grazing meadows and small fields of permanent pasture.*
- *Riparian character with a strong pattern of riverside willows and tree-lined ditches.*
- *Sparsely settled with a few roads".*

1.3.21 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *Agricultural intensification has led to the drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, as well as to the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries. As a result, many hedges are gappy and sometimes replaced by fences.*
- *There is some intrusion from urban fringe development at the edge of main settlements. Major roads, with their associated roundabouts and service stations, railway lines and overhead power lines intrude upon the tranquil and pastoral character of the landscape type. This visual intrusion is particularly noticeable along Hinksey stream to the southwest of Oxford, northwest of Lower Wolvercote, and north of Thame and Banbury.*
- *There is some suburbanisation of the river corridor along the lower part of the River Thames to accommodate boat traffic. Canalization of the river has taken place in several parts, resulting in steep concrete banks which prevents natural colonisation of aquatic marginal vegetation. There are also numerous mooring platforms adjacent to houses and settlements. Gardens, caravan sites and marinas all contribute to the obvious suburbanization of the river corridor.*
- *Gravel extraction is likely to continue, particularly along parts of the Lower Windrush Valley. Overall, standards of restoration are much higher and the flooded pits will be restored to accommodate a range of after-uses including angling, sailing, nature conservation and general amenity.*

1.3.22 The landscape strategy for the River Meadowlands LT is summarised as:

"Conserve and enhance the tranquil, small-scale, intimate pastoral character and visual unity of the river corridors.

1.3.23 Guidelines:

- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to rivers and other watercourses.*
- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.*
- *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.*

- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined rivers and other watercourses by planting willows and alders and, where appropriate, pollarding willows.*
- *Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as willows and alders.*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns with the judicious planting of appropriate tree and shrub species characteristic of the landscape type. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain high standards of restoration at gravel pits to accommodate a range of after-uses that integrate successfully with the character of the surrounding landscape.*

1.3.24 Key Recommendations:

- *Conserve and enhance the tranquil, small-scale, intimate pastoral character and visual unity of the river corridors through safeguarding existing grassland and the promotion of arable reversion to grassland.*
- *Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management particularly those surviving areas of floodplain, neutral and marshy grassland.*
- *Promote the expansion of these habitat types through the targeting of agri-environment schemes particularly within appropriate parts of the Upper Thames and its Tributaries".*

12. Rolling Farmland LT

1.3.25 The Rolling Farmland LT covers part of the Project Site (fields x) in the south of the Study Area and the key characteristic features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"A landscape with a prominent rolling landform and distant views from hillsides across the surrounding low-lying vale. It is associated with large open arable fields and localised blocks of ancient woodland.*
- *Prominent rolling landform.*
- *Large, geometric arable fields enclosed by a weak hedgerow pattern.*
- *Thinly distributed hedgerow trees.*
- *Locally prominent blocks of ancient woodland.*
- *Small to medium-sized villages"*

1.3.26 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *"Intensive arable farming has resulted in the large-scale fragmentation and removal of hedges, particularly internal field boundaries. The remaining hedges tend to be low and intensively maintained.*

- *There is some impact from residential development in the villages. It consists mainly of moderate to large-scale new housing development, which is not always in keeping in with the traditional character of the villages. In places, there is extensive ribbon development.*
- *Some large agricultural buildings and barns are visually prominent, out of scale, poorly located and using inappropriate materials.*
- *Overhead power lines around Moulsford and Horspath are visually intrusive in this open landscape.*
- *Abingdon airfield, with its associated depots and large-scale housing, has had a visual impact on the open rural landscape.*
- *Harwell laboratories, which cover a large area, is a very dominant feature and out of character with the surrounding open, farmed landscape of the North Wessex Downs".*

1.3.27 The landscape strategy for the Rolling Farmland LT is summarised as:

"Conserve and enhance the surviving pattern of woodlands, hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses. Minimise the impact of built development through appropriate location, choice of building materials, and the use of locally characteristic tree and shrub species."

1.3.28 Guidelines:

- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.*
- *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.*
- *Promote the sustainable management of existing ancient semi-natural woodland to safeguard its long-term survival.*
- *Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak and ash.*
- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses.*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type. This includes limestone or limestone and bricks and clay roof tiles in the Midvale Ridge, and red bricks and clay tiles in the Vale of White Horse and North Wessex Downs.*

1.3.29 Key Recommendations:

- *Safeguard and enhance landscape character of the surviving hedgerow network, ancient semi-natural woodlands, species-rich hedgerows and tree-lined watercourses.*
- *Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management and seek opportunities for extending and linking these habitats whenever appropriate and practicable".*

17. Vale Farmland LT

1.3.30 The Vale Farmland LT covers part of the Project Site (fields x) in the south of the Study Area and the key characteristic features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"This is a vale landscape defined by regularly shaped, arable fields enclosed by hawthorn hedges and hedgerow trees. A nucleated settlement pattern is also a characteristic feature of this landscape type.*
- *A gently rolling landscape associated with clay soils.*
- *Medium to large regularly shaped arable fields and more localised smaller grass fields.*
- *A well defined hedgerow pattern with characteristic hedgerow trees.*
- *Occasional ditches and minor streams bordered by crack willows and ash.*
- *A nucleated pattern of small, compact villages".*

1.3.31 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *"Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, in places it is becoming fragmented and intensively managed in areas dominated by arable farming. This is particularly apparent around the local character areas of Clifton Hampden, Peartree Hill, Farmoor and Charney Basset.*
- *The M40 corridor, in the Cherwell Valley to the east of Adderbury, intrudes into an otherwise rural and sparsely settled landscape.*
- *Landscapes on the fringes of settlements, such as Banbury and Oxford, are particularly vulnerable to change. The area between Oxford and Kidlington is criss-crossed by roads, with their associated junctions and services. There is also a significant impact from railways, hotels, golf courses and park and ride car parks. Even in relatively small settlements such as Adderbury, there is a business park and a recently established golf course. Their localised impact on the landscape has been mitigated to some extent by screen planting, although not always with native tree and shrub species characteristic of the area.*
- *There is a low to moderate impact from modern residential development within villages.*
- *Culham Laboratories have had a localised impact with their large complex of modern buildings and landscaped grounds. The dispersed*

nature of the buildings and ornamental planting has had an urbanizing effect on the rural setting".

1.3.32 The landscape strategy for the Vale Farmlands LT is summarised as:

- *"Conserve and enhance the well-defined pattern of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses. Minimise the impact of built development through appropriate location, choice of building materials, and the use of locally characteristic tree and shrub species".*

1.3.33 Guidelines:

- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.*
- *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.*
- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses.*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that are appropriate to this landscape type. This ranges from the red brick and clay tiles of the Vale, the limestones and stone tiles of the Cotswolds, through to the ironstones and slate tiles of the Northamptonshire Uplands.*

1.3.34 Key Recommendations:

- *Safeguard and enhance landscape character of the hedgerow network and tree-lined watercourses.*
- *Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management.*

19. Wooded Estatelands LT

1.3.35 The Wooded Estatelands LT covers part of the Project Site (fields x) in the middle of the Study Area and the key characteristic features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"A wooded estate landscape characterised by arable farming and small villages with a strong vernacular character.*
- *Rolling topography with localised steep slopes.*
- *Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes.*

- *Large parklands and mansion houses.*
- *A regularly shaped field pattern dominated by arable fields.*
- *Small villages with strong vernacular character".*

1.3.36 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *"Overall, the hedges are in good condition but intensive agriculture has led to the fragmentation of field boundaries, particularly in areas dominated by arable farming. In such areas the hedges are very intensively maintained, fragmented, and in places removed altogether and replaced by fences.*
- *The vernacular character is strong in most of the villages and there is generally a low impact from residential development, especially within the wider countryside. However, in some villages new residential development is out of character, even though it is contained within the village envelope. There is also sprawling development along some of the main roads, particularly the A420 and A338, although this is mitigated to some extent by woodland and mature garden trees.*
- *In very intensive areas of arable farming some of the new, large-scale barn complexes are visually intrusive.*
- *Some large-scale business parks using inappropriate building materials are also visually intrusive.*
- *There is a localised visual impact from operational quarries and partially restored landfill sites, particularly around places such as Stanford-in-the-Vale.*
- *The golf course next to the A420 close to Buckland is visually prominent. Frilford Heath golf course, by comparison, blends well with the surrounding countryside by integrating successfully with existing woodlands and heath.*
- *Overhead pylons are very intrusive in the more open areas where intensive arable farming predominates. This is evident in areas near Nuneham Park, Cumnor and Harcourt hills and to the north of Cuddesdon.*
- *In the flat, open area near Weston-on-the-Green, the large airfield is visually prominent, in spite of the dense screen planting".*

1.3.37 The landscape strategy for the Wooded Estatelands LT is summarised as:

- *"Conserve and maintain semi-natural and ancient semi-natural woodland. Where appropriate, replace non-native conifer species with native species such as oak and ash. Promote the establishment and management of medium to large-scale deciduous and mixed plantations in areas where the landscape structure is particularly weak."*

1.3.38 Guidelines:

- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.*

- *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.*
- *Conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle.*
- *Conserve parklands and their associated landscape features such as stone walls, lakes, mature trees and woods.*
- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly within parklands.*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as quarries, landfill sites, airfields and large-scale development, such as new barns and industrial units, with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.*

1.3.39 Key Recommendations:

- *Safeguard and enhance landscape character of the ancient woodlands, parklands, species-rich hedgerow network and tree-lined watercourses.*
- *Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management, and opportunities for expanding this resource should be promoted through agri-environment schemes and the restoration of mineral sites".*

24. Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes LT

1.3.40 The Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes LT covers part of the Project Site in the north of the Study Area and the key characteristic features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"This landscape type includes pastoral and wooded landscapes associated with the steep slopes and valleys of small streams and main rivers*
- *Steep sided valleys and slopes.*
- *Large, interlocking blocks of ancient and plantation woodland.*
- *Small pasture fields with localised unimproved grassland.*
- *Tall, thick hedges and densely scattered hedgerow trees.*
- *Small, intact villages and hamlets".*

1.3.41 The Forces for Change is summarised as:

- *"Although the landscape structure is generally strong, the hedgerow network is in decline in some areas, particularly to the north. This has resulted in gappy hedges which, in places, have been replaced by fences. In the Chilterns, around Shepherd's Green and the Stonor valley, the hedgerow pattern is more fragmented.*
- *Overall, the impact from new residential development is low, with the slight exception of villages such as Horley and Drayton. In other villages, including Middle Barton and Middle Assendon, recent development is more in keeping with the village character and pattern.*
- *At the northern fringe of Banbury there is a strong visual impact from industrial development. The M40 corridor has a strong impact on the tranquil, pastoral landscape of the valley".*

1.3.42 The landscape strategy for the Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes LT is summarised as:

- *"Conserve the characteristic mosaic of woodland and grassland along the valley sides and bottoms, as well as the unspoilt vernacular character of the villages."*

1.3.43 Guidelines:

- *Promote the sustainable management of existing deciduous woodland to safeguard its long-term survival.*
- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, field maple and hazel, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.*
- *Promote environmentally sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.*
- *Protect stone walls from deterioration.*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses and valley bottoms by planting willows, ash, alder and, where appropriate, pollarding willows.*
- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to watercourses.*
- *Safeguard, maintain and enhance and the characteristic landscape features of existing parklands including veteran trees, avenues of trees, lakes, woods and walls.*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen any development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type. This ranges from ironstone and slate in the Northamptonshire Uplands, the limestone and stone tiles of*

the Cotswolds, through to brick and flint, red and blue bricks and clay tiles in the Chilterns.

1.3.44 Key Recommendations

- *Safeguard and enhance the characteristic mosaic of woodland, parklands, hedgerows and grassland along the valley sides and bottoms.*
- *Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management, and opportunities for extending and linking this resource, should also be promoted by appropriate targeting of agri-environment schemes".*

1.4 District Landscape Character Assessments

1.4.1 It is noted that the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) has been renamed as the Cotswolds National Landscape. The Landscape Character Assessment has not been updated and therefore the following section still refers to the AONB when referencing he character assessment.

Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002)

1.4.2 *"The Cotswolds was designated as an AONB in 1966, in recognition of its special landscape character. The outstanding natural beauty of the area is derived from its remarkable visual unity, and yet scenic diversity. The unifying factor is, of course, the underlying geology".*

1.4.3 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB) Partnership together with the Countryside Agency appointed Landscape Design Associates (LDA)in 2002 to carry out a Landscape Character Assessment of the ANOB. The Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment draws from existing Partnership Authorities assessments and *"where LCAs are adopted as SPG, or form part of an Adopted Development Plan, these will take precedent over the broader findings of the Cotswolds LCA in respect of the determination of planning and development control matters and decisions, and other detailed considerations. Nevertheless, the Cotswolds AONB LCA will remain as an essential reference document in any decisions to provide a further perspective on the implications of any development, and its effect on the AONB Landscape*".

1.4.4 The study consists of:

- The Cotswolds ANOB Landscape Character Assessment (2002); and,
- The Cotswolds Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (2016).

1.4.5 The assessment is based on a refinement of the National Typology, and *"through detailed desk and field study has identified landscape character types based on a more detailed refinement of the National Types. Theses equate to 'local authority scale' of assessment".*

1.4.6 The study identifies 19 LCT's and 68 LCA's. No LCT or LCA fall within the Project Site, however two LCT's and LCA's are located within the Study Area, in close proximity to the west of fields 2.33 / 2.34 and are of relevance to this assessment. There locations are illustrated on Figure x and are as follows:

- LCA 11B: Stonesfield Lowlands; and,
- LCA 16B: Lower Evenlode Valley.

LCT 11: Dip-Slope Lowland

1.4.7 The key characteristics of LCT 11: Dip-Slope Lowland relevant to the Application Site and the Study Area include:

- *"Broad area of gently sloping, undulating lowland with a predominantly south-easterly fall, changing to a north-easterly fall in the southern perimeter of the area;*
- *lowland landform gently dissected by infrequent small watercourses flowing into the main rivers that cross the area, reinforcing the general grain of the topography;*
- *strong and structured farmland character, more intimate and smaller in scale than the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope;*
- *well-managed, productive agricultural landscape of mixed arable and improved pasture, together with more limited areas of permanent pasture, mainly within the valley bottoms;*
- *seasonal variations in colour and texture associated with mixed arable farming;*
- *medium to large scale, regular fields predominate mainly enclosed by hedgerows, with hedgerow trees, together with some stone walls or post and wire fencing;*
- *woodland cover limited to intermittent copses and shelterbelts within agricultural land, but balanced by extensive broadleaved, mixed and coniferous plantations within the large estates and associated farmland areas;*
- *limited areas of ancient woodland and species rich grassland;*
- *settlement pattern of intermittent small nucleated villages, hamlets, and isolated farmsteads, together with occasional larger settlements;*
- *distinctive pattern of large estates and associated planned parkland landscape and woodland occurring throughout the Dip-Slope Lowland; and*
- *evidence of long period of occupation of the area.*

LCA 11B: Stonesfield Lowlands

1.4.8 The key characteristics of LCA 11B: Stonefield Lowland relevant to the Application Site and the Study Area include:

- *"A small area of Dip-Slope Lowland is located on the extreme eastern part of the AONB, within which are the nucleated villages of Stonesfield and Combe. Although detached from the broader sweep of Dip-Slope Lowland to the west, physiographically it forms the transition to lower land from the adjacent area of High Wold Dip-Slope that extends across*

a more elevated and rolling landscape north and south of the Evenlode Valley.

- *Beyond the two villages, land use is entirely under agriculture with a predominance of arable production within large regular fields, with evidence of amalgamation. The broad expansive character is emphasised by the large fields, low hedges, and evidence of hedge loss, as well as the generally limited woodland cover. There is, however, a notable area of ancient woodland at Notoaks Wood between the two villages, and occasional geometric blocks of coniferous and broadleaved woodland plantations, particularly north of Combe. In keeping with the local name, a considerable number of rocks and stones are visible in the soil; this is particularly evident during the winter period after ploughing.*
- *The village of Stonesfield gives its name to the 'Stonesfield Slates' that were quarried in the vicinity of the village for many years. The particular characteristics of the fissile sandy limestone rock that outcrops at the base of the Great Oolite make it particularly suitable for splitting into roof 'slates'. Historically the stone was dug in the Autumn and spread out on the ground for winter frosts to invade the thin films of water within the stone to weaken it so that in spring a blow from a mallet would be enough to split the stone into slates. In the village of Stonesfield quarries were small enterprises and the spreading of the stone in the fields was carried out by almost the entire village. Mining of the stone slates ceased over a century ago, when the source was worked out, but the legacy that this locally occurring horizon has had on the appearance of buildings within the Cotswolds is immeasurable. Many of the older buildings in this character area are roofed in locally mined slates.*
- *Although lying beyond the AONB, the influence of the adjacent estate managed landscape of Blenheim Park is evident. The Park and house was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1987. The Palace and grounds were given to John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough in recognition of his victory over the French in 1704. It is regarded as a perfect example of an 18th century princely home. The Palace is set within an impressive designed landscape attributable to Lancelot 'Capability' Brown.*
- *The line of the former Roman road, Akeman Street crosses the character area, and although no longer used as a road, it now has a recreational focus and is followed by the Oxfordshire Way.*

LCT 16: Broad Floodplain Valley

1.4.9 The key characteristics of LCT 16: Broad Floodplain Valley relevant to the Application Site and the Study Area include:

- *"Intimate, small scale settled and relatively busy landscape, contrasting with more remote areas of High Wold;*
- *well-defined broad valley profile of open flat floodplain, river terraces and gentle convex slopes;*

- *river floodplain features such as meanders, water meadows, ponds, old river channels and islands;*
- *floodplain and riverside trees including pollarded willows;*
- *wooded bluffs and areas of species rich grassland on areas of steep landform;*
- *river corridor marked by main transport routes through the valley;*
- *valley sides cloaked in improved pasture and arable land form a back drop to the valley floor landscapes;*
- *land use within valley floor and floodplain dominated by pasture although some extensive areas of arable land on areas less prone to flooding;*
- *fields defined by hedgerows and some stone walls although the robust framework is eroded by hedgerow loss and the use of post and wire fences;*
- *river channel habitats including standing water important to a diverse range of flora and fauna;*
- *prolific archaeological remains likely to be hidden by fluvial and human activity;*
- *linear settlements often located at ancient bridging points established in the Saxon or medieval period; and,*
- *historic character of villages evident in their distinctive layout, building styles and use of Cotswolds limestone*

LCA 16B: Lower Evenlode Valley

1.4.10 The key characteristics of LCT 16B: Lower Evenlode Valley relevant to the Application Site and the Study Area include:

- *"Unlike its upper section, the Lower Evenlode Valley forms a distinct landform unit, and despite varying in width, creates a sense of enclosure and a strong sense of place.*
- *The valley floor has a distinct pastoral, intimate and riparian character with a close visual relationship with its enclosing valley sides along which lie a string of valley side settlements.*
- *The overall valley form is characterised by gently sloping convex sides and a wide flat floodplain through which the river flows in a complex series of meanders. On its northern slopes, the smooth and gentle landform of the valley side is interrupted by a number of minor tributary streams that flow off the West Enstone Uplands landscape character area. To the south the valley has a gentler profile as it rises up onto the Wychwood Forest Character Area. Below Stonesfeld the valley profile is narrower, with wooded slopes bordering the river, the course of which follows a series of tight meanders, and through which the course of the Oxford to Worcester rail line cuts a direct route.*

- *The free draining soils on the gentle valley slopes are predominantly used for arable farming although improved pastures are also evident. Fields are divided by hedgerows, except on the heavier clay soils of the floodplain where post and wire fences predominate. Here, permanent pasture is prevalent although areas of arable farmland tend to mirror the presence of the more free draining river terrace gravels as is the case to the south of Chadlington.*
- *The Evenlode contains a string of settlements located along the valley sides, including the main settlements of Charlbury, Ascott-under-Wychwood and Chadlington. These are interspersed with numerous villages and hamlets and a dispersed pattern of large farms. Together these various forms of settlements form a well-populated area, and yet one which retains a distinct rural character.*
- *The course of the London to Worcester rail line is a major landscape feature and a number of settlements along its route have stations. This was a significant factor in the post war expansion of the villages within the valley.*
- *There are numerous prehistoric sites in and bordering the valley. On the neighbouring uplands, numerous barrows and prehistoric sites such as Knollbury and the Hawk Stone indicate that the valley was an important trade route and area of settlement and indeed modern roads and footpaths linking these sites to the valley may be contemporary with their construction. Perhaps the most significant prehistoric landscape feature in the valley is the small part of the Grims Ditch to the south of Charlbury. This is thought to be the boundary of an Iron Age oppidum, or tribal centre. Longer and more impressive stretches can be found beyond the AONB boundary, particularly in Ditchley Park.*
- *Later sites of historic importance include the North Leigh Roman villa site to the south of Stonesfield and Cornbury Park, located on the eastern fringes of Wychwood Forest, both of which are located on the gentle southern slopes overlooking the river.*

Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy Guidelines

1.4.11 Following on from the findings of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (Adopted June 2016) “provides an overview of the forces for change that are influencing the landscape and outlines a series of landscape and management strategies to help guide change in a positive and sustainable way”. The guidelines provide “strategies and guidelines for the 19 landscape character types to help manage change in a sustainable and positive way”. Below are details taken from the landscape strategy guidelines for the:

- 11. Dip-slope Lowland LT
- 16 Broad Floodplain Valley

11. Dip-slope Lowland

1.4.12 The Landscape Strategy and Guidelines details the following with regards to Landscape Sensitivity:

- *"The strongly structured cultivated Dip-Slope Lowland landscape is sensitive to large scale developments that might interrupt wide views across the landscape and in particular to developments that would introduce tall vertical elements such as pylons and wind turbines.*
- *However, the presence of more intensively managed landscapes makes the Dip Slope Lowlands generally less sensitive than remoter and more elevated landscapes on the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope. Areas where a strong woodland framework exists are particularly suited to accommodate development. However, development proposals should avoid extensive new woodland planting to screen developments, as this would compromise the open character of the landscape and long views across the Dip-Slope Lowlands.*
- *Areas of ancient woodland and species rich grassland represent a small fraction of the extent that once existed, and are therefore highly sensitive to developments that might compromise their survival or setting. Parkland landscapes are particularly sensitive to developments that might compromise their historic character and the contribution they make to the wider landscape of the Dip-Slope Lowlands. Care should be taken to ensure that developments do not compromise elements that constitute the wider setting of designed parklands such as estate villages and tree plantations".*

1.4.13 The table below has been taken from the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines for the LCT 11. Dip-slope Lowland

Table 1.1: Landscape strategies and guidelines for LCT 11 Dip-slope lowland

Local Forces for Change	Potential Landscape Implications	Landscape Strategies and Guidelines
Solar Farms	• Industrialisation of the rural landscape • Change of character due to colour and texture and heliographic glint • Loss of seasonal change in the landscape • Loss of characteristic agricultural landscape • Damage to and loss of landscape features such as Ridge and Furrow, Strip Lynchets, trees and dry stone walls • Impact of supporting infrastructure such as buildings, cables, roadways, security fencing, CCTV masts and lighting. • Concealment of geomorphological or archaeological features • Decline in quality of landscape	• Prevent proposals for solar farms that will impact negatively on landscape character and/or intrude into views • Ensure a comprehensive LVIA is undertaken (including potential cumulative effects) • Avoid proposals that will result in the loss or harm to landscape features such as Strip Lynchets, hedgerows and walls • Ensure a glint/glare assessment is undertaken to determine the heliographic impact on receptors. • Reduce landscape impact with appropriate screening • Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables • Keep supporting infrastructure to a minimum and ensure it is in keeping with landscape character. • Ensure removal and restoration on temporary construction access. • Avoid the inclusion of any security lighting proposals • Seek appropriate landscape enhancement to field boundaries and margins within solar farm development proposals. • Promote the use of roof space for photovoltaic panels particularly on modern

16 Broad Floodplain Valley

1.4.14 The Landscape Strategy and Guidelines details the following with regards to Landscape Sensitivity:

- *"The broad valleys retain a quiet, rural character. The landscape along the valley floor has an intimate, enclosed character with views limited by vegetation and landform. Wide views from the upper valley slopes and over long stretches of the valley are possible, thus increasing the sensitivity of the valleys to large scale built development that might interrupt views or impact on their rural character. Limited woodland cover in the valleys further reduces the capacity of the valleys to accommodate development as there is little to integrate new structures to their surroundings. The gently sloping valley sides also have limited development capacity as they often form an agricultural backdrop to views from the valley floor.*
- *The floodplain and valley floor are highly sensitive to development. Traditionally these areas have been undeveloped and retained as seasonal grazing land although limited areas are increasingly being used for permanent pasture and arable farming. The floodplain retains many features of nature conservation and historic/ archaeological interest that are sensitive to development. Indeed the natural river profile is also an important feature of the landscape that should be protected and enhanced wherever possible.*

- *Existing settlements along the valley floor and on the valley sides may have some capacity for built development although new buildings should respect local building styles and materials, ensuring that key views along the valleys to and from prominent features such as churches are retained and that settlement forms are perpetuated in the layout and location of new development".*

1.4.15 The table below has been taken from the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines for the LCT 16. Broad Floodplain Valley.

Table 1.2: Landscape strategies and guidelines for the LCT 16 Broad floodplain valley

Local Forces for Change	Potential Landscape Implications	Landscape Strategies and Guidelines
Solar Farms	• Industrialisation of the rural landscape • Change of character due to colour and texture and heliographic glint • Loss of seasonal change in the landscape • Loss of characteristic agricultural landscape • Damage to and loss of landscape features such as Ridge and Furrow, Strip Lynchets, trees and hedges • Impact of supporting infrastructure such as buildings, cables, roadways, security fencing, CCTV masts and lighting. • Concealment of geomorphological or archaeological features • Decline in quality of landscape	• Prevent proposals for solar farms that will impact negatively on landscape character and/or intrude into views including from the adjacent High Wold and Dip-slope landscape types • Ensure a comprehensive LVIA is undertaken (including potential cumulative effects) • Avoid proposals that will result in the loss or harm to landscape features such as ridge and furrow, hedgerows and walls • Ensure a glint/glare assessment is undertaken to determine the heliographic impact on receptors. • Reduce landscape impact with appropriate screening • Bury cables underground and seek opportunities to bury existing overhead cables • Keep supporting infrastructure to a minimum and ensure it is in keeping with landscape character. • Ensure removal and restoration on temporary construction access. • Avoid the inclusion of any security lighting proposals • Seek appropriate landscape enhancement to field boundaries and margins within solar farm development proposals. • Promote the use of roof space for photovoltaic panels particularly on modern farm buildings

Oxford City Council

1.4.16 Oxfordshire City Council have produced A Character Assessment of Oxford in the Landscape Setting (2002) and the following LCAs are located within the Study Area:

- Lowland Clay Vales
- Rivers and Pastoral Floodplains
- Settled and Open River Terraces

1.4.17 As these LCA's are located some distance from the Project Site it is considered they have little potential to be significantly affected by the Project and are therefore not considered any further within this assessment.

Vale of White Horse District Council

1.4.18 The Vale of White Horse District Council have produced the Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment (2017). The assessment identifies 12 Landscape Types (LT) which cover the District and includes descriptions of specific Character Areas (CA) within each LT.

1.4.19 The following LT's and CA's cover the Project Site and have the potential to be affected by the Project:

- LM: Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland
- LM19: Whitley Copse to Chawley Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland CA
- LM20: Farmoor to Botley Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland CA

1.4.20 For each LT and CA the assessment identifies Key Characteristics and these are detailed below:

LM: Corallian Landscape Ridge with Woodland LT

1.4.21 Landscape Type LM: Corallian Landscape Ridge with Woodland covers part of the Project Site in the south (fields x). The key characteristics features relevant to the Application Site detailed below support the Vale Farmland and Rolling Farmland CA's. Key characteristics are summarised as:

- *"Underlying Corallian Limestone contributes to form a low ridge which protrudes above the clay and alluvial landscapes to the north and south.*
- *The north facing slopes of the ridge are relatively steep, whilst the south facing slopes are gentler and form a transition to the Upper Vale to the south.*
- *The Corallian Limestone Ridge features a mixture of relatively large scale arable and pastoral farmland, with areas of estate land, and smaller scale parcels of land including paddocks associated with settlement.*
- *There are dispersed blocks of significant woodland across the landscape, including areas of ancient woodland.*
- *The hedgerow network along field boundaries varies, but there is a greater intactness than other Types within the District. Hedges frequently contain mature trees such as Oaks. Minor watercourses flow from the ridge towards the Thames and Ock.*
- *There are areas of rare semi-natural habitats including fens, wet woodland, and calcareous grass heaths, including fens around Frilford and Cothill.*
- *There are nucleated settlements, of varying size, across the Corallian Limestone Ridge, as well as scattered large country house and farmsteads, often located on high points with views over the Vale landscapes to the north and south.*

- *The eastern end of the Corallian Limestone Ridge has intervisibility with the city of Oxford, and the Downs are frequently seen on the horizon to the south.*

LM19: Whitley Copse to Chawley Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland CA

1.4.22 Character Area LM19: Whitley Copse to Chawley Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland covers part of the Project Site in the south (fields x). The key characteristics features relevant to the Application Site detailed below support the Vale Farmland and Rolling Farmland CA's. The key characteristics features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"The Character Area is underlain by a combination of Stanford Limestone Formation, Hazelbury Bryan Sandstone, Siltstone and Mudstone Formation, and Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Mudstone Formation on the lower slopes to the west.*
- *The landform predominately consists of north facing slopes, which fall from the flatter hill top which reaches a height of approximately 110m AOD within the south-eastern corner of the Character Area. To the west, the slopes turn to face the Thames.*
- *The area contains an irregular pattern of medium scale pastoral and arable fields, interspersed with a considerable number of blocks of woodland.*
- *Field boundaries are lined with a network of hedges and occasional hedge trees. Hedges vary in quality, and include low clipped hawthorn hedges as well as more substantial lines of vegetation including mature trees such as oak and sycamore.*
- *A significant proportion of the woodland is recorded as ancient woodland, and fields are classified as a mixture of grade 2, 3 and 4 agricultural land.*
- *Pylons cross through the middle of the Character Area. Internally, settlement is limited to occasional isolated small groups of dwellings and scattered farmsteads.*
- *The area abuts the western edge of Botley and the northern edge of Cumnor. The western end of Botley is largely obscured from the wider landscape by layers of vegetation to the east of the A420, which passes through the eastern end of the Character Area, partially in cutting, and edged with planting.*
- *The Character Area provides the northern setting to Cumnor, including its conservation area and listed buildings within an area identified as having medieval history. The north edge of the village is filtered by tree cover, although buildings, including the tower of St Michael's Church, are visible from the adjacent upper part of the Character Area.*
- *The B4017 travels down the slope between Cumnor and Farmoor, and there are public rights of way, including part of the Oxford Greenbelt Way*

Long Distance Path. However, parts of the Character Area to the west have limited public access.

- *The north facing slopes have wide views north over the Thames Vale, including Farmoor Reservoir, as well as views of rising ground including wooded Wytham Hill on the horizon to the north. There are panoramic views north from the B4017, after leaving the built up area of Cumnor at the southern edge of the Character Area.*
- *Lower Whitley and Upper Whitley farms have listed buildings.*
- *The area is identified as having a mixture of post medieval and modern fieldscapes.*
- *This is a rural landscape with distinctive views framed by woodland. There is a sense of peace and tranquillity from public rights of way as they pass between blocks of woodland away from development. Human influences including pylons, roads and settlement reduce the sense of remoteness.*

LM20: Farmoor to Botley Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland CA

1.4.23 Character Area LM20: Farmoor to Botley Corallian Limestone Ridge with Woodland is located adjacent to the north of Project (fields x). The key characteristics features relevant to the Application Site detailed below support the Vale Farmland CA The key characteristics features relevant to the Application Site and the surrounding areas are summarised as:

- *"The Character Area is underlain predominately by the Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Formation Mudstone bedrock geology.*
- *A lower, flatter, area within the overall ridge, which falls very gently towards Farmoor Reservoir at approximately 65m AOD. Contained by wooded slopes to the north and south.*
- *The Character Area consists predominantly of large scale arable fields, with some smaller areas of pasture and tree cover at the eastern and western ends of the area.*
- *Fields are classified as grade 3 and 4 agricultural land.*
- *There is limited woodland within the main body of the area, but there is a relatively intact network of hedgerows along field boundaries.*
- *Pylons cross the eastern and western ends of the Character Area.*
- *There is limited settlement internally, other than occasional small pockets of housing and isolated farmsteads.*
- *The Character Area abuts Farmoor and the large Farmoor reservoir to the west, and the A420 road and Botley to the east. The area forms a gap between Farmoor and Botley, with boundary vegetation filtering views of the settlement edges and providing visual separation between the two settlements.*

- *The B4044 borders the Character Area to the north. Internal vehicle access is limited to tracks. Public rights of way connect across most parts of the area and link to the Oxford Greenbelt Way Long Distance Path to the south.*
- *Views of surrounding wooded hills are prominent to the north and south and form a wooded horizon.*
- *Valley Farm, Red House Farm and Nobles contain listed buildings.*
- *The area is identified as having a mixture of post medieval and modern fieldscape.*
- *This is a rural, relatively unsettled area, with a keen sense of place, contained by the slopes to the north and south. Pylons and traffic along the B4044 are detracting features, however there is a degree of peace and tranquillity along footpaths within the middle of the area.*

West Oxfordshire District Council

1.4.24 West Oxfordshire District Council commissioned Atlantic Consultants to produce the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (WOLA) (1998). The assessment identifies 14 Landscape Character Areas (LCA) and 6 Landscape Types (LT) (that are divided into sub-types that reflect degrees of character variation within the main types) and describes landscape character *"together with appropriate guidelines for landscape enhancement and built development".*

1.4.25 The study identifies variations in landscape quality and condition and provides Landscape Guidelines that identify enhancement priorities and Development Sensitivities.

1.4.26 The Project Sites falls within the following Landscape Character Areas which would be directly affected:

- LCA 4: Eastern Parks and Valleys; and,
- LCA 11: Eynsham Vale.

LCA 4: Eastern Parks and Valleys

1.4.27 Landscape and visual character:

"The parkland and estate landscapes are the dominant feature of this area, creating a large-scale mosaic of woodland and farmland within which are set the mansions and formal elements of the designed parkland landscape".

1.4.28 Key landmarks and landscape features:

- *mansions and formal parkland features of the eighteenth century designed landscapes of Blenheim Palace, Rousham and Ditchley Park;*
- *attractive stone buildings within Conservation Areas and in open countryside, including manor houses, churches and farm buildings.*

Landscape quality and key issues

1.4.29 This character area is outside the Cotswolds AONB but it lies within an Area cl High Landscape Value and includes some of the most outstanding designed landscapes in the country and a number of other features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- *Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Blenheim Palaoe, Ditchley Park, Rousham and Kiddington;*
- *Conservation Areas at Woodstock, Wootton and Tackley;*
- *three Sites of Special Scientific Interest, a Ia::al. Nature Reserve and extensive remnants . of ancient semi-natural woodland;*
- *a significant concentration of Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Ditchley area.*

1.4.30 The Eastern Parks and Valleys contains large areas of high quality, unspoilt and valued landscape with a rural and attractive character. There are a few detracting influences around settlements and main roads but the localised variations in quality and condition are mainly related to the effects of agricultural land management practice.

1.4.31 The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- *agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;*
- *loss of semi-natural broad-leaved woodland*
- *or conversion to commercial coniferous woodland;*
- *visual intrusion of prominent structures such as communication masts and large farm buildings;*
- *'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and road corridors.*

Guidelines for parkland and estate landscapes

1.4.32 Enhancement priorities:

- *maintain, and where necessary, restore historic parkland landscapes and features,*
- *including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, lakes, rides, woods, boundary walls and structures;*
- *retain mature boundary and roadside trees and replant as necessary;*
- *manage and extend existing areas of woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;*
- *plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce typically endosed, well-wooded character;*
- *retain areas of permanent pasture and resist further conversion to arable.*

1.4.33 Development sensitivities:

- *historic parkland landscapes are of exceptional landscape value and extremely sensitive to development;*
- *estate farmland is also generally of high scenic*
- *quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust*

LCA 11: Eynsham Vale

1.4.34 Landscape and visual character:

"Like the Western Vale Fringes, the typical character of this area is defined by its low-lying and gentle relief and the patchwork of large, regularly shaped fields and comparatively strong structure of hedgerows and trees".

1.4.35 Key landmarks and landscape features:

- *intrusive buildings and urban features around fringes of Eynsham.*

1.4.36 Landscape quality and key issues:

1.4.37 This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations and only a small part lies within the Area of High Landscape Value. However, it includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- *Conservation Areas at Church Hanborough, Bladen, Cassington and Eynsham;*
- *a Park and Garden of Special Interest at*
- *Eynsham Hall;*
- *a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the terrace gravels near Eynsham;*
- *some large remnants of Ancient Semi-natural Woodland scattered a:ross the area.*

1.4.38 Overall, the Eynsham Vale has an attractive and largely unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which demand different strategies for management and enhancement.

1.4.39 The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- *agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and tss cf field boundaries;*
- *intrusion from built development, heavy traffic on main roads (particularly the A40) and overhead power lines;*
- *expansion of rural settlements and 'suburbanisation' of the wider countryside.*

Guidelines for parkland and estate landscapes

1.4.40 Enhancement priorities:

- *maintain, and where necessary, restore parkland landscape and features at Eynsham Pak;*
- *retain mature hedges, boundary trees and*
- *roadside avenues and replant a. necessary;*
- *manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;*
- *plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland w!thin estate farmland to reinforce endosed, wooded character;*
- *retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.*

1.4.41 Development sensitivities:

- *parkland landscapes and their component features are cf high landscape value and very sensitive to development;*
- *estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust*