



# ARCUS

**EIA SCREENING REPORT  
SUBMITTED UNDER THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING  
(ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017**

**HAYTON HOUSE SOLAR FARM WITH BATTERY STORAGE**

**DECEMBER 2021**

ec  energy  
Powering renewables .



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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Arcus Consultancy Services Ltd ('Arcus'), on behalf of Econergy International Ltd ('the Applicant'), formally requests an EIA Screening Opinion from Selby District Council ('the Council'), which contains 100.40 ha of the development site, and will include the solar park, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), and the majority of the access. The Red Line Boundary for the access road also crosses into Leeds District Council, but as only 0.16 ha of the site and 220 m of the access road is located within this District, a Screening Opinion is not being requested from this council. The EIA Screening Opinion is for a proposed ground mounted solar photovoltaic ('PV') development of circa 49.9 Megawatts ('MW') and a BESS, also of 49.9 MW ('the Development'), with associated infrastructure and landscaping, on land at Hayton House Farm, approximately 1.2 km north east of the centre of Aberford, and 5.5 km south west of Tadcaster ('the Site').

A plan showing the extent of the Site (outlined in red) is provided as Figure 1, Appendix A which has a total area of approximately 100.56 ha. The final footprint of the Development would not be as large as this, more likely about 70-80 ha, and will be refined following environmental assessments. A plan showing the environmental considerations within 2 km of the Site is provided as Figure 2, Appendix A.

The EIA screening opinion request is made pursuant to Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, in order to determine whether or not a statutory environmental impact assessment (EIA) is required in accordance with those Regulations (known as 'the EIA Regulations').

This report sets out a brief description of the Development and then goes on to provide an assessment of the Development in terms of the EIA Regulations screening criteria and guidance set out in Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

### **1.2 The Development and the EIA Regulations (2017)**

The EIA Regulations define EIA development as either:

- (a) Schedule 1 development; or
- (b) Schedule 2 development likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location.

Solar development is not listed in Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations.

There is also no express threshold for solar developments to be considered as Schedule 2 development under the EIA Regulations. However, a development area threshold of 0.5 ha is applied to category 3 (a) industrial installations for the production of electricity.

The Development exceeds the Schedule 2 area threshold of 0.5 hectares and, as such, whether the Development is EIA development or not depends on an assessment against the screening selection criteria, as set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations, which comprise:

- Characteristics of the development;
- Location of the development; and
- Characteristics of the potential impact.

PPG paragraph 018, states that EIA will only apply to a small proportion of projects and only those which are likely to have significant effects.

The key question is whether or not the Development would be likely to give rise to significant effects on the receiving environment, taking into account the selection criteria

in Schedule 3. An assessment of the potential effects of the Development is presented in Section 2 of this report.

## 2 DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND LOCATION

### 2.1 Site Location and Surroundings

The 'red line boundary' shown in Figure 1, Appendix A illustrates the extent of the Site, occupying an area of approximately 100.56 ha. This is the area being considered for the Development, and the final design will be informed by ongoing environmental assessments including a landscape and visual appraisal, heritage assessment, agricultural land classification survey, ecology surveys and a flood risk assessment. The general approach to design and minimising environmental effects is to avoid impacts in the first instance and where that is not possible then mitigation and or enhancement may be required.

The aspect and topography of the Site is broadly flat and gently sloping from approximately 70 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the north western land parcel, to approximately 30 m AOD in the south of the Site. The land in the surrounding area is predominantly flat and gently undulating, with elevations ranging between 110 m AOD and 20 m AOD. The Site is located on Green Belt Land.

The Site comprises agricultural land, located approximately 1.2 km north east of the centre of the town of Aberford, West Yorkshire (with the solar park approximately 600 m from its western edge), and to the east of the A1(M). The Site is made up of two land parcels, connected by an existing agricultural track through Hayton Wood, which is designated as Ancient Replanted Woodland. The solar site is adjacent to South Approach, approximately 650 m east of Main Street, 600 m east of the A1 (M), and 1.2 km south of the A64. The Site will be accessed by South Approach, which in turn provides access to Main Street and beyond to the A64 and the A1(M). The grid connection will connect to an existing electricity pylon to the west of the Site, which connects to Bramham 132 kV substation, 2.7 km to the north of the Site.

In the wider area, there are various isolated farms and residential properties including:

- Hayton House (an involved property) – surrounded by the Site to the east, north, and south, approximately 90 m north of the Site boundary at its closest point;
- Black Horse Farm and its associated buildings:
  - Black Horse Farm – approximately 35 m north of the access road;
  - The Cottage – approximately 20 m north of the access road; and
  - Willow Tree Cottage, Nevison's Rest, The Granary, and The Barn – approximately 50 m south of the access road;
- Black Horse Court – approximately 80 m north of the access road;
- Nutmill Farm Cottage – approximately 10 m north of the access road;
- Hayton House Cottage – approximately 10 m north of the access road;
- Nut Hill Cottages – approximately 200 m north of the access road;
- Humphrey Dale Cottage – approximately 800 m south of the north western land parcel, and 800 m west of the southern land parcel.
- Field Cottage – approximately 400 m south of the Site;
- 1 to 4 Lowlead Cottages – approximately 760 m south west of the Site.
- Newstead Farm – approximately 200 m north of the Site;
- Lodge Farm and Lodge Farm Cottage – approximately 600 m north east of the Site;
- Peggy Ellerton Farm – approximately 650 m north east of the Site; and
- St Leonard's Chapel – approximately 780 m north of the Site.

The Site benefits from large areas of woodland along many of its boundaries, and hedgerows and trees along the remaining areas which provide screening, and which are proposed to be retained and enhanced with the Development.

## **2.2 The Development**

### **2.2.1 Summary Description and Land take Requirements**

The Development would comprise of a ground mounted solar PV farm with associated infrastructure including housing for inverters, transformers, battery storage containers and electrical equipment, as well as fencing, security cameras, cabling and access tracks. The Development would have an export capacity of up to 49.9 megawatts (MW) and would be temporary with an operational period of 40 years. The total Site area is approximately 100.56 ha. The Site will be subject to numerous environmental surveys and assessments which will be used to identify constraints and refine the design. The design will evolve to avoid potentially significant environmental effects and embedded mitigation should form part of the design.

Given the nature of the development, ground excavation is not required for panel installation. Strings or rows of solar panels would be mounted on metal frames, likely to be screwed or piled to a depth of between 1-2 m below the ground depending on ground conditions. In the event that archaeological sensitivities are identified, the use of concrete footings could be implemented in these areas to avoid impacts on buried archaeology as they have limited below ground presence, typically less than ploughing depth.

As part of the design, there are gaps between the rows of panels and around the perimeter of the panels up to existing field boundaries, and therefore the area of land directly impacted by the Development is vastly smaller than the site area. Areas of new hardstanding would be limited to the substation and inverter kiosk foundations, and foundations for the District Network Operator (DNO) and client substations.

### **2.2.2 Size and Appearance**

The Development would consist of rows of solar panels known as strings. The panels are composed of photovoltaic cells, are dark in hue, and are designed to maximise the absorbency of the sun's rays and minimise solar glare. Each string of panels would be mounted on a rack comprising metal poles anchored to the ground. A tracker system is proposed, whereby the strings would run north-south so that the panels would tilt to face east or west depending on the time of day.

The scale and nature of the associated infrastructure is anticipated to be as follows:

- Strings or rows of solar panels mounted on metal frames;
- Lower edge of panel typically 0.8 m from the ground;
- Highest point of panel up to a maximum of 4 m in height from the ground when tilted, but typically 2.5 m from ground or less;
- Inverters and transformers housed in GRP enclosures or containers, typically measuring 7 m x 2.5 m x 3 m and located throughout the solar farm;
- Substation compound up to 3 m tall, including DNO and Client substation kiosks (dimensions to be confirmed);
- 25 No. Battery Storage Containers, typically 12 m x 3 m x 3 m (h) with associated inverters and transformers. This would be housed in a central compound close to the substation or close to the solar inverters across the solar farm;
- Additional storage containers of approximately 3 m;
- 2.4 m high perimeter fence/ deer fence;
- CCTV cameras located on 3 m high poles;
- Internal access tracks – 3.5 m wide (kept to a minimum across the site); and
- Underground cabling to connect the Development to the grid.

### **2.2.3 Site / Development Access**

The main access route to Site would be via South Approach, which runs along the eastern side of the A1(M) and passes beneath it to meet Main Street, which provides access to the A64 and A1(M). South Approach is used by the landowner to access their property, and passes along the northern boundary of the Site and passes through Hayton Wood to connect to the south eastern parcel of land. No highway improvements to South Approach are expected to be required in order to facilitate the Development.

Access to the Development would utilise the existing South Approach which already passes through the Site, and it is likely that the temporary construction compound (TCC) for the Development will be located along this route.

Access across the wider Site from the TCC would be via existing field access tracks that will then be extended as needed to reach areas of panels further within the Site; this is to minimise the requirement for new field entrances and reduce traffic on the roads around the Site during the construction period. Where new access tracks are required, they will be constructed approximately 3.5 m wide to accommodate HGV deliveries during construction.

### **2.2.4 Cumulative Developments**

A review of planning applications within 5 km of the Site has identified no applications for solar farms in the vicinity of the Site.

A review of the Councils' online planning application database and aerial mapping identified no operational solar farms within 5 km of the Site. The operational 10.3 MW Hook Moor Onshore Wind Farm is located 2.5 km south of the Site. Given the distance between this development and the Site, and the different forms of renewable energy generation, substantial cumulative effects with the Development are unlikely. For the purposes of this EIA Screening Report, there are not considered to be any potential cumulative effects with other developments and so cumulative effects are not considered further.

A planning history search of planning applications relating to the Site was undertaken using Selby District Council's and Leeds District Council's planning application search facilities. No relevant past planning applications were recorded on the Site. The search was then extended to the 2 km Search Area, and no planned major developments were identified.

There are no further extant planning applications or permissions with potential for significant combined impacts with the Development.

The planning application database will be regularly monitored for future solar farm applications, and any potential cumulative effects considered as necessary within technical assessments submitted alongside any future planning application.

## **3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As stated in Section 1.2, screening of the Development requires an assessment as to whether it is "likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location" (Schedule 2). The potential for significant effects depends on the sensitivity of the receiving environment to the type of changes proposed, combined with the magnitude and scale of changes proposed, including in combination with other development.

Information on the methodology for EIA screening is presented in this section. The characteristics of the Site and Development are described in Section 2 above, and other potentially relevant developments in Section 2.2.4. Section 4 then describes the existing environment by EIA topic, followed in each EIA topic section by an appraisal of the potential



for impacts, consideration of the magnitude of those impacts, and whether or not there is the potential for significant effects.

### 3.2 Establishing the Baseline

In order to evaluate the likely environmental effects, information relating to the existing environmental conditions (known as the 'baseline' conditions) has been collected through desktop research and site visits. Information has been gathered using a variety of sources, including:

- Selby District Council websites (e.g. online planning application searches, Local Plan proposals map);
- Leeds District Council websites (e.g. online planning application searches, Local Plan proposals map);
- ArcGIS online and Magic.gov.uk, with data provided by:
  - Natural England;
  - Historic England;
  - the Environment Agency;
  - Sustrans;
  - Ordnance Survey open data;
  - National Trust; and
  - Historic Environment Records.

The baseline is used to help describe the Site location, to identify potentially sensitive receptors on and near the Site, and to help characterise the potential impacts.

### 3.3 Identifying the Potential for Significant Effects

The changes to the Site and its surrounding environment which may take place during the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Development have been identified and considered for potential direct or indirect changes to environmental features within or outside of the Site. Changes to the environment are known as 'impacts', and anything which benefits or creates detriment to an environmental feature is known as an 'effect' – reference is made to either 'beneficial' or 'adverse' effects. Any impacts are appraised using professional judgement by experienced EIA practitioners to determine the potential for significant effects on receptors. The following potential effects are considered:

- Direct and indirect effects<sup>1</sup>;
- Primary and secondary effects<sup>2</sup>;
- Short, medium and long-term effects; and
- Permanent and temporary effects.

Establishing the baseline, including predicted future conditions without the Development, is the key basis for predicting the potential for impacts and effects at this screening stage, combined with the depth and breadth of experience of the author<sup>3</sup> in conducting EIA and environmental assessment of a range of development types, and reviews of other similar developments.

In arriving at conclusions about the potential for significant effects, the author has, in line with EIA assessment techniques, considered (and appropriately referenced) sensitivity of the receptors and the predicted magnitude of change from the baseline conditions (either beneficial or adverse). This is done because the overall significance of potential likely

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<sup>1</sup> broadly those which occur in the same time and place as the action (direct), vs. those which occur some distance away or time after the action (indirect).

<sup>2</sup> primary being caused by the action itself, e.g. removing a habitat as part of clearance of a site for construction, and secondary being caused by subsequent consequence of the action, e.g. a substance / pollutant entering the environment and then being taken up by people, crops / livestock, or wildlife generally through consumption, absorption or inhalation.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Mott, Associate Director, IEMA registered EIA practitioner.

environmental effects (when assessed in EIA) is determined by the interaction of the above two factors. However, EIA Screening is not a full, in-depth assessment (which would be done if EIA is required) and relies mostly on understanding of the baseline and professional judgement, including previous experience of similar developments.

### 3.4 Mitigation

Where possible, mitigation measures will be “embedded into” the overall design strategy rather than “added on” to the proposals. An example of this is screening to reduce the magnitude of visual effects, and habitat creation where consideration will be given to tree and woodland planting and wildflower meadow on sections of the site following completion of the ecological and landscape assessment. By being flexible with the design, the project will continue to respond to the findings of consultation and environmental assessment work through an iterative process.

## 4 ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE AND SCREENING ASSESSMENT

### 4.1 Use of Natural Resources

The nature of the Development is to utilise sunlight to generate electricity. Sunlight is a renewable resource and the Development will contribute to a reduction in the use of non-renewable natural resources for the same purpose. Furthermore, there would be extremely limited use of other natural resources in construction and during operation with the Site being restored when the Development is decommissioned after 40 years.

Natural resources would therefore not be affected in terms of their relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity and there is **no potential for significant effects on non-renewable natural resources**.

(See also ‘Hydrology’ and ‘Land-use & Soils’ below.)

### 4.2 Production of Waste

The production of waste during construction would be extremely limited, as the large majority of components would be brought to site ready-made/pre-assembled. During operation, the Development will generate very little waste. Following the expiry of the consent, the solar panels and associated infrastructure would be dismantled and removed from the Site, leaving no residual effects. In addition, the solar panels themselves can be recycled at the end of their operational life. This allows for the recovery of major panel components from the PV panels including glass, aluminium and copper, with likely cumulative yields greater than 85% of total panel mass. In the long term, dedicated panel recycling plants can be expected to increase treatment capacities and the ability to recover a greater fraction of embodied materials.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of their useful life, the batteries will be recycled, with the constituent chemicals being re-used, likely in the manufacture of new batteries. Any waste from this process will be handled in accordance with the waste management regulations at that time. No significant effects in terms of the EIA Regulations will be associated with the recycling of the batteries.

Decommissioning would be in accordance with technical guidance and best practice, with the methodology to be agreed with the Council at that time. There is **no potential for significant effects on waste generation and management**.

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<sup>4</sup> IEA International Energy Agency (IRENA) Photovoltaic Power Systems Programme End of Life Management – Solar Photovoltaic Panels (2016) [Online] Available at: [https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2016/IRENA\\_IFAPVPS\\_End-of-Life\\_Solar\\_PV\\_Panels\\_2016.pdf](https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2016/IRENA_IFAPVPS_End-of-Life_Solar_PV_Panels_2016.pdf) (Accessed 24/11/21)

#### 4.3 Pollution and Nuisances: Air Quality and Water

The Development, when operating, would have no emissions to air or water, cause no deposition to land, emit very little noise and potentially only have intruder-activated security lighting. Construction of the Development is a simple process involving only small quantities of cement and the ordinary use of vehicle fuels/oils, with none stored on site. The potential for pollution is therefore very low.

During construction and decommissioning, there would be emissions to air from vehicles and plant, but these will not be sufficient to lead to air quality effects, such as the breach of National Air Quality Objectives, at the nearest receptors. (Note: the site is not within or in relevant proximity to an air quality management area - AQMA.)

In the wider context, the Development will reduce the need for electricity from other sources, including fossil fuels and nuclear electricity generation, and thus will reduce the potential for pollution relative to the baseline.

The southern boundary of the Site is adjacent to Cock Beck (a Main River), and there are a couple of unnamed agricultural drains and springs that run adjacent to the Site boundary to the east and north. All infrastructure and therefore construction activity will be designed so that it is set back appropriately from such features. All works would be undertaken in accordance with best construction practice, and pollution prevention and control measures.

Consequently, there are no air quality or hydrology receptors considered to be sensitive to the type of development proposed and there is **no potential for significant effects on air quality or water quality.**

#### 4.4 Risk of Accidents and to Human Health

Very few potentially polluting substances will be handled or stored on site, and hence the potential for accidents caused by, or involving, the release of substances is very low.

Solar panels do not move or otherwise cause directly or indirectly an appreciable risk of accidents during operation.

Further detail is included here on battery safety and it is considered that, following the measures set out, the fire risk potential is limited. The supplier of the energy storage technology will hold the relevant test certificates and meet the relevant electrical safety regulations. The energy storage system would be constructed with the appropriate materials and designed to minimise the risk of fire and thermal runaway. Every module would be fitted with state-of-the-art fire suppression and containment systems. Furthermore, the modules would be installed with air conditioning in order to maintain a constant and safe operating temperature, and the entire system will be subject to inspection, testing and maintenance for safe operation.

During construction, normal construction site and transportation risks would be managed through normal good practice, and there would be minimal risk from the technologies being employed for the Development. As per the previous section, the Development will not give rise to any emissions to air or water. As such, there is **no potential for risks of accidents and no potential for significant effects on human health.**

#### 4.5 Landscape

The Site is located within a Locally Important Landscape Area, as designated by Selby District Council, as the limestone ridge area the Site is situated within is one of the more scenic landscapes within the district due to its varying landform and tree cover. The closest statutory landscape designation is Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, located 22 km south west of the Site, and at such a distance no effects are anticipated.

The Site falls within the National Character Area of Southern Magnesian Limestone (NCA 30; NE464<sup>5</sup>), characterised by the underlying Permian Zechstein Group (formerly known as Magnesian Limestone) which forms a low, narrow ridge extending from Thornborough, North Yorkshire, in the north to the outskirts of Nottingham further south. The NCA comprises open, rolling arable farmland enclosed by hedgerows and plantation woodland, historic estate properties, and parkland, although localised networks of grassland and semi-natural habitats have become fragmented. Industrial development in the form of limestone, coal and some sand extraction impact the agricultural landscape, along with urban areas, but the landscape still retains its essential rural character. There is a need to promote sustainable agriculture and appropriate hedgerow and woodland management and planting, with appropriate habitat enhancement and links being fundamental to this, which could be embedded into the design of the Development.

The Selby Landscape Character Assessment<sup>6</sup>, published in 2019, states that the Site is located in County Landscape Character Type 006: Magnesian Limestone Ridge, which corresponds with the Magnesian Limestone NCA.

At a local level, the Site is situated within Selby District Landscape Character Area 8: West Selby Limestone Ridge. This is characterised as a low ridge of Magnesian limestone with large scale rolling arable fields, with irregularly shaped, large scale agricultural fields defined by hedgerows and field margin buffers. There is a strong presence of large areas of calcareous woodland to the west of the character area, providing a sense of semi-enclosure. Major transport links dissect the landscape, and there is a sparse settlement pattern outside the town of Tadcaster and small villages, with few isolated properties and farmsteads. The assessment highlights that some areas have a smaller scale field pattern, notably in the north around Tadcaster, and in the central region within the valley of Cock Beck, which runs adjacent to the Site's southern boundary. Fields are commonly defined by low, fragmented hedgerows or occasional ditches, promoting a sense of openness, with long ranging views across parts of the landscape and the surrounding lowlands. Woodland, hedgerow, and the undulating topography has localised effects on the distance of visibility. Despite the major roads, mineral sites, energy transmission infrastructure, and views of Hook Moor Wind Farm, the landscape preserves a rural character with a tranquil and occasionally remote feel. This sense is reduced towards the fringes of the character area due to the proximity of major roads including the A1(M) and A64.

The Landscape Character Assessment also states that:

*"The area may have a lower sensitivity to changes, due to the highly undulating landscape in which new features would likely be screened by intervening topography.*

[...]

*The large scale of the landscape may be able to absorb sensitively sited and designed new development, particularly in areas which have a greater presence of woodland and hedgerows which are less open to views."*

The landscape surrounding the Site consists of agricultural land, woodland blocks, tree lines following the path of Cock Beck, and hedgerows, which contribute to screening in the gently undulating landscape. The Site itself is surrounded by woodland (Hayton Wood, Hazel Wood, and Bullen Wood), tree lines along Cock Beck, and well established hedgerows along the majority of the Site's boundaries, as shown in Photos 1 and 6 in Appendix B. The A1(M) to the west of the Site, and the A64 to the north, interrupts the tranquil nature of the landscape in this area, and break up the landform.

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<sup>5</sup> Natural England (2013). NCA Profile: 30 Southern Magnesian Limestone (NE464). [Online] Available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5733629942562816> (Accessed 24/11/2021)

<sup>6</sup> Selby District Council (2019). Selby Landscape Character Assessment. [Online] Available at: <https://www.selby.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Selby%20LCA%20Report%20Combined.pdf> (Accessed 25/11/2021)

The Development is relatively low-lying and does not give rise to significant vertical elements in the landscape, other than the substation (which would be smaller than, but viewed in the context of, the larger high voltage transmission infrastructure that traverses to the east and west of the Site). The Development would lead to a change in the overall use of the landscape, from an agricultural setting to fields of solar panels for a temporary period.

The landscape has the capacity to accommodate the Development due to the predominantly flat and gently undulating nature of the landform and existing woodland, hedgerows and scattered trees which would provide screening and limit any landscape effects to a localised area around the Site. The Development will also feature the planting of new lengths of hedgerow within gaps of the existing field boundary vegetation, and some additional planting should it be considered necessary. Access to the Site will utilise existing agricultural field access points and where possible existing trackways to avoid the need for tree and/or hedgerow removal.

The only other effects on landscape character would occur as a result of effects on views from areas of the landscape outside the Site. Over time, with additional planting to strengthen the existing boundary vegetation, any effects would be reduced and the Development would likely be integrated into the landscape to a greater extent and help limit views from properties and settlements in the vicinity of the Site.

Given the location of the Site, the topography within and around the Site and due to the fact that the Site is already partially screened with woodland, hedgerows and scattered trees (which can be readily extended alongside the Development to offer additional mitigation), and the potential to incorporate grassland mix within the Development, it is considered that there is **no potential for significant effects on the landscape**.

#### 4.6 Visual Receptors

There are a number of properties, groups of properties, settlements and Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) located within the vicinity of the Site. The properties are detailed in Section 2.1 of this report and are not repeated here. The closest settlements to the Site are:

- Village of Aberford – approximately 1.2 km south west Site;
- Village of Saxton – approximately 1.5 km south east of the Site;
- Village of Towton – approximately 2.8 km north east of the Site;
- Village of Barwick in Elmet – approximately 3.7 km west of the Site;
- Village of Stutton – approximately 3.9 km north east of the Site; and
- Town of Tadcaster – approximately 5.5 km north east of the Site.

There are three PRoWs<sup>7</sup> (footpaths 35.63/12/1, 35.44/3/1, and 35.44/3/2) which pass through the south of the Site or are located on the Site boundary. These routes have minimal natural screening along them, and therefore appropriate setbacks and additional natural screening may need to be included in the design of the Development in order to screen views from users of these routes and reduce the visual impacts of the Development. Footpath 35.63/12/1 crosses the eastern land parcel of the Site in the south western corner, but given the size of the Site and the area needed for the Development (see Section 1.1), it is likely that no panels or infrastructure will be located to the west of this footpath, thereby minimising views of the Development. Footpath 35.63/2/1 also runs along part of the northern boundary of the Site, and then passes south along the south eastern boundary of the north western parcel of land. This route is screened on one side by Hayton Wood, but would be open to the Development on the other side. Appropriate setbacks and additional natural screening will be embedded into the design of the development to screen views of the Development from users of this route.

<sup>7</sup> North Yorkshire County Council (2021). Rights of Way Map. [Online] Available at: [https://maps.northyorks.gov.uk/connect/analyst/mobile/#/main?mapcfg=Out\\_and\\_About](https://maps.northyorks.gov.uk/connect/analyst/mobile/#/main?mapcfg=Out_and_About) (Accessed 24/11/2021)

Further to these footpaths, the closest PRoWs to the Site are:

- Footpath 35.63/13/1, which passes north to south through Hazel Wood, and runs adjacent to part of the access route to the Site;
- Footpath Aberford 1, which passes from the access road of the Development south east to join Footpath 35.63/2/1 discussed above approximately 150 m south west of the north western land parcel;
- Footpath Aberford 8 which passes from the southernmost corner of the north western land parcel south towards Cock Beck;
- Footpath 35.55/1/1 which joins footpath 35.44/3/1 at the Site's southern boundary, and then passes south west towards Aberford; and
- Bridleway 35.44/1/2 which runs north to south and then east, and is adjacent to the Site's easternmost boundary.

The principal roads in the immediate vicinity of the Site are Southern Approach which runs adjacent to Hazel Wood and the Site's western and northern boundaries, and Milner Lane/Chantry Lane which runs adjacent to the Site's easternmost boundary for approximately 120 m. Both of these roads are private roads, and Southern Approach joins Main Street in the west, and Milner Lane/Chantry Lane joins Chantry Lane in the north, and the B1217 in the south. The A1(M) also runs north to south, 570 m from the Site's north western land parcel. This major route is well screened, and no views of the Development are likely, and if they do occur, they would be glimpsed at speed.

Visibility in its own right is not necessarily detrimental, particularly given the inanimate and low-lying nature of the Development. The landscape is well vegetated with woodland, hedgerows and scattered trees, but additional planting may be needed to prevent significant impacts of views of the Development particularly as some of the hedgerows are fragmented, or not present along the whole route.

Visual effects on residential properties are likely to be limited given the nature of the solar development which would be generally at a low height across the Site. Existing hedgerows and woodland would help to screen the Development and appropriate planting will also be proposed as part of a planning application to further reduce visual effects and deliver biodiversity enhancements. Appropriate consideration will be given to ensure that no significant amenity effects occur as a result of the Development. The Development will be designed to ensure any effects on residential properties are minimised.

The topography of the Site is gently sloping, from approximately 70 m AOD in the north to 30 m AOD in the south near Cock Beck. The Site benefits from existing established vegetation and hedgerow screening which would limit views from nearby properties and settlements. The Development is relatively low-lying and does not give rise to significant vertical elements in the landscape and is therefore highly unlikely to be discernible in views from the majority of properties in the nearest settlements of Aberford, Saxton, Towton, and Barwick in Elmet. Aberford, as the closest settlement to the Site, has views of the Development blocked by the A1(M) in between the town and the Site, and the intervening distance, topography, and vegetation from the Site to Saxton (the second closest settlement) means views are unlikely.

Whilst there are a number of isolated properties in the immediate vicinity of the Site, as identified above in Section 2.1, many benefit from existing screening/ boundary vegetation, which would limit visual impact of the Development. Furthermore, as part of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) that would be carried out to accompany any future planning application, any additional landscape planting that is required to mitigate visual impact on these properties would be detailed.

Three footpaths are located in the southern area of the Site, and there are several other PRoWs which are adjacent to the Site boundary or located in the wider area around the Site. Any effects on right of way users in the wider area will be assessed in the LVA that

would be submitted as part of any planning application for the Development. These receptors will also influence site design and such measures would include appropriate landscaping and planting.

The main road routes around the Site are private roads, utilised by only residents and landowners. This means few people utilise the routes, reducing the number of receptors potentially visually impacted by the Development. Visibility of the Site from roads would be limited to a short section of Milner/Chantry Lane, as you approach the Site from the east or the north. Aerial imagery suggests there is some natural screening in the form of hedgerows and isolated trees along this route, and therefore additional screening may be needed to screen views of the Development. Any views experienced would be limited by vegetation, with motorists receiving transient, glimpsed views albeit at potentially slower speeds than average along the single-lane roads. Southern Approach will have clear views of the Development, as it passes around the Site boundary, and will be used to access the Development, as seen in Photo 4 in Appendix B. The majority of this road is being incorporated into the Development, and therefore doesn't qualify as a receptor. Additional natural screening may be needed towards the west of Southern Approach, to minimise visual impacts on the property owners who live in the residential properties along the western side of this road before it reaches Main Street. These receptors are at approximately the same elevation as the north western land parcel of the Development, although the eastern parcel slopes to a lower level than these properties, and therefore the low-lying Development may not be significantly visible from these properties.

The LVA will inform the extent to which vegetative screening is necessary to assimilate the Development into the landscape and will ensure that the Development is sited appropriately to the amenity of residents in the surrounding area. Details of proposed additional landscaping will be shown on a Landscape Mitigation Plan which will be submitted along with any future planning application.

The Site is located within a Locally Important Landscape Area<sup>8</sup>, designated due to the varying landform and tree cover. As the Development is low-lying, and well-screened by the woodland areas and surrounding topography, the Development will have a minimal impact on the surrounding landscape, and therefore won't affect the landscape character and reduce its importance. There is also scope within the Development to enhance and strengthen existing landscape features, which would help preserve and enhance this locally important area.

Solar panels can result in glint and glare effects from reflected sunlight, affecting nearby receptors such as car drivers or residential properties. However, firstly the impact is generally only of concern at dawn and dusk and is limited by the position of the panels relative to the sun, and in turn the position of potential receptors relative to the panels and the sun. Secondly, the panels are designed to absorb maximum daylight to convert it to electricity and therefore have low levels of reflectivity when compared to surfaces such as window glass, water or snow. A Glint and Glare Assessment would be submitted with any planning application, and any required mitigation (in the form of landscape planting) would be provided to ensure there were no significant effects on residential receptors, road or light aircraft users.

It is therefore considered that there would be **no significant visual impacts from the Development**. For any impacts which are not significant, for example for road and PRow uses, and residents in surrounding settlements and isolated properties in the vicinity of the Site, visual screening will be taken into consideration within the Development's landscaping proposals.

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<sup>8</sup> Selby District Council (2021) New Local Plan. [Online] Available at: <https://selby-dc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f5c63ec776384a97aa11d88b1faea027> (Accessed on 24/11/2021)

## 4.7 Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Receptors

### 4.7.1 Designated Heritage Features

There are no designated archaeological or cultural heritage assets within the Site. There are no World Heritage Sites within a 5 km radius of the Site. Towton Registered Battlefield is located approximately 440 m east of the Site, designated due to the War of the Roses Battle in 1461. Bramham Park, Parlington Estate, and Lotherton Hall Registered Parks and Gardens are located approximately 1.8 km north west, 1.7 km south west, and 1.8 km south of the Site respectively. The Site itself does not lie within a Conservation Area, and the nearest is the Aberford Conservation Area, located 920 m west of the Site.

The following heritage assets were identified within 2 km of the Site (as shown on Figure 2, Appendix A):

- The Scheduled Monument 'Linear Earthworks known as Woodhouse Moor Rein and South Dyke' (List Entry: 1016954), located approximately 90 m south of the Site;
- The three Scheduled Monuments 'Length of Linear Earthwork, part of the Aberford Dyke System' (List Entries: 1019873 and 1016952) and 'Linear Earthwork, part of Aberford Dyke System' (List Entry: 1016953), located approximately 150 m north west of the Site at its closest point;
- The Scheduled Monument 'Roman Road near Hazelwood Castle' (List Entry: 1003685), located approximately 400 m north of the Site;
- The Scheduled Monument 'Medieval Manorial Complex, garden and water management features' (List Entry: 1020326), and the associated Grade II\* Listed Building Chapel of St Mary, located approximately 600 m south east of the Site;
- Grade II Listed Building, Mile Post at SE433381, located approximately 675 m south of the Site's access point;
- Hazelwood Castle Historic Park and Garden, and associated six Listed Buildings (two Grade I Listed – Hazelwood Castle and Roman Catholic Chapel of St Leonard – and four Grade II Listed), located approximately 700 m north of the Site;
- Aberford Conservation Area, and associated 22 Listed Buildings, located approximately 920 m west of the Site;
- Grade II Listed Building, Crossroads Farmhouse, located approximately 1.3 km north west of the Site;
- The Scheduled Monument 'Length of Linear Earthworks known as Becca Banks and the Ridge' (List Entry: 1016951), located approximately 1.4 km south west of the Site;
- Saxton Conservation Area, and associated eight Listed Buildings (one Grade I Listed, and seven Grade II Listed), located approximately 1.4 km south east of the Site;
- Grade II Listed Building, Becca Hall (House Only), located approximately 1.5 km west of the Site;
- Grade II Listed Building, the Cottage, located within Parlington Estate Registered Park and Garden; and
- The Scheduled Monument 'Lord Dacre's Cross or Townton Cross' (List Entry: 1011967), located approximately 1.8 km north east of the Site;
- Grade II Listed Building, Cross sometimes known as Lord Dacre's Cross, located within Towton Registered Battlefield.
- The Scheduled Monument 'Saxton Castle' (List Entry: 1008226), located approximately 1.8 km south east of the Site;
- Grade II\* Listed Building Lotherton Chapel, and Grade II Listed Building Lotherton Hall Cottage and Lotherton Old House, located in Lotherton Hall Registered Park and Garden;

Whilst no direct impacts are expected on these heritage assets, indirect effects will be given due consideration during the detailed planning process and a heritage assessment will be prepared to assess any potential impacts on the setting and character of heritage assets



on these and the wider area. There is also scope within the Development to increase setbacks from sensitive receptors and provide large areas of landscape mitigation, as the Site is larger than is required for the proposed Development (see Section 1.1), reducing the potential impact the Development may have on these heritage assets. The heritage assessment will also consider the potential for undiscovered archaeological remains (see Section 4.7.2).

Existing woodland, hedgerows, in-hedgerow trees, tree lines and buildings would help obstruct views between the Development and any of the heritage assets. As a result, no heritage features are considered sensitive to the changes of the type proposed, and there is **no potential for significant effects**.

#### **4.7.2 Non-designated Heritage / Archaeology**

Whilst the Site has not previously been developed, it has been used for agricultural purposes, including ploughing, and so any remains close to the surface are likely to have already been disturbed. A geophysical survey will be completed to support the findings of a Heritage Impact Assessment. These results will be used to inform the archaeological potential of the Site, the design implications and mitigation requirements.

Any potential impact on undiscovered archaeological resources resulting from the Development could be adequately mitigated through appropriate archaeological evaluation, the requirement for which would be agreed with the County Archaeologists and implemented via a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI). Furthermore, should archaeological sensitivities be identified, the use of concrete footings could be implemented in these areas to avoid impacts on buried archaeology as they have limited below ground presence, typically less than ploughing depth.

Following the evaluation and any required mitigation, there is **no potential for significant effects**.

#### **4.8 Community and Recreation**

In addition to the settlements and public rights of way discussed in Section 4.6 above, this section considers other recreational receptors.

Lotherton Hall Estate Country Park is located 1.5 km south of the Site, and contains a Deer Park, Registered Park and Garden, and a Bird Garden. National Cycle Route 66 runs adjacent to the A1(M), on its western side. There are no National Trails within 2 km of the Site. Hazelwood Castle Hotel and Spa is located 700 m north of the Site and is shown in Photo 2, Appendix B. There are no further local recreation facilities within 2 km of the Site.

The only potential for effects on recreational features are visual impacts and noise, affecting amenity value. Intervening distance and the nature of the Development (low-lying), in conjunction with intervening woodland, hedgerows, tree lines and landform, collectively act to obstruct views between the Development and identified recreational receptors. The National Cycle Route is on the opposite side of the motorway than the Site, and therefore views are blocked by the road and screening around it. The undulating topography, woodland blocks and other vegetation screens views of the Site from Hazelwood Castle Hotel and Spa, and the intervening distance and vegetation would screen views of the Development from Lotherton Hall Estate Country Park. Therefore, even if unmitigated, the effects would not be significant. Potential noise effects during construction would be temporary and reversible and works could be adequately controlled by limited working hours set out in appropriately worded planning conditions, or a construction environmental management plan, as would be used for a wide range of other non-EIA development types. Furthermore, when the Development is operational, minimal noise is produced by the PV panels (as discussed in Section 4.11). There is **no potential for significant effects on community and recreation facilities**.

#### 4.9 Ecological Receptors

There are no international ecological designations, including, SPAs, SACs, and Ramsar Sites identified within the 2 km search area. The closest statutory European ecological designation to the Site is Skipwith Common SAC, located 18 km east of the Site. It is not anticipated that this designation will be impacted by the Development.

Five areas of Ancient Woodland are located within 2 km of the Site, as shown on Figure 2 in Appendix A, with three (Hazel Wood, Hayton Wood, and Bullen Wood) located adjacent to the Site's boundary, and the access road between land parcels passes through Hayton Wood. These areas are classified as mainly Ancient Replanted Woodland, with a small area of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland to the north of Hazel Wood. Early arboricultural surveys are being undertaken to ensure these Ancient Woodland are not significantly impacted by the Development, and appropriate 15 m offsets will be applied to the woodland. Furthermore, access through Hayton Wood between the land parcels will use an existing track, and the connecting cable will be buried within this track to minimise arboricultural impacts. These Ancient Woodland are also classified as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, along with a small area of Cock Beck adjacent to the Site's southern boundary, and two areas of earthworks, located 500 m and 550 m south of the Site. Two Local Nature Reserves are located within 2 km of the Site, the closest of which is 480 m west of the Site.

An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey was completed in September 2021 which covered the Site and adjoining areas, where access permitted. The majority of the Site comprised of fields prepared for arable cultivation, as shown in Photos 1, 2, 3, and 5 in Appendix B. The Site is bounded by hedgerows of different quality (intact, defunct, with trees, etc.), a watercourse to the south, and areas of broadleaf woodland. There are no ponds or other areas of standing water across the Site, although there are watercourse and agricultural drains and ditches in close proximity to the Site.

The following information is known with regards to protected species:

- Bats – The habitat suitability for bats varies across the Site. Open arable habitats have a low suitability, but hedgerows, watercourses, and woodland edges have a moderate to high suitability and also provide connectivity within the wider landscape. There are several mature trees on the Site with potential roost features and low to moderate suitability. In any case no trees or hedgerows with potential to support bats will be impacted by the Development, therefore no further surveys or mitigation are required with regards to bats. Should extensive areas of hedgerow be removed, or trees felled or pruned, further assessment, bat transect surveys, activity surveys and a preliminary roost assessment would be completed. The long-term operational effects of the Development on bats are likely to be positive because habitat quality and availability will be increased, and the panels may create a sheltered area in which bats can forage;
- Reptiles - No reptiles or evidence of reptiles was recorded, and suitable grassland habitat is limited throughout most of the Site and is restricted to narrow field margins. It is considered that adverse impacts to reptiles will be minimal. No further reptile surveys are required as the Site will be designed to avoid potential reptile habitat and high-value habitats. Should loss/disturbance of extensive areas of value be unavoidable, targeted surveys will be undertaken. The long-term, operational effects of the Development on reptiles are likely to be positive because terrestrial habitat quality will be increased, providing additional habitat connectivity to offsite areas;
- Badger – Evidence of badger presence was recorded in the Phase 1 Survey. A detailed survey of hedgerows, scrub, and woodland within a 30 m buffer of the Site will be undertaken to determine the location and status of all setts, and development will be excluded from within 30 m of known setts. Precautionary mitigation measures to safeguard badgers will be proposed and an updated field walk-over is recommended

- in advance of construction in case of any change in presence due to their highly mobile nature;
- Great Crested Newts (GCN) – There are no suitable water bodies on the Site, no ponds within 250 m of the Site, and field drains and ditches adjacent to the Site boundary were dry and generally unsuitable for GCN. Cock Beck is considered unsuitable for GCN due to the fast flow of water and likely presence of fish. No further surveys are required with respect to GCN, but good practice mitigation measures will be followed to ensure no adverse impacts occur;
  - Otter and Water Vole – Cock Beck may be used by otters as commuting corridors, but no evidence of otters was found in the Phase 1 survey. Slow-flowing areas of the Beck may have the potential to support foraging and commuting water vole, but no evidence was seen during this overview appraisal. The Development will exclude watercourses and banksides from the developable areas, but if any areas cannot be avoided, detailed surveys will be completed. The design of the Development will be sensitive to watercourses and an appropriate buffer will be applied to ensure no disturbance of riparian habitat;
  - White-Clawed Crayfish – Cock Beck comprises a stone and cobbled substrate which could provide refuge for white-clawed crawfish, although presence of predators and turbid water makes the habitat less favourable. No further surveys are required for this species;
  - Non-Native Invasive Species – Himalayan Balsam was found in abundance along the northern boundary of Cock Beck, and spreading onto the Site. An Invasive Species Management Plan (ISMP) will be developed and implemented prior to the commencement of work. Updates to the invasive species survey map will show exact locations and new growth during peak growing season, construction will maintain a separation distance of 5 m from Himalayan balsam, and monitoring and treatment of Himalayan balsam is advised;
  - Invertebrates – woodlands, watercourses and semi-improved grassland are likely to support notable assemblages. Target surveys will be completed if high-value habitat areas can't be avoided during construction, although this is unlikely as these areas are planned to be retained; and
  - Birds – The variety of habitats (farmland, woodland, watercourses, and scattered trees) can each support distinct bird communities, including species of conservation concern. A six-visit breeding bird survey of the Site and surrounding 250 m buffer will be undertaken in March to June 2022, and surveys for Schedule 1 species may be required depending on the results of these surveys and the development design.

The results of the surveys detailed above and any required mitigation or enhancements will be reported in an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) to be submitted as part of any future planning application.

Overall, the Development is relatively limited in extent and will actively enhance habitat. Consequently, the Development is likely to have a neutral or net positive effect on habitat resources. Offsite habitats and species will not be affected by changes to the Site of the type proposed and there is **no potential for adverse significant ecological effects, however there is potential for beneficial biodiversity effects.**

#### 4.10 Hydrology Receptors

The majority of the Site is located within Flood Zone 1 (lowest probability of flooding). These definitions are provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) where Flood Risk Zone 1 is categorised as having a less than 1 in 1,000 (0.1%) annual probability of flooding, the lowest risk of flooding potential. The southern boundary of the Site is located within Flood Risk 2 and 3, associated with Cock Beck which runs adjacent to the Site's southern boundary. Flood Zone 2 is categorised as having between a 1 in 100 and 1

in 1000 annual probability (1% - 0.1%) of river flooding, and Flood Zone 3 is categorised as having a 1 in 100 or greater (>1%) annual probability of river flooding.

The EA Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Map indicates that the Development is generally at low risk of surface water flooding, with slightly higher risk around Cock Beck and agricultural drains and ditches.

The Development will be designed to be located in Flood Zone 1 where possible. A Flood Risk Assessment will be submitted as part of any future planning application which will confirm the predicted flood levels, plus an appropriate allowance for climate change, and will inform the final design of the Development. The potential to impact off site receptors and surface water run-off will also be considered within the assessment. The design will seek to avoid locating any panels or infrastructure in the areas at a higher risk of flooding.

Further to this, the land take of the Development is minimal, as the mounting structures for the solar panels themselves are either anchored at surface level or driven or screwed into the ground on poles and foundations are only required for inverters, transformers and the switching gear in the substation compound. The majority of the Site would be permeable, including any access tracks which would be constructed of type 2 aggregate. Furthermore, with enhanced species rich grassland beneath the solar panels, surface water drainage is considered to be an improvement on the current baseline, much of which includes intensively farmed arable fields. No specific surface water drainage measures would be required for the Development.

The Development would not give rise to adverse effects in respect of flood risk, and there is **no potential for significant effects**.

#### 4.11 Noise and Vibration

The nearest receptors of potential noise effects are the residential properties located close to the boundaries of the Site, as identified in Section 2.1, the closest of which is the involved property Hayton House, and the properties along the access road to the Site. The closest settlement is Aberford where the nearest receptors are approximately 300 south west of the access point to the Site.

In addition, the baseline environment is likely fairly typical of a rural location with some traffic noise and noise from agricultural processes. The baseline environment includes existing noise sources including the major roads around the Site, notably the A1(M) and A64, which will raise the baseline noise level particularly to the west and north of the Site. These major routes may raise the expected rural baseline noise level of the area, and therefore the operational and construction phase of the Development will have a minimal noise impact on nearby receptors, particularly as many of the properties identified in Section 2.1 are closer to the A1(M) than the solar site.

Solar farm construction takes place quickly, as minimal excavations are required. The potential adverse effects of noise and vibration during construction are therefore limited to specific locations within the Site, and only for short periods, e.g., when deliveries are made and when piles for mounting structures are being installed. Given the temporary nature and limited extent of such works, the noise impact from such activities can be controlled by limited working hours set out in appropriately worded planning conditions, or a construction environmental management plan, as would be used for a wide range of other non-EIA development types.

During the operational phase of the Development, low levels of noise can be generated by the electrical systems such as the transformers, inverters, batteries, and substations, but this is highly unlikely to be audible at the identified receptors given the degree of separation. Consideration will be given in the design of the Development to ensure that these items are placed at locations as far away as possible from residential properties and noise sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the Site. Additionally, solar panels only generate

electricity during daylight hours, and therefore there is negligible noise generated in the evening, night and early morning, when ambient noise levels are typically at their lowest.

Consequently, there are no noise and vibration receptors considered to be sensitive to the type of development proposed and there is **no potential for significant effects**.

#### 4.12 Traffic and Transport

The main access route to Site is likely to be via Main Street, which connects to Southern Approach and passes into and through the Site. Main Street provides access to the A1(M) and A64 in the north, and the B1217 in the south. Exiting the Site and taking Main Street north to the A1(M) and A64 avoids routing traffic through the centre of any settlements.

Access to the Development would utilise the existing field access points off Southern Approach used by Hayton House, and it is likely that the temporary construction compound (TCC) for the development will also be located along this route.

Access across the wider Site from the TCC would be via existing field access tracks that will then be extended as needed to reach areas of panels further within the Site; this is to minimise the requirement for new field entrances and reduce traffic on the roads around the Site during the construction period. Where new access tracks are required, they will be constructed approximately 3.5 m wide.

Construction traffic will consist of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), light good vehicles (LGV's) and cars. No abnormal loads movements are expected to be required. Southern Approach and the existing agricultural tracks are designed for agricultural vehicles, and therefore should be suitable for HGVs, as shown in Photo 4 in Appendix B. Movements associated with the construction phase are expected to contribute a minor, temporary increase to the Annual Average Daily Traffic Flow (AADTF) of these roads. Temporary disruption may also be caused around the residential properties on the western side of Southern Approach, as the road may need traffic management when deliveries or other works take place. A Transport Statement will be submitted with the planning application detailing the traffic volumes and routes and any required mitigation. It is anticipated that traffic volumes during the decommissioning phase will be similar to that during the construction phase. As a result, the magnitude of change during the construction and decommissioning phases would be minimal.

During the operational phase of the Development, additional traffic would be limited to maintenance vehicles and the magnitude of change would be negligible.

Traffic volumes generated by the Development during construction, operation and decommissioning are not likely to lead to any long-term delays or other traffic-related effects. Consequently, there is **no potential for significant effects**.

#### 4.13 Land Use and Soil

A review of publicly available Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) mapping indicates that the majority of the Site is Grade 2, with a small area of Grade 3 to the south, along Cock Beck. The majority of the surrounding area is also a mix of Grade 3, Grade 2, and Non-Agricultural land.

A site specific Agricultural Land Classification Survey was undertaken in October 2021, which confirmed that the Site consists of 54.13% Grade 2 agricultural land, 2.75% Grade 3a agricultural land, and 43.12% Grade 3b agricultural land. This survey will be submitted with any future planning application.

A Sequential Test will be completed and will also be submitted alongside the application for completeness. This will determine whether or not there is potentially lower quality agricultural land on which to locate the Development when considered against the

requirements of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)<sup>9</sup> and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)<sup>10</sup>.

The NPPF, which was revised in July 2021, states the following at paragraph 174:

*"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: ...*

*b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;"*

*with the following relevant definition:*

*"Best and most versatile agricultural land: Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification."*

PPG on "Renewable and Low Carbon Energy" still, at the time of writing, reflects the 2012 version of the NPPF, which required a sequential test to address the factors a local planning authority needs to consider, including:

*"- encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;*

*- where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays."*

As such, there is no prohibition on the use of good quality agricultural land for solar outlined in the NPPF and PPG. The requirements as detailed in the Minister's statement of 2015<sup>11</sup> stated that it would need to be justified by 'the most compelling evidence'.

There has been an historical absence of national policy direction for solar development in England. That changed in September 2021 with the issue of the draft revised version of the National Policy Statement (NPS) for renewable energy, EN-312. Whilst this Policy is for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, it provides a useful insight into a number of considerations for solar farm development and specifically, with regards to ALC, it identifies it as relevant but it should not be 'a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location' and solar is 'not prohibited on agricultural land classified 1, 2 and 3a' (2.48.13 and 2.48.15).

The Sequential Test report seeks to demonstrate that the Site meets the requirements of both PPG and NPPF with regard to the siting of the Development as it is found to comprise best and most versatile land.

The temporary nature of the Development (which would not lead to an irreversible loss of the land which would be reinstated after the Development is decommissioned) means that the land use at the Site is not considered to be sensitive to the type of development proposed and there is **no potential for significant effects**. Furthermore, there is the potential for agricultural land use to continue in conjunction with the Development once it

<sup>9</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (2021) [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2> (Accessed 24/11/2021)

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2015). Guidance: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy. Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy#active-solar-technology> (Accessed 24/11/2021)

<sup>11</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, Written Statement – HCWS488 (2015). Available at <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-03-25/HCWS488/> (Accessed 24/11/2021).

<sup>12</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1015236/en-3-draft-for-consultation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1015236/en-3-draft-for-consultation.pdf) [Accessed 24/11/2021].

is operational, in the form of sheep grazing amongst the solar panels, or the land can recover from intensive agricultural use, and will of a better quality once the Development is decommissioned.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the experience of the author<sup>3</sup>, overall, significant effects in EIA terms are not likely as a result of the Development and the Development does not warrant an EIA.

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations states that "the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected must be considered having regard to (a) the existing and approved land use; (b) the relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources; and (c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to a number of areas including wetlands, coastal zones, mountains and forest areas, nature reserves and parks, areas classified or protected under legislation, areas in which the environmental quality standards have already been exceeded, densely populated areas or landscapes of historical, cultural or archaeological significance."

These have been considered in this EIA Screening assessment, and special consideration has been given to landscape, visual, heritage, ecological and hydrological resources. As discussed in the previous sections, the Development is relatively low-lying, does not give rise to significant vertical elements in the landscape, and would be implemented alongside areas of wildflower meadow habitat creation and most likely some shelterbelt/hedge planting to enhance visual screening and provide biodiversity gain. The landscape has the capacity to accommodate the Development due to the predominantly gently undulating nature of the landform and existing vegetation, including the mature woodland, hedgerows and individual trees, which would provide established screening which can readily be enhanced and extended.

There are no operational solar farms in close proximity to the Development with the potential for cumulative effects, and no other developments in the vicinity of the Site with potential for cumulative effects.

There will be no impact on nationally or internationally designated ecological sites. Ecological surveys are being carried out and will be reported, alongside any required mitigation measures and or enhancement measures, as part of any future planning application. These surveys are designed to inform the baseline and the final design of the Development as well as any mitigation measures that may be required. The Development will actively enhance habitat and consequently the Development will have a substantial net positive effect on habitat resources and biodiversity, exceeding the minimum 10% being sought under the Environment Act.

The solar farm would be compatible with sheep grazing during the temporary operational phase, maintaining the land's agricultural use in part. Land use at the Site would then be returned to full agricultural use following decommissioning of the Development after the 40-year operational period.

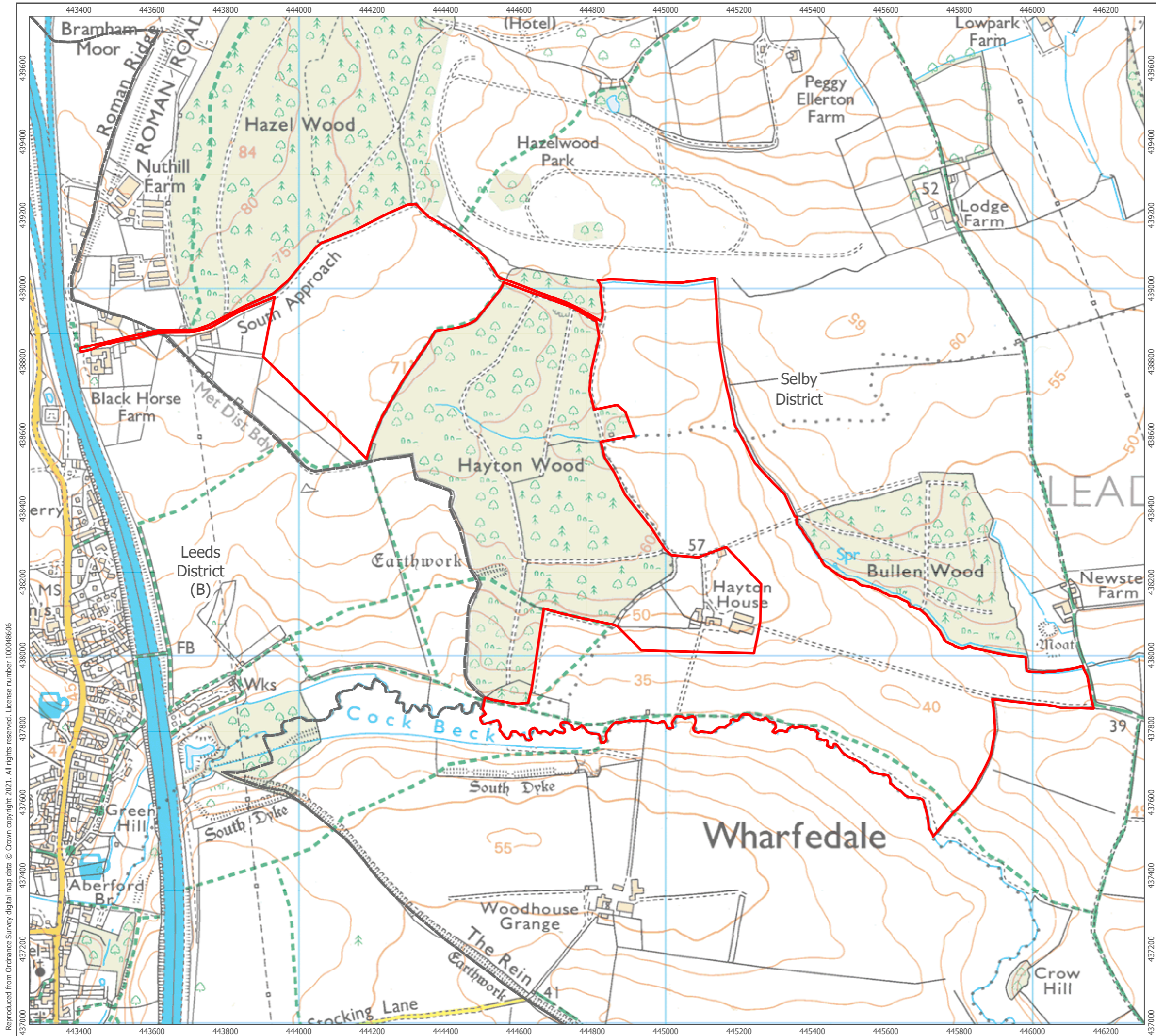
## **APPENDIX A**

### **Figures**

Figure 1 – Site Location


Figure 2 – Environmental Considerations





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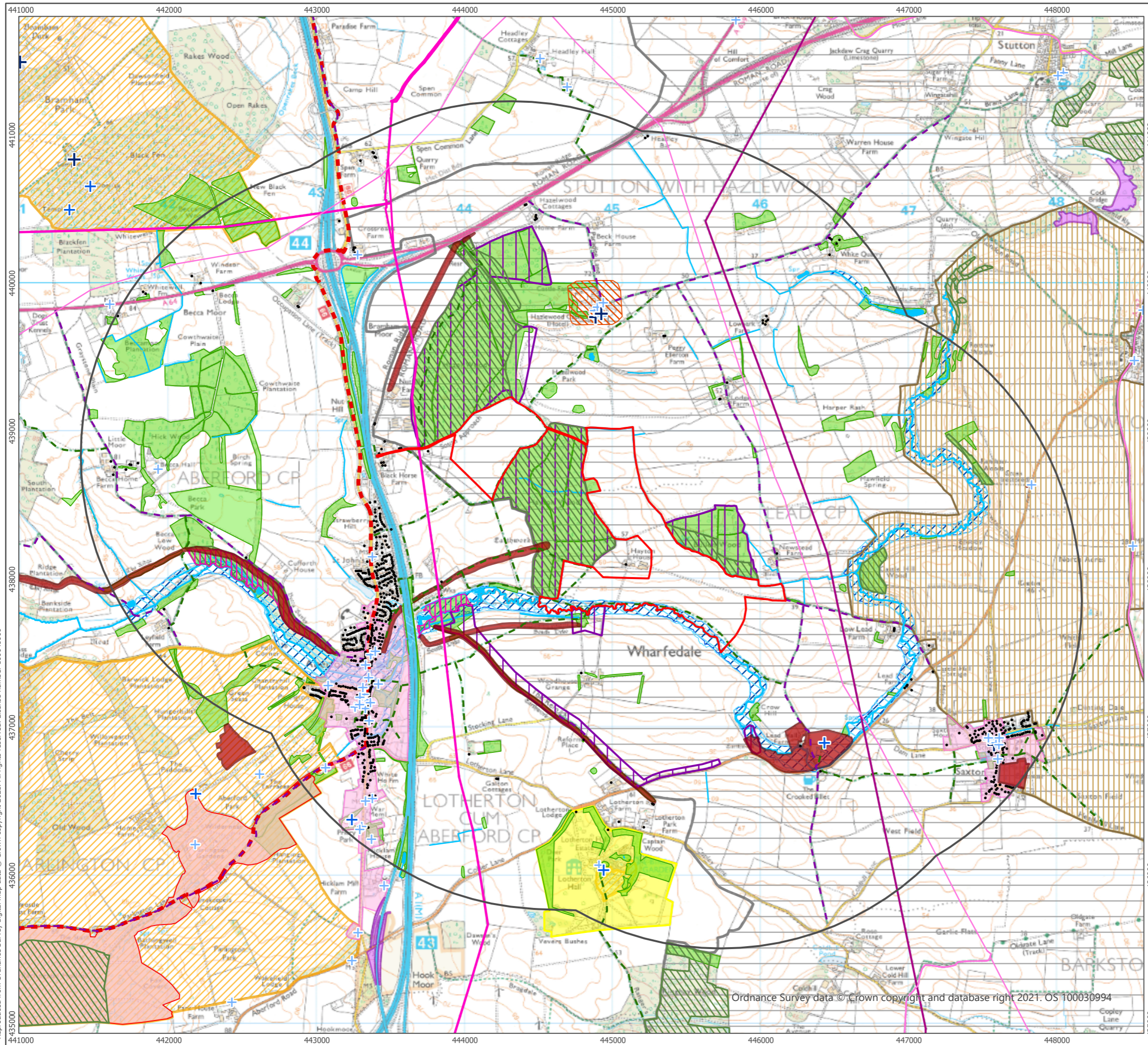
- Site Boundary
- Local Planning Authority Boundary

1:10,000 Scale @ A3  


Produced By: EB	Ref: 4546-REP-006
Checked By: SC	Date: 30/11/2021

**Site Location**  
 Figure 1

**Hayton House Solar Farm**  
**EIA Screening Report**



- Site Boundary
- 2 km Search Area
- Woodland
- Surface Water
- Scheduled Monument
- Conservation Area
- Registered Battlefield
- Registered Park and Garden
- Historic Park and Garden
- Country Park
- Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
- Site of Ecological or Geological Importance
- Local Wildlife Site
- Ancient Woodland
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Locally Important Landscape Area
- Flood Zone 2
- Flood Zone 3
- Surface Water
- National Cycle Network
- Footpath
- Bridleway
- 33 kV Overhead Electrical Line
- 132 kV Overhead Electrical Line
- 275 kV Overhead Electrical Line
- + Grade I Listed Building
- + Grade II\* Listed Building
- + Grade II Listed Building
- Residential Property

**Please note:** the entire Site is located within Green Belt Land.

1:25,000 Scale @ A3

0 0.5 1 km ▲ NORTH

Produced By: EB	Ref: 4546-REP-007
Checked By: SC	Date: 30/11/2021

**Environmental Considerations**  
Figure 2

**Hayton House Solar Farm**  
**EIA Screening Report**

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **Site Photographs**

 <p>7 Sep 2021 at 13:43:19 213° SW</p>	 <p>7 Sep 2021 at 09:13:56 N 53.839150°, W 1.314418° 87° E Tadcaster England LS24 United Kingdom</p>	 <p>7 Sep 2021 at 11:07:37 N 53.845488°, W 1.324316° 141° SE Leeds England LS25 United Kingdom</p>
<p>Photo 1: Looking south west towards Hayton House from the east of the Site. Hedgerows, woodland, and individual trees can clearly be seen and act as natural screening.</p>	<p>Photo 2: Looking across the north east of the Site, showing the existing agricultural use of the Site. Hedgerows and treelines along the Site boundary are clear, and Hazelwood Castle can be seen in the distance.</p>	<p>Photo 3: Looking south east across the north western land parcel, and showing the arable fields that make up the majority of the Site.</p>
 <p>7 Sep 2021 at 11:52:31 N 53.846408°, W 1.332004° 179° S Leeds England LS25 United Kingdom</p>	 <p>7 Sep 2021 at 12:36:07 N 53.842319°, W 1.319087° 99° E Tadcaster England LS24 United Kingdom</p>	 <p>7 Sep 2021 at 14:38:32 N 53.832869°, W 1.307409° 312° NW Tadcaster England LS24 United Kingdom</p>
<p>Photo 4: Looking south along Southern Approach to the west of the Site, showing how the access track is suitable for HGVs, and the screening the adjacent woodland provides.</p>	<p>Photo 5: Looking south east across the eastern land parcel of the Site, showing the undulating topography, arable fields, and woodland, hedgerows and individual trees.</p>	<p>Photo 6: Looking north west along the Site's southern boundary, adjacent to Cock Beck. Trees and shrubs along the watercourse can be seen, and provide screening to the south.</p>