

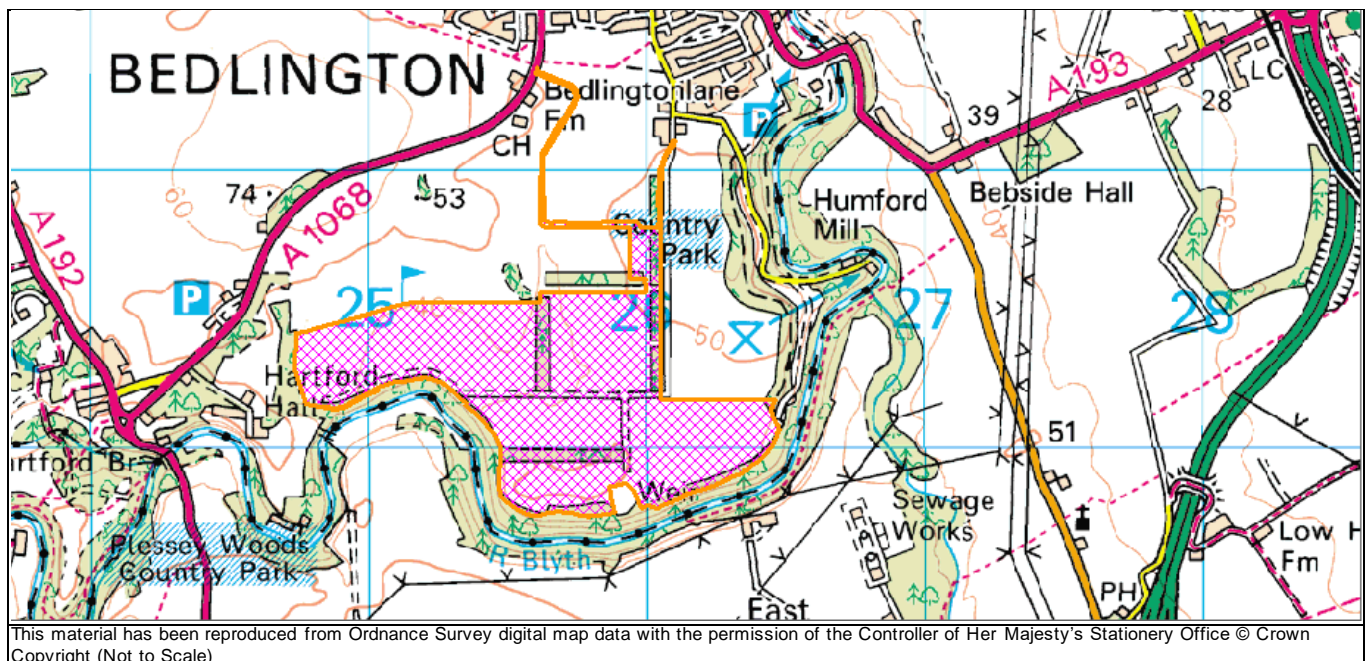


# Northumberland County Council

## Strategic Planning Committee, 7 November 2023

<b>Application No:</b>	23/02205/RENE		
<b>Proposal:</b>	Construction of a solar farm and battery energy storage facility (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure.		
<b>Site Address:</b>	Land South of Broadway House Farm, Church Lane, Bedlington		
<b>Applicant:</b>	Mr Alan Connolly Bluefield Renewable Developments Limited Johnstone House 2a - 4a Gordon Road West Bridgeford Nottingham NG2 5LN	<b>Agent:</b>	Mr Michael Ruddick Pegasus Group 33 Sheep Street Cirencester GL7 1RQ
<b>Ward:</b>	Bedlington Central	<b>Parish:</b>	West Bedlington
<b>Valid Date:</b>	21 June 2023	<b>Expiry Date:</b>	14 November 2023
<b>Case Officer Details:</b>	Name: Mr Gordon Halliday Job Title: Consultant Planner Tel No: 07785 727053 Email: Gordon.Halliday@northumberland.gov.uk		

**Recommendation:** That this application be GRANTED permission



## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This planning application is for a major development proposal and therefore is to be determined by the Strategic Planning Committee.

1.2 A screening opinion was issued on 21 January 2021 in response to a request from a previous potential developer, stating that the proposed development was not likely to have significant effects on the environment and therefore it did not represent EIA development in the context of the EIA Regulations 2017. As the proposal is very similar to the proposal then proposed, it was agreed that a further screening opinion was not required.

1.3 An extension of time was agreed for the determination of the application.

## **2. The Application Site and Surrounding Area**

2.1 The proposed solar farm would cover an area of 79.1 hectares of farmland to the south of Bedlington. The application site predominantly comprises a series of medium-sized fields south of Broadway House Farm on Church Road on the southern fringe of the town. The River Blyth and Bedlington Country Park lie to the east and south and Bedlingtonshire Golf Course lies to the north. The northwest corner of the site is bounded by the A1068 Hartford Road

2.2 The area was the subject of opencast coal extraction in the 1950s and 1960s before it was restored to its current land uses after 1966. The arable fields within belts of linear conifer planting reflect this restored landscape. The fields are presently used to produce animal feed in the form of haylage, rather than for arable food production.

2.3 The existing vehicular access to the site is via a Broadway House Farm Road, at a point approximately 80 metres from its junction with Church Lane. A private metalled track, approximately 3 metres in width, continues southwards through the farmland. It is proposed to provide a temporary vehicular access during the construction period, to the north of Bedlingtonshire Golf Club, through golf club-owned land, to prevent vehicles having to access the site through the residential streets north of the Broadway House farmhouse.

2.4 There are no statutory or non-statutory landscape designations covering the application site. The site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations, but Bedlington Country Park to the south and east of the site is a Local Nature Reserve. There are no Public Rights of Way (PROW) across the site, with the nearest PROW running approximately 80 metres from the south-eastern boundary of the site within the Bedlington Country Park. The closest listed building is the Grade II\* Hartford Hall, approximately 250 metres to the southwest of the site.

2.5 The nearest residential properties northwards are approximately 500 metres from the proposed solar panel arrays within Bedlington. A number of residential properties are located within the Hartford Hall estate to the south-west of the site, beyond the River Blyth with the nearest house some 150 metres from the panel arrays. Blyth is approximately 2.5 km to the east of the site and Cramlington is approximately 1.5 km to the south.

2.6 Members of the Committee will recall in November 2022 granting planning permission for two solar farms also proposed for development by Bluefield

Renewable Developments Limited - at Low Horton Farm to the west of Blyth (reference 22/01153/RENE) and at Burnt House Farm to the west of Bedlington (reference 22/01082/RENE). Construction is yet to commence on these sites which are located approximately 2 kilometres to the east and north-west of the current application site respectively.

### **3. Description of the Proposals**

3.1 This application seeks full planning permission for a ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) development and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure. The proposed scheme relates to the construction, operation, management and decommissioning of a grid connected solar farm and BESS project with associated infrastructure. The proposed solar development would be connected to the local electricity distribution network with an export capacity of 49.99MW, providing a reliable source of clean renewable energy.

3.2 The associated BESS would have capacity of 60MW and would assist in the integration of renewable energy with the grid. Planning Permission is sought for a temporary period of 40 years from the date of first exportation of electricity from the site. At the end of this period, the solar panels, BESS and associated equipment would be removed and the land restored to its current condition, with the exception of the proposed substation which is more than likely to be required on a permanent basis as the substation would become part of the local electricity distribution network, subject to agreement between the landowner and Distribution Network Operator (DNO).

3.3 The primary infrastructure within the proposed solar farm would comprise the arrays of photovoltaic (PV) panels in rows on an east-west orientation (to face the south at 15 to 25 degrees from the horizontal for optimum efficiency), with a maximum height of 3 metres. The arrays are spaced to avoid any shadowing effects between panels with topography dictating exact row spacing (typically between 3 and 8 metres). The panels will be mounted on a metal framework comprising upright galvanised steel posts which are driven into the ground without deep or concrete foundations and an aluminium support frame. Inverter stations and other equipment to support the generation of electricity would be located across the site, accessible by 4 to 5 metre wide crushed aggregate internal tracks for maintenance purposes.

3.4 The insulated DC cables from the solar modules will be routed in channels fixed on the underside of the framework and then within shallow trenches to link to the inverters, the site (customer) substation and the proposed NPG substation east of the existing site access. The cable trench may also carry earthing and communications cables and will be backfilled with fine sands and excavated materials to the original ground level. The grid connection will be via the NPG substation forming part of this application. Cabling will run from inverter stations to the on-site DNO 66kV substation where the electricity will be run through the transformer to 66kV and exported via an underground cable to the local distribution network, into an existing NPG substation located in Bedlington.

3.5 The battery storage compound would be co-located within the south-east quadrant of the solar farm site. The BESS would consist of multiple rows of cabinets within an enclosed fenced site plus additional plant and equipment to control the site and to connect the site to the grid. The BESS will have a capacity of 60MW with the ability to store energy and export to the local electricity grid network when required.

The BESS will share the onsite solar farm substation and its onward underground cable connection to the existing 66kV substation in Bedlington.

3.6 A perimeter security deer fence up to 3 metres high with small mammal / badger access points would be installed along the site boundary. 3 metres high pole mounted CCTV security cameras would be installed within the site and along its boundary.

3.7 Vehicular access during the construction period would be via the A1068 Hartford Road. The proposed access would be located to the north of Bedlingtonshire Golf Club, through golf club-owned land adjoining the A1068. Six trees would need to be removed to facilitate a satisfactory access point. It is anticipated that the solar farm will take up to nine months to complete. Once installed, the facility would be unmanned, being remotely operated and monitored. Operational access will only require a low number of trips for maintenance and cleaning purposes (typically around one per month), with the largest maintenance vehicle anticipated to be a small van or pick-up truck.

3.8 Existing hedgerows will be strengthened and infilled where necessary with native shrubs and trees and maintained at a minimum of 4 metres. Along the boundary with the golf club and along the site's southern boundary the hedgerows will be maintained at a minimum height of 6 metres to provide a strengthened visual screen between the solar infrastructure and the residential properties to the south-west and the informal paths within the Country Park. A range of biodiversity enhancements is proposed, including the provision of several separate 'Biodiversity Enhancement Areas' across the western and southern part of the site. These areas will provide 4.3 hectares of species-rich meadow grassland with additional planting, providing refuge and foraging opportunities for wildlife, improved habitat connectivity, and additional visual screening. The proposed layout has been designed to minimise any works to existing trees and hedgerows, by incorporating them as features within the scheme and ensuring any development avoids rooting areas of trees. However, to allow for the provision of the temporary construction access, a small number of trees will need to be removed in the north-east of the site. These will be replanted with appropriate specimens following completion of the construction phase.

3.9 At the end of the 40-year operational lifespan of the solar farm and BESS, the decommissioning process would take approximately six months. The site would be restored to its existing use and appearance. With the exception of the DNO substation, all equipment and below ground connections would be removed. The majority of solar equipment would be recycled and the BESS either reused for other batteries or also recycled.

#### 4. Planning History

**Reference Number:** 20/04172/SCREEN

**Description:** Screening Opinion for the construction and operation of approximately 60ha of ground mounted solar farm development and related infrastructure, including site access, inverter/ transformer units, substation, battery storage provision and security measures.

**Status:** EIA not required

#### 5. Consultee Responses

West Bedlington Town Council	The Town Council SUPPORTS the application. The developer has discussed this application with the Town Council and also listened to residents concerns regarding any construction traffic using church lane and has removed this from being an issue during construction via the construction of the temporary construction route off Hartford Road, which has already been welcomed by residents in the area. The Town Council supports the environmental gain and increased bio-diversity of the site as a result of this application and a reduction in the towns overall carbon footprint. The Town Council also welcomes any community gain finances from this application.
Environment Agency	No objections subject to conditions
Natural England	No objections subject to conditions. The proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites.
The Coal Authority	No objections subject to the imposition of conditions to ensure that a scheme of intrusive investigations is carried out and remediation works or mitigation measures required to address any land stability arising from coal mining legacy is implemented.
Forestry Commission	No objections.
Newcastle International Airport	No objections and no impacts requiring mitigation.
Northumbria Police	Suggest that the perimeter fence is upgraded to a security fence
Fire & Rescue Service	No objections.
County Highways	No objections subject to the imposition of recommended conditions and informatives.
Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)	No objections subject to conditions.
Public Protection	No comments or objections.
County Ecologist	No objections subject to the imposition of conditions to secure ecological avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures.
County Archaeologist	No objections subject to a condition requiring a targeted programme of archaeological mitigation to be undertaken.
Built Heritage and Design	No objections on heritage grounds.
Strategic Estates	No response received
Climate Change Team	No objections.

## 6. Public Responses

### Neighbour Notification

6.1 Neighbour notification was carried out as described in the following table.

Number of Neighbours Notified	187
Number of Objections	2
Number of Support	1
Number of General Comments	1

### Notices

6.2 General site notices were posted around the site on 22 June 2023 and a press notice advertising the application as a 'major application' was placed in the News Post Leader on 30 June 2023.

### Summary of Responses

6.3 Two letters of objection have been received from residents of the Hartford Hall residential estate who refer to the following points.

- The proposed development including the panels, buildings and perimeter fencing will create noise and low-level radiation blighting the local area that is a haven for wildlife and widely used for walking by local residents and visitors.
- The proposed development is too extensive and too close to the boundary of the Hartford Hall estate.
- Concern about visibility and glare on adjacent properties in the Hartford Hall estate especially in winter when there is no foliage on the trees in the intervening country park.
- Impact on quality of life including noise, views and value of property.
- Tree planting needed on southeastern boundary to screen the development and reduce noise.

6.4 One letter of support has been received whilst raising concerns that the access for the temporary access road might increase the risk of accidents on this busy stretch of road.

6.5 One letter has been received expressing support for renewable energy but also concerned at the scale of the proposed scheme and seeking assurance that there will be no visual or noise impact.

6.5 The above is a summary of the comments. The full written text is available on our website at: <http://publicaccess.northumberland.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=RW93E6QSIER00>

## 7. Planning Policy

### Development Plan Policy

7.1 In accordance with Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case the development plan is the Northumberland Local Plan (NLP) that was adopted on 31 March 2022. The policies in the NLP are therefore up-to-date and must be given full weight.

7.2 The policies in the NLP that are relevant to the consideration of the application include the following policies.

- Policy STP1: Spatial Strategy
- Policy STP 2: Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development
- Policy STP 3: Principles of Sustainable Development
- Policy STP 4: Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
- Policy STP 5: Health and Wellbeing
- Policy QOP 1: Design Principles
- Policy QOP 2: Good Design and Amenity
- Policy QOP 4: Landscaping and Trees
- Policy TRA 2: The Effects of Development on the Transport Network
- Policy TRA 7: Aerodrome safeguarding areas
- Policy ENV 1: Approaches to assessing the impact of development on the natural, historic and built environment
- Policy ENV 2: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Policy ENV 3: Landscape
- Policy ENV 7: Historic Environment and Heritage Assets
- Policy ENV 9: Conservation Areas
- Policy WAT 3: Flooding
- Policy WAT 4: Sustainable Drainage Systems
- Policy POL 1: Unstable and Contaminated Land
- Policy POL 2: Pollution and Air, Soil and Water Quality
- Policy POL 3: Agricultural Land Quality
- Policy MIN 4: Safeguarding mineral resources
- Policy MIN 5: Prior extraction of minerals
- Policy REN 1: Renewable and low carbon energy and associated energy storage
- Policy INF 5: Open space and facilities for sport and recreation

### National Planning Policy

7.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (September 2023) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) are material considerations in determining this application.

### Neighbourhood Planning Policy

7.4 The site of the proposed development is located within the Civil Parish of West Bedlington. This is a designated Neighbourhood Area and West Bedlington Town Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan. The plan has reached the pre-submission stage and a consultation on the 'West Bedlington

Neighbourhood Plan: Pre-Submission Draft' took place between 10 February 2021 and 7 April 2021. As the plan is at the pre-submission stage it should be afforded little weight in decision-making at this time.

7.5 The policies from the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan that are relevant to this application are:

- Policy WB 1: Sustainable development
- Policy WB 2: Design Policy
- Policy WB 3: General location of new development
- Policy WB 4: Green infrastructure
- Policy WB 8: Heritage assets
- Policy WB 18: Transport and new development

#### Other Documents/Strategies

7.6 A variety of other documents and strategies are relevant to the consideration of the proposals and these are referred to as appropriate in the appraisal section of this report.

### **8. Appraisal**

8.1 The main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are:

- Principle of the development
- Climate change
- Agricultural land
- Landscape and visual impact
- Impact on residential amenity
- Transport considerations
- Impact on ecology
- Impact on heritage assets
- Glint and glare
- Water management
- Open space
- Mineral safeguarding
- Cumulative effects

#### **Principle of the Development**

8.2 Policy STP 1 sets the spatial strategy for Northumberland and directs development towards existing settlements. The site of the proposed development is in the open countryside and outside of an existing settlement. For development in the open countryside to be supported it must align with at least one of the relevant policy criteria in Policy STP 1 (g). This includes if the proposal provides for essential energy infrastructure in accordance with other policies in the plan (g, iv).

8.3 Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan is generally supportive of renewable energy such as solar photovoltaic developments, provided that the effects from the development are acceptable or can be made acceptable when considered against the criteria in this policy and the other policies in the development plan. It also supports energy storage systems where this would improve the efficiency of the associated renewable energy development. The Local Plan does not allocate sites for solar photovoltaic developments with Policy REN 1 requiring an assessment of the likely effects of a proposal as described above.



8.4 The NPPF is also supportive of new renewable energy development. Paragraph 152 states the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. Paragraph 158 (b) goes on to state when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. The NPPF also does not provide specific locational requirements for solar photovoltaic developments.

8.5 It is therefore considered that Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan and Paragraph 152 of the NPPF support solar photovoltaic development in principle, including the development that is the subject of this planning application. This support in principle is subject to the proposed development being considered acceptable when assessed against the relevant policies in the development plan.

## **Climate Change**

8.6 Both national legislation and international agreements set targets for the reduction of carbon emissions and the increase in renewable energy generation. In 2019 the Government amended the Climate Change Act 2008 by introducing a target for at least a 100% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (compared to 1990 levels) in the UK by 2050. This is known as the commitment to 'net zero'. Paragraph 2 of the NPPF states that planning decisions must reflect relevant international obligations, and the UK's legally binding commitments to energy targets is also an important material consideration.

8.7 The Energy White Paper (Energy White Paper: Powering our net zero future, December 2020) addresses the transformation of the UK's energy system towards the 2050 target for net-zero emissions. It sees the expansion of renewable technologies as a key contributor to achieving an affordable clean electricity system by 2050 and sets out that solar is one of the key building blocks of the future energy mix. In October 2021, the Government published the Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener. Under 'Key Policies' for power it explains that subject to security of supply, the UK will be powered entirely by clean electricity through, amongst other things, the accelerated deployment of low-cost renewable generation such as solar.

8.8 In February 2023 the Government created a new Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the following month published 'Powering up Zero' as the new Department's manifesto for the future. In the Ministerial Foreword the document is described as follows. *'By bringing together our Energy Security Plan, and Net Zero Growth Plan, it explains how we will diversify, decarbonise and domesticate energy production by investing in renewables and nuclear, to power Britain from Britain.'* The document recognises the contribution that solar can make. *'Solar has huge potential to decarbonise the power sector. We have ambitions for a fivefold increase in solar by 2035, up to 70GW enough to power around 20 million homes.... Government seeks large scale solar deployment across the UK, looking for development mainly on brownfield, industrial and low / medium grade agricultural land'*. In March 2023 a draft National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure was published. Whilst dealing with projects over 50MW such national energy statements can be material considerations in relation to planning applications for developments <50MW.

8.9 The proposed development has a capacity of 49.9MW and would generate a significant amount of electricity from a clean, renewable source. This would provide for a reduction of approximately 8,700 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually

and meet the energy needs of approximately 13,000 homes each year. The scheme could therefore make an important contribution to the objective of achieving the statutory Net Zero target set for 2050, the commitment to reducing emissions by 78% compared with 1990 levels by 2035 and the ambitions for a fivefold increase in solar by 2035. This benefit of the scheme should be given significant weight in the planning balance.

8.10 It is also considered that the proposed development accords with Part 1 of Policy STP 4 of the Northumberland Local Plan with regard to contributing to meeting binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to mitigating climate change. The proposed development is also supported by Paragraph 158 (a) of the NPPF which states when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Agricultural Land**

8.11 Paragraph 174 of the NPPF indicates that decisions should recognise the economic and other benefits of best and most versatile agricultural land, which it classes as land in Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification. NLP Policy POL 3 states that regard will be had to the wider economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land when considering any irreversible loss in accordance with national policy. Where significant development of such land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of higher quality. Part 2 of Policy POL 3 goes on to state temporary or reversible development on best and most versatile agricultural land will be supported where the land would be reinstated to its pre-development quality.

8.12 As stated in paragraph 8.8 above there is Government support for locating solar developments on low / medium grade agricultural land.

8.13 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) includes specific advice on large scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms (see Paragraph 013, Reference ID 5-013-20150327). The PPG encourages 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, consideration should be given to whether 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 the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

8.14 The application site comprises a number of regularly sized agricultural fields that are currently used to produce animal feed (in the form of haylage) rather than for arable food production. It forms part of a wider land holding which extends northwards to Broadway House Farm and the southern edges of Bedlington. An Agricultural Land Classification Report prepared by Soil Environment Services has been submitted. This demonstrates that all the agricultural land is classed as Grade 3b with wetness and a topsoil texture of medium silty clay loam, silt loam or heavy clay loam being the limiting factors.

8.15 The proposed solar farm (excluding the substation) will be a temporary installation to operate for a 40-year lifespan. A suitably worded planning condition is recommended to be imposed to control this and to require the solar arrays and

associated equipment to be removed, and the site restored following the cessation of this 40 year period. There would be no permanent or irreversible loss of agricultural land with a conversion from arable cropping to pasture grazing in between the solar panels. Whilst there is likely to be a reduction in agricultural production over the whole development area, it can be anticipated that the soil quality would improve over this long fallow period, and the restored land whether used for arable or livestock farming will be more productive than at present. Conditions have also been recommended to ensure that the soil resource is protected during construction and restoration. This would be encapsulated within the Construction Management Plan and post-development restoration conditions.

8.16 Although the development would temporarily remove a significant portion of land from arable use it would still be available for low intensity grazing. The development would also be fully reversible if the land were to be required for food production during the operational period. Nevertheless there is likely to be a loss of agricultural production over the whole development area and this factor will need to be taken into account in the planning balance.

### **Landscape and Visual Impact**

8.17 Part 3 (a) of Policy REN 1 states appropriate weight will be given to landscape character and sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors including landscapes and views demonstrated to be of value at the local community level in assessing whether applications for renewable energy development are acceptable or can be made acceptable. Part 1 (a) of Policy ENV 3 states proposals affecting the character of the landscape will be expected to conserve and enhance important elements of that character. A number of other NLP policies are relevant when considering landscape matters including policies STP 3, QOP 1, QOP 4 and ENV 1.

8.18 The application site is not within a landscape which has been nationally or locally designated because of its value.

8.19 It is located within National Character Area 13: South East Northumberland Coastal Plain, which contains four Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and seven Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) as defined in the Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment prepared by Land Use Consultants and published in August 2010.

8.20 With the exception of the most northerly sections of proposed access routes, the site falls within the 'Coalfield Farmland' Landscape Character Type (LCT) and 'Stannington' Landscape Character Area (LCA) 39c, which extends across the landscape to the west of the site and towards the northern edges of Cramlington to the south. A key feature of LCA 39c is that the character of the landscape is significantly modified and influenced by adjoining urban areas and their associated infrastructure and a characteristic of relevance to the application site is that the level of the enclosure is categorised as "*generally open, enclosed in places*", with the level of intervisibility noted as "*self-contained, restricted intervisibility*".

8.21 The northern-most sections of access routes into the wider site are included within Landscape Character Type 42: Urban and Urban Fringe. This LCT is represented by one character area, 'Ashington, Blyth and Cramlington' and key features include large built up areas and large scale industrial and commercial land uses.

8.22 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) prepared by Pegasus Group has been submitted with the planning application. The LVIA considers possible effects of the proposed development upon landscape features, landscape character and visual amenity. The LVIA assesses both the permanent effects of the development and the temporary effects associated with its construction. It also has regard to seasonal variations in the visibility of the development which is considered to be important for this proposal because most of the woodland around the site is deciduous thus its screening and filtering effects are reduced during winter months.

8.23 The application site comprises a number of regularly sized agricultural fields which are divided by mature native hedgerows or belts of coniferous woodland bounded to the south and east by the steeply sloping banks of the River Blyth and to the west and part of the northern boundaries, by the Bedlingtonshire Golf Course. The LVIA states: *'The proposed development layout has been developed iteratively in conjunction with the production of the LVIA with the intention of incorporating mitigation into the scheme from the outset. The effects identified and described as part of this LVIA are based on the Master Layout and Landscaping Plan submitted as part of this application which provides the strategy for the design of landscape that respects local landscape character, whilst also assimilating new development within views for the few visual receptors who might see it.'*

8.24 The landform across the site slopes gradually, reflecting the prevailing landform beyond the boundaries of the site. Local high points are located at Bedlington Country Park to the northeast and Ewart's Hill on the A1068 to the northwest. From these points, the land falls steadily in a south-westerly and south-easterly direction respectively towards the River Blyth to the south of the site, which flows within a steep valley and passes through a corridor of ancient woodland. This corridor wraps round an area of restored opencast coal workings, including the application site. Within the site and across the local landscape linear belts of coniferous trees and hedgerows are common. There are areas of plantation woodland in the vicinity of the site including at Bedlington Country Park, Bedlingtonshire Golf Club and Hartford Bridge. The areas of woodland in combination with the sloping topography restrict views and result in the site having limited visual connectivity with the surrounding landscape and its wider environs, including potential visual receptors. The LVIA assesses the value of the local landscape as medium and this is agreed.

8.25 It is proposed that six trees would need to be removed to create the proposed access track from Hartford Road. Four trees, to allow increased space for the trees to mature, would be replaced in this location as part of the detailed landscaping proposals. No other trees would be removed. The landscaping proposals include the provision of new native trees, hedgerows and shrub planting to better integrate the proposals with the surrounding area and provide screening for example from properties within the Hartford Hall residential estate. In the LVIA these planting proposals are assessed as having a minor beneficial landscape effect and this is agreed. Several areas for biodiversity enhancement are proposed which will be seeded with species-rich and structurally diverse grassland including an area of fruiting trees for foraging benefits. The impact of the proposed development on biodiversity is considered further at paragraphs 8.42 – 8.50 below.

8.26 The effects of the proposed development on the character of the site itself would be locally transformative due to the scale of the proposed development, the introduction of a new form of development not currently present in this area, and the urbanising effects creating from the solar panels and the associated elements of the proposed development. However, as noted above (paragraph 8.24) the site has

limited visual connectivity with the surrounding landscape and this together with the proposed landscaping will significantly reduce the impact on the character of the wider landscape and visual effects on users of the Country Park, golf course and residential properties, including properties on the Hartford Bridge residential estate. A small number of residents of this estate have objected to the proposed development but it is considered that the proposed landscaping on the boundary of the site will diminish the visual effects as the planting matures, including in winter months when foliage in the intervening woodland will be reduced. In summer months the existing vegetation in the woodland will largely filter any views of the solar panels until the proposed planting matures to screen the panels. It should also be noted that in response to comments made at the pre-application stage, the distance between the site boundary and the location of the solar arrays has been increased in this western field with the result that the arrays are further away from residential properties in the Hartford Hall residential estate.

8.27 The proposed Battery Storage Energy Facility (BESS) is located in the south-eastern part of the site. This location was selected for a number of reasons. In particular there was a need to avoid any areas of former surface mining and the historic high walls. The location of the BESS means that it will not be visible from anywhere outside of the site.

8.28 In conclusion, it is considered that the proposed development would have some adverse landscape and visual impact effects. However, the topography of the site, existing screening and the proposed introduction of new tree and hedgerow planting would limit the adverse effects. It is considered that the adverse effects have been suitably mitigated in the proposals. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that the proposal would be in some conflict with Policy ENV 3 of the Northumberland and Part 15 of the NPPF due to the harm identified. In the planning balance consideration will be given as to whether the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the harm.

### **Impact on Residential Amenity**

8.29 NLP Policy STP 5 requires development proposals to demonstrate that they will prevent negative impacts on amenity and do not have a negative impact on air and noise pollution. Policy QOP 2 requires that development does not cause unacceptable harm to the amenity of those living in, working in or visiting the local area. Policy REN 1 requires the assessment of proposals to give appropriate weight to amenity due to noise, odour, dust, vibration or visual impact.

8.30 The site lies to the immediate south of Bedlington with the nearest residential properties northwards are approximately 500 metres from the proposed solar panel arrays. A number of residential properties are located within the Hartford Hall estate to the south-west of the site, beyond the wooded course of the River Blyth Valley, with the nearest house some 150 metres from the panel arrays.

8.31 A Noise Assessment has been submitted. It states that the existing baseline noise levels are low and are influenced by local road traffic and noise from the surrounding environment. The assessment concluded that the operation of the solar farm and BESS would generate very low noise levels at surrounding properties throughout the day and night-time periods, with the mitigation measures provided around the BESS facility, as proposed. It concluded also that the operation of the plant would result in a low impact, with noise levels not exceeding a level which would represent a No Observed Effects Level, thus ensuring that the operation did not result in unacceptable levels of noise.

8.32 The Public Protection team was consulted on the application but had no comments to make. In view of the nature of the proposed development and the distance from residential properties it is considered that there will be minimal adverse effects in terms of noise during both construction and operation. The potential impact of transport operations and of glint and glare on residential amenity is considered below. The proposed development therefore is in accordance with NLP Policies, QOP 2, REN 1 and STP 5.

### **Transport Considerations**

8.33 Policies TRA 2 and REN 1 (Part 3g) are relevant to the effects of new development on the transport network. Policy TRA 2 requires all developments affecting the transport network to:

- a. Provide effective and safe access and egress to the existing transport network;
- b. Include appropriate measures to avoid, mitigate and manage any significant impacts on highway capacity, congestion or on highway safety including any contribution to cumulative impacts;
- c. Minimise conflict between different modes of transport, including measures for network, traffic and parking management where necessary;
- d. Facilitate the safe use of the network, including suitable crossing points, footways and dedicated provision for cyclists and equestrian users where necessary;
- e. Suitably accommodate the delivery of goods and supplies, access for maintenance and refuse collection where necessary; and
- f. Minimise any adverse impact on communities and the environment, including noise and air quality.

8.34 The existing access to the application site is from an access track extending south from Broadway House Farm Road which connects with Church Lane and the A193 Front Street to the north. Church Lane provides access to a number of residential roads as well as having residential properties along its length with St Cuthbert's Church close to the junction with Front Street.

8.35 A Transport Statement prepared by PFA Consulting has been submitted and notes that the proposals take into account comments made by both County Highways and others at the pre-application stage. A key issue raised at pre-application stage was the impacts on Church Lane and associated pedestrian and cycle movements.

8.36 It is proposed that a temporary construction access for the full extent of the construction period would be provided from the A1068 Hartford Road to the north of Bedlingtonshire Golf Club. This will avoid the routing of construction traffic through the residential area via Church Lane hence minimising the conflict with the existing traffic and other highway users including pedestrian and cyclists. It will also allow for the HGV construction route to avoid routing through the centre of Bedlington.

8.37 Deliveries will be spaced across the construction period of approximately 9 months, with typically up to 8 deliveries per day. It is unlikely that, even at the most intense periods of construction there will be more than 10 deliveries (20 HGV movements) per day. The first weeks of the construction period will see initial deliveries to the site involving site security measures, machinery, temporary site welfare and office and establishment of a site construction compound and aggregate to construct the temporary access track and some internal access tracks. It is

estimated that this could result in approximately 350 HGV deliveries to the site. The main construction of the solar farm will see items such as the transformers/inverters, cabling, solar panels, solar panel support frames, DNO substation and aggregate to construct the battery storage base and remaining internal access tracks. It is calculated that this will result in approximately 800 deliveries to the site. In total the construction of the solar farm will result in approximately 1,450 deliveries to the site, which will be spread over the construction period. The expected HGV numbers are based on best estimates at this stage and will be dependent upon the construction programme and shipping of materials.

8.38 Construction hours will be between 08:00 and 18:00 Monday to Friday, and between 08:00 and 14:00 on Saturday. The temporary access and its exact position will be secured by condition given its proximity to the existing right hand turn lane on the A1068 which will require a Road Safety Audit. This access shall be reinstated to its original state once the development is complete. Parking for 25 construction staff vehicles and cycle parking would be provided in the construction compound adjacent to the office / welfare area. Materials for the construction of the proposed development would be stored on the site compound.

8.39 Access for on-going maintenance of the solar farm and battery storage facility is proposed along the existing access track extending south from Broadway House Farm Road. This will involve vehicles travelling along Church Lane past residential properties. However, vehicle movements during the operational period of the solar farm would be limited in number and mainly associated with the monitoring, upkeep and cleaning of the site. These trips would typically be made by small vans with between 10 and 20 trips each year. Due to the low number of vehicular movements being made to and from the site during its operational period, the site is unlikely to have any significant impact to the local highway network once constructed and operational.

8.40 The Council's Highways Development Management team has reviewed the submitted information and has raised no objections to the proposed development, subject to the imposition of relevant planning conditions and informatives.

8.41 It is concluded that the proposed development accords with Policies TRA 2 and REN 1 (Part 3g) of the Northumberland Local Plan. It is therefore acceptable in highways terms subject to the imposition of appropriate planning conditions.

### **Impact on Ecology**

8.42 NLP Policy ENV 2 states that development proposals affecting biodiversity will minimise their impact, avoiding significant harm through location and/or design and secure a net gain for biodiversity as calculated to reflect latest Government policy and advice. Policy REN 1 (Part 3) states that in considering applications appropriate weight will be given to (inter alia) Internationally, nationally and locally designated nature conservation sites and features and protected habitats and species.

8.43 An Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) prepared by Tyler Grange Ltd., a Biodiversity Metric 4.0 demonstrating a greater than 10% net gain in both habitat and hedgerow units and an Arboricultural Impact Assessment prepared by Barton Hyett were submitted in support of the application. An updated EIA was subsequently submitted containing additional information as requested by Natural England and the County Ecologist.

8.44 The main habitat on site is agricultural land with hedgerows. There is also a block of mixed woodland plantation in the south of the site and areas of grassland managed for amenity and lines of trees. There are no watercourses or ditches on site. Intact native hedgerows are a Habitat of Principal Importance under s41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and all of the hedgerows on site meet this definition, with two hedgerows also being classed as species rich. The hedgerows will be retained with a buffer and incorporate areas of habitat enhancement which should continue to support the four protected and notable breeding birds (dunnock, song thrush, skylark and yellowhammer) that have been recorded.

8.45 To the south and east are areas of deciduous woodland which form part of Bedlington Country Park, a designated Local Nature Reserve. There is also the Plessey Woods designated Local Wildlife Site. These woodlands are both designated ancient woodland, and a Habitat of Principal Importance under s41 of the NERC Act. The woodland is wholly outside the red line boundary and the scheme has been designed so that no development, including the security fence will be within 15m of the trees.

8.46 The site is within 6km of the Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site. The wintering bird surveys and local data records have not recorded any of the SPA bird species to be present at the application site. Therefore, due to the distance from the Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar site and the large expanses of arable crop on the majority of the site it is concluded that the site could not be functionally linked land to the SPA.

8.47 The initial consultation response from Natural England highlighted potential impacts on two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - Northumberland Shore SSSI and Holywell Pond SSSI. Natural England required further information in order to determine the significance of these impacts and the scope for mitigation. The applicant subsequently submitted further information in response to Natural England's concerns. This enabled Natural England to conclude that the proposed development would not damage or destroy the interest features for which the sites had been designated.

8.48 The Northumberland Shore SSSI, located about 3.5 kilometres to the east, provides important non-breeding grounds for wading and shore birds, some which will also roost on nearby farmland outside of the designated site. Due to the presence of suitable arable farmland habitat on the application site wintering and breeding bird surveys have been undertaken. None of the SSSI notified species were recorded on site. A peak number of 30 lapwing were recorded, however this is not considered significant in the context of the Northumberland Shore which as a whole is used by about 4000 lapwing in the winter. Holywell Pond SSSI, located more than 7 kilometres to the south east, is designated for the aggregations of non-breeding whooper swan which it supports. Whooper swan will feed on arable land through the winter. The wintering bird surveys of the application site did not record any presence of swans. Due to the absence of swans from the site plus the distance from, and the availability of arable land closer to the SSSI, the site is not considered to be core habitat for this species or linked to the SSSI.

8.49 The requirement for a quantified 10% net gain is not yet mandatory therefore, the early use of Natural England's Biodiversity Metric to quantify losses and gains on site is to be welcomed. The County Ecologist supports the proposals in the submissions subject to appropriate conditions.



8.50 It is concluded therefore that the proposals are in accordance with NLP policies ENV 2 and REN 1 (Part 3) subject to the imposition of conditions as recommended by Natural England and the County Ecologist.

### **Impact on Heritage Assets**

8.51 Policy ENV 1 of the NLP states that great weight will be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets with the impact of proposed development on their significance being assessed in accordance with Policy ENV 7.

8.52 Policy ENV 7 of the NLP states that development proposals will be assessed and decisions made that ensure the conservation and enhancement of the significance, quality and integrity of Northumberland's heritage assets and their settings. Applicants are required to provide a heritage statement; describing the significance of the asset and any contribution made to this significance by its setting. Development proposals that would result in substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets will not be supported unless they meet various criteria. Where development proposals would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, the policy states that this will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing the optimum use that is viable and justifiable. This policy approach accords with the policy approach towards designated heritage assets set out in the NPPF (paragraphs 194 and 199 – 203).

8.53 Policy ENV 9 of the NLP states that where development may affect a conservation area or its setting, it will be ensured that development enhances and reinforces the local distinctiveness of the conservation area, while, wherever possible, better revealing its significance;

8.54 A Heritage-based Risk Assessment (HDS) has been submitted with the planning application. The HDS concludes that the proposed development would not result in any harm to the heritage significance of any designated heritage asset through change to setting.

8.55 The Council's architectural heritage and design officer has reviewed the submissions including the HDS and the Design and Access Statement and has also visited the site and the surrounding area to inform her response to the proposals. She considers that the nature, scale and location of the proposed development have the potential to impact the setting and significance of the following heritage assets.

- Bedlington Conservation Area
- The Tower and Beeches Grade II listed building
- Hartford Hall Grade II\* listed building
- Hartford Hall Stables and Terraced Walls Grade II listed buildings.

8.56 There are also other Grade II listed buildings in the vicinity of the proposed development but the Council's architectural heritage and design officer considers that due to the natural topography of the area and established estate planting and shelter belts, the ability to appreciate and understand the setting and significance of these assets would not be impacted by the development proposals.

8.57 The Council's officer's views and conclusions are set out below.

8.58 The development proposals would not result in a direct physical impact to the Conservation Area, but given their substantial scale, form and nature they would result in a change to the agricultural land to its south and southeast, thereby altering

its setting. However, the enclosed nature and linear form of the Conservation Area, its orientation, siting, surrounding topography and how it is encountered, means that while the development proposals would result in a change to the landscape (in function and appearance), it would not result in a harmful impact to the setting and significance of the Bedlington Conservation Area.

8.59 The Tower and Beeches Grade II listed building also has an enclosed setting orientated to face west and set within a pleasing garden bounded by metre high walls, there is no intervisibility between or with the proposed development site. It is concluded therefore that the ability to appreciate and understand the listed building would not be impacted by the development proposals.

8.60 Hartford Hall and its associated listed buildings are encountered on approach from the south along the A192 towards Hartford Bank. From these views its domed roof, palatial form, and massing, serve to distinguish it as a building of status and antiquity. Its verdant surroundings provide a soft frame to the heritage asset, enhancing its architectural design and significance. However, it is not until within close proximity, on approach to the gate lodge, screen walls and upon entering its grounds that the scale and grandeur of the listed building as a Country House set within its parkland is fully revealed. From these southern and western approaches to the Hall and its ancillary listed buildings, there is no intervisibility with, from or to the development site. Whilst the development proposals are extensive in form and layout resulting in a significant change to the existing landscape, the established planting to the northeast is retained thereby ensuring that the verdant frame (and buffer) to the listed buildings is not altered or severed. It is therefore concluded that the development proposals would not result in a harmful impact to the setting and significance of the Grade II\* listed Hartford Hall, and its ancillary Grade II listed buildings.

8.61 The County Archaeologist has also reviewed the submissions. The proposed development site was subject to a phased programme of archaeological assessment comprising desk-based assessment (DBA) and a geophysical survey. The DBA included a review of historic mapping, aerial photographs and historic mining data. This exercise identified that large areas of the site have been subject to significant damage or truncation associated with the operation of the Acorn Bank surface mine between 1955 and 1966, following which the site was restored. The precise extent of the open cast workings are not accurately recorded, though large areas of the site were truncated either by mineral extraction or associated works such as soil storage, mineral processing and plant movement. Any archaeological remains previously present within this area are assumed to have been either wholly destroyed or substantially truncated by mining activity.

8.62 The archaeological geophysical survey did identify a number of anomalies of potential archaeological origin beyond the area of the former surface mine. These features had not been tested via archaeological field evaluation, such that their presence or absence or significance had not yet been established. The County Archaeologist therefore advised that the application should not be determined until the archaeological field evaluation had been undertaken and the evaluation report submitted to the Local Planning Authority.

8.63 An Archaeological Evaluation report prepared by Durham University was subsequently submitted presenting the results of the field evaluation. A total of 31 linear evaluation trenches were excavated in the southern and western areas of the site. Potentially significant archaeological remains were identified in only one trench and comprised a pit containing burnt organic material consistent deposition in the

Late Iron Age / Romano-British. This feature was not absolutely dated and no material suitable for radiocarbon dating was recovered. Other features identified in the evaluation trenches comprised evidence of medieval and post-medieval agriculture (field boundaries and ploughing) and land drains of most-medieval or modern date.

8.64 The County Archaeologist has raised no objections to the proposed development subject to the imposition of a condition requiring a targeted programme of archaeological mitigation to be undertaken. The County Archaeologist has provided a brief for this work which will involve 'strip, map and record' mitigation area based on a 10m buffer from the pit feature identified in Trench 16 of the evaluation exercise. Should further archaeological features be identified, an additional area of 'strip, map and record' mitigation should be stripped based on a further 10m buffer from edge of identified archaeological features.

8.65 It is concluded therefore that the proposals are in accordance with Policies ENV 1, ENV 7 and ENV 9 and relevant provisions in the NPPF and that there are no objections to the proposed development on heritage grounds.

### **Glint and Glare**

8.66 Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph 013, Reference ID: 5-013-20150327) advises the potential for the effects of glint and glare on the landscape, neighbouring uses and aircraft safety should be given consideration for large-scale solar farms. The definition of glint and glare is as follows:

- Glint – a momentary flash of bright light typically received by moving receptors or from moving reflectors;
- Glare – a continuous source of bright light typically received by static receptors or from large reflective surfaces.

8.67 Relevant policies in the NLP to be taken into account are Policies POL 2, TRA 7 and REN 1.

8.68 The solar panels will be dark blue or black with a matt anodized aluminium frame. The purpose of the panels is to absorb and not reflect light; the latest generation of panels have an anti-reflective coating to limit any glint and glare associated with earlier versions of the technology. Similarly, the framework material is designed to avoid glint or gleam in the light.

8.69 A Glint and Glare Study has been submitted that assesses the possible effects of the proposed development on surrounding road users, dwellings, and aviation activity associated with Newcastle International Airport. The study indicates that whilst reflections are possible, the existing vegetation would mitigate the impacts to block views of the reflective area and the distance between the observer and the closest reflecting panel area is such that the proportion of an observer's field of vision that is taken up by the reflecting area is significantly reduced. Furthermore the study indicates that the proposal would not adversely impact as the modelling indicates that no solar reflections are geometrically possible towards the air traffic control tower at Newcastle Airport and towards either of the 2-mile approach paths to the airport. It is therefore considered that the proposed development is therefore considered to be acceptable in terms of glint and glare.

8.70 Newcastle International Airport has welcomed the production of a Glint & Glare Assessment which takes into account the potential impact to the aerodrome operations as a result of the development. The Airfield Technical Advisor has

reviewed the contents of the assessment and has confirmed that due to the location of the site (9km from the aerodrome) and the results of the assessment, it is considered that there are no impacts requiring mitigation with regards to Newcastle International Airport. As a result the Airport raises no objection to the proposals.

8.71 Public Protection and Council's Highways Development Management team also raise no objections or concerns with regard to glint and glare.

8.72 In respect of residential amenity further information was sought on any potential impact on properties on the Hartford Hall residential estate in view of the concern expressed about the potential for glare in winter when there is no foliage on the trees in the intervening country park. The applicant responded pointing out that reflections are possible from March to September and for the majority of this time the woodland would be fully in leaf. It is concluded that the risk of glare to residential amenity is low due, however, a condition is recommended to control glare should it be identified post-construction. Subject to the imposition of a condition, it is considered that the proposal does not conflict with NLP Policies POL 2, TRA 7 and REN 1 and relevant provision in Planning Practice Guidance in relation to the effects from glint and glare.

## **Water Management**

8.73 Policy WAT 3 of the Northumberland Local Plan requires development proposals to demonstrate how they will minimise flood risk to people, property and infrastructure from all potential sources. In line with Paragraph 159 of the NPPF, Policy WAT 3 states inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided and directs development away from areas at highest risk of flooding. Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. Policy REN 1 also requires consideration of flood risk when considering planning applications for renewable energy development. Policy WAT 4 requires SuDS for any development where it is necessary to manage surface water drainage.

8.74 There is an ordinary watercourse running along the north east boundary of the application site and the River Blyth is located south of the application site. The site lies predominately within Flood Zone 1, defined as land with a low probability of flooding, having less than 0.1% (1 in 1000) annual probability of river flooding. There is a small section of the site to the south west that lies within Flood Zone 2, defined as land with a medium probability of flooding, having between 1% (1 in 100) and 0.1% (1 in 1000) annual probability of flooding. Solar Farms are classified as Essential Infrastructure and therefore appropriate in Flood Zone 2 and the sequential test is satisfied.

8.75 The application is accompanied by a site-specific flood risk assessment to assess flood risk to and from the proposed development. The potential flood risk to the site from all sources of flooding is considered to be 'High' to 'Very Low'. Areas of elevated surface water flood risk are present associated with isolated low spots where surface waters could accumulate and low lying areas adjacent to watercourses. All control equipment is restricted to areas of 'Very Low' risk and all sensitive equipment, including a small number of solar panels, would be raised above ground level and would not be affected by shallow overland flows. The security fencing is permeable to flood waters and solar panels are raised above the flood levels. The development would remain operational and safe for users in times of flood and not impede water flows and not increase flood risk elsewhere. There are

areas of elevated surface water flooding associated with low points across the site, these depths range from 0.3m to >1.2m.

8.76 The risk of flooding from surface water is assessed as between 'High' and 'Low'. A sustainable drainage strategy, involving the implementation of SuDS in the form of interception swales, is proposed for managing surface water runoff. Interception swales are proposed at the low points of the site to intercept extreme flows which may already run offsite. The interception swales have no formal discharge arrangements but will gradually empty by natural processes and provide runoff pathway management. The volume of depression storage provided within the proposed interception swales (204.06 cubic metres) is greater than the additional runoff volume generated as a result of the extreme 1 in 100 year storm event, including an allowance for climate change (198.49 cubic metres) and is an appropriate form of mitigation.

8.77 Due to the inclusion of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and substation a more robust sustainable drainage strategy (SuDS) is proposed for managing surface water runoff. It is proposed that runoff from the BESS area and substation would be collected by perimeter filter drains which would then convey runoff to attenuation swale. Overflow controls would be utilised to ensure that if the attenuation swale were to flood, the surface water would be directed away from the BESS area and would allow flows to spread overland to replicate the natural overland flow routes. The proposed drainage strategy would ensure that surface water arising from the developed site would be managed in a sustainable manner to mimic the surface water flows arising from the site prior to the proposed development, while reducing the flood risk to the site itself and elsewhere, taking climate change into account.

8.78 The Lead Local Flood Authority was consulted on the application and in their initial response objected to the proposals as they sought clarification and assurances on a number of issues. A Technical Note addressing the LLFA's points was subsequently submitted. This further information enabled the LLFA to withdraw its objections subject to the imposition of planning conditions requiring the maintenance of vegetation cover, grass filter strips and interception swales around the proposed development and the location of the control equipment. These conditions have been included in the recommended conditions.

8.79 In relation to water management, it is considered that the proposal would accord with Policies WAT 3 and WAT 4 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the NPPF, subject to the imposition of the recommended conditions.

## **Open Space**

8.80 Part 1 of Policy INF 5 of the NLP states that:

*The loss of open spaces defined on the Policies Map, or other existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, will not be supported unless:*

- a. an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b. the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a sustainable location; or*

- c. the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

8.81 Policy INF 5 is consistent with paragraph 99 of the NPPF.

8.82 The temporary construction access route for the solar farm passes through the designated open space of Bedlingtonshire Golf Club. An Open Space Assessment has been submitted in support of the planning application. This explains that the part of the golf course affected by the construction access has historically been used as a golf practice area and the golf club has indicated that it will continue to be used through the construction period subject to health and safety considerations. Following construction the temporary access will be removed and the area restored back to its previous use.

8.83 The loss of open space will therefore be very limited in extent, will be for a temporary period of up to 9 months and will not affect the operation of the golf club. It is considered that whilst there is a conflict with Policy INF 5, the weight to be given to any harm that would result is very limited.

### **Mineral Safeguarding**

8.84 The Northumberland Local Plan identifies Mineral Safeguarding Areas (MSA) to protect mineral resources from unnecessary sterilisation by non-mineral development. The proposed development is located within a Mineral Safeguarding Area for coal. Policy MIN 4 sets out policy criteria to assess proposals for new non-mineral development within these areas.

8.85 In accordance with Part 2 (a) of Policy MIN 4, the applicant has submitted a desk-based assessment of the effect of the proposed development on the mineral resource beneath and adjacent to the site of the proposed development. This assessment identifies that the majority of the site has been subject to past surface coal mining, which has removed the potential resource from these areas. The assessment also finds evidence that in the remainder of the site, in the south-east shallow coal reserves have been partially mined by underground pillar and stall methods with approximately 30 – 70% of the coal extracted. A detailed assessment has been carried out of this area that concludes that this resource is not of strategic importance or demonstrable economic value.

8.86 It is therefore considered that the proposed development can be supported within a MSA because the applicant can demonstrate that the mineral concerned is not of economic value in accordance with Part 3 (a) of Policy MIN 4. While the proposed development has a proposed operational lifespan of 40 years, it is both temporary and reversible in nature. The proposed development can therefore be supported in line with Part 3 (c) of Policy MIN 4. The requirements of Policy MIN 5 have also been considered and it is considered that there is no conflict.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

8.87 NLP Policy RENE 1 Part 3 states that applications will be supported where it has been demonstrated that the environmental, social and economic effects of the proposal, individually and cumulatively, are acceptable or can be made acceptable. Part 4 requires an assessment to be made of the cumulative impacts arising from the proposal. The officer appraisal set out in this report has taken into account the effects of the proposed development both individually and cumulatively. This has

included consideration of the cumulative effects of this solar farm together with other solar farms that have been granted planning permission in the area, in particular the Burnt House Farm solar farm on land between Bedlington and Hepscott to the north of the proposed development and the Low Horton farm solar farm east of Blyth to the south of the proposed development. There would be no intervisibility between these sites and it not considered that any other effects give rise to cumulative issues. On this basis it is therefore concluded that there is no conflict with NLP Policy RENE 1 Part 4.

## **Other Matters**

### *Public Rights of Way*

8.88 There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the site. The nearest PRoW is a footpath of approximately 1.6 km length, located approximately 100 m from the site's south-eastern boundary. This footpath provides a route through Bedlington Country Park, on the southern side of the River Blyth. Beyond this, there is a further footpath located between housing from Hartford Road and Church Lane, approximately 60 m from the proposed access at Hartford Road and 570 m from the main site's northern boundary. There is also a network of footpaths around Plessey Woods Country Park, approximately 560 m from the south-western site boundary.

### *Land Stability*

8.89 The site is located within a 'Coalfield Development High Risk Area', which means there are coal mining features and hazards that need to be considered in determining this planning application. A coal mining risk assessment has been submitted in support of the planning application.

8.90 The Coal Authority records indicate that within the application site and surrounding area there are coal mining features and hazards, which need to be considered in relation to the determination of this planning application, including shallow coal workings associated with a thick coal seam outcrop, which may have been worked from the surface. Voids and broken ground associated with such workings can pose a risk of ground instability and may give rise to the emission of mine gases. The Coal Authority advise that their records indicate that the application site is in an area of recorded and likely unrecorded coal mine workings at shallow depth. Where such mining has taken place general settlement of backfill and differential settlement over / in the vicinity of buried opencast highwalls can occur, which in turn can result in damage to buildings and structures. These features pose a potential risk to surface stability and public safety.

8.91 The Coal Authority has no objection to the proposed development subject to the imposition of planning conditions to require the undertaking of intrusive site investigations to establish the risks posed to the development by past coal mining activity prior to the commencement of development, and the submission for approval in writing of a statement prepared by a suitably competent person confirming that the site is, or has been made, safe and stable for the development. The Coal Authority considers the undertaking of intrusive site investigations, prior to the commencement of development, is considered to be necessary to ensure that adequate information pertaining to ground conditions and coal mining legacy is available to enable appropriate remedial and mitigatory measures to be identified and carried out before works commence on site. This is in order to ensure the safety and stability of the

development, in accordance with Policy POL 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan and paragraphs 183 and 184 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

### *Health & Safety*

8.92 A fire Safety Management Plan for the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) prepared by Reliance Fire Ltd has been submitted. The BESS will be constantly monitored and controlled through an Energy Management System (EMS) that will monitor the energy dispatch of the system and the temperature of the cells and cabins. The EMS will raise any alarms regarding temperatures, smoke detection, fire detection and fire suppression. The Fire & Rescue Service was consulted and has raised no objections on fire safety grounds.

### *Time limit for commencement of development*

8.93 It is normal for the time limit for the commencement of development to be not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date on which the permission is granted, but the local planning authority may consider a longer or shorter time period where this would assist the delivery of the development. The applicant has requested a period of not later than the expiration of five years beginning with the date on which the permission is granted be conditioned in order to provide an appropriate period of time to allow works associated with grid connection to be agreed and programmed with the network operator.

8.94 It is considered that a period of five years is justified in these circumstances and this is incorporated in the recommended planning conditions.

### *Community Benefits*

8.95 The applicant company has had discussions with West Bedlington Town Council regarding contributing to local community projects as part of its solar farm investment. It has pledged a sum of at least £250,000 and discussions are ongoing to identify local projects for investment. The provision of community benefits is not a consideration that is taken into account in the appraisal or determination of the planning application.

### *Equality Duty*

8.96 The County Council has a duty to have regard to the impact of any proposal on those people with characteristics protected by the Equality Act. Officers have had due regard to Sec 149(1) (a) and (b) of the Equality Act 2010 and considered the information provided by the applicant, together with the responses from consultees and other parties, and determined that the proposal would have no material impact on individuals or identifiable groups with protected characteristics. Accordingly, no changes to the proposal were required to make it acceptable in this regard.

### *Crime and Disorder Act Implications*

8.97 Northumbria Police submitted representations on the application. They stated that they support the move toward renewable energy sources but believe that more consideration needs to be given to the impact of crime on solar farms in view of the increased number of thefts from solar farms, in particular of solar cable, in recent years. They point out that as solar farms are usually in secluded locations, offenders can often work undisturbed for a number of hours through the night.



8.98 At Broadway House Farm, a perimeter security deer fence up to 3.0m high with small mammal/badger access points would be installed along the site boundary. Northumbria Police suggest that upgrading to a security fence would have no more visual impact than the livestock fence proposed, but would be more appropriate given the risk of theft from the site. In their consultation response they provide advice on the type of security fence that they consider would be suitable and better deter potential thieves.

8.99 The Northumbria Police response has been discussed with the applicants but they wish to install the type of perimeter fencing originally proposed. It is considered that a decision on the type of fence is ultimately a matter for the applicants and that the type of fencing proposed is acceptable in land use planning terms.

### *Human Rights Act Implications*

8.100 The Human Rights Act requires the County Council to take into account the rights of the public under the European Convention on Human Rights and prevents the Council from acting in a manner which is incompatible with those rights. Article 8 of the Convention provides that there shall be respect for an individual's private life and home save for that interference which is in accordance with the law and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of (inter alia) public safety and the economic wellbeing of the country. Article 1 of protocol 1 provides that an individual's peaceful enjoyment of their property shall not be interfered with save as is necessary in the public interest.

8.101 For an interference with these rights to be justifiable the interference (and the means employed) needs to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised. The main body of this report identifies the extent to which there is any identifiable interference with these rights. The Planning Considerations identified are also relevant in deciding whether any interference is proportionate. Case law has been decided which indicates that certain development does interfere with an individual's rights under Human Rights legislation. This application has been considered in the light of statute and case law and the interference is not considered to be disproportionate.

8.102 Officers are also aware of Article 6, the focus of which (for the purpose of this decision) is the determination of an individual's civil rights and obligations. Article 6 provides that in the determination of these rights, an individual is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal. Article 6 has been subject to a great deal of case law. It has been decided that for planning matters the decision making process as a whole, which includes the right of review by the High Court, complied with Article 6.

## **9. Conclusion**

9.1 The proposed development has a capacity of 49.9MW and would generate a significant amount of electricity from a clean, renewable source. The applicant states that this would provide for a reduction of approximately 12,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually and meet the energy needs of approximately 15,000 homes each year. The scheme could therefore make an important contribution to the objective of achieving the statutory net zero target set for 2050 and the commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 78% compared with 1990 levels by 2035. The development of the BESS would also provide benefits including the storage of energy and assisting in the integration of renewable energy with the national grid. These benefits of the scheme will be given significant weight in the planning balance.

9.2 Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan is supportive of solar energy development and associated energy storage, provided the effects are acceptable or can be made acceptable. The assessment of the application has identified that the proposals would result in some landscape and visual harm. The adverse effects are localised due to a combination of existing topography, existing screening and the proposed landscape mitigation. The proposals would result in considerable visual and character change to the current experience of open views over rolling countryside. There is also likely to be a reduction in agricultural production notwithstanding that the site will be grazed by sheep during the lifetime of the development. With regard to the other main planning matters assessed, it is considered that the effects are acceptable or can be made acceptable through appropriate mitigation and the imposition of planning conditions in accordance with the relevant policies in the Northumberland Local Plan and the NPPF.

9.3 Overall, whilst it is accepted that the proposed solar farm would have a modest adverse impact on the landscape and result in a reduction in agricultural production, it is considered that the benefits of the proposed development particularly in terms of the supply and storage of renewable energy would outweigh the identified harm. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted for this proposed development, subject to the imposition of planning conditions.

## **10. Recommendation**

10.1 That this application be GRANTED permission subject to the following conditions.

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of five years from the date of this planning permission.

*Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and to prevent an accumulation of unimplemented planning permissions.*

2. The development hereby permitted shall be for a temporary period only to expire 40 years and 6 months after the first export date of the development. Written confirmation of the first export date shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority within one month after the event.

*Reason: The development is not considered suitable for permanent retention and to enable the impacts to be assessed as to the impacts on the landscape character and visual amenity in accordance with Policy ENV 3 and Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan.*

3. If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to operate for a continuous period of 12 months, then a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the solar farm and ancillary equipment together with the restoration of the site shall be submitted within 6 months of the end of the cessation period to the Local Planning Authority for written approval. The scheme shall make provision for:
  - a. the removal of the solar panels, battery energy storage facility and associated above ground works approved under this permission;
  - b. the management and timing of any works;

- c. a traffic management plan to address likely traffic impact issues during the decommissioning period;
- d. an environmental management plan to include details of measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife and habitats;
- e. details of site restoration; and
- f. an implementation timetable.

The decommissioning of the site shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme.

*Reason: To ensure that the decommissioning and restoration of the site is carried out in a managed approach that minimises the impacts on the natural, built and historic environment and upon highway safety in accordance with Policies REN 1, TRA 2 and ENV 1, ENV 2, ENV 3, ENV 4 and ENV 7 of the Northumberland Local Plan.*

4. Within a period of 39 years and 6 months following the first export date, a scheme for the decommissioning of the solar farm, battery energy storage facility and its ancillary equipment and restoration of the site, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (except in the event that Condition 3 has been triggered and decommissioning has been completed). The scheme shall incorporate the criteria set out within Condition 3 as a minimum. The decommissioning of the site shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme.

*Reason: To ensure that the decommissioning and restoration of the site is carried out in a managed approach that minimises the impacts on the natural, built and historic environment and upon highway safety in accordance with Policies REN 1, TRA 2 and ENV 1, ENV 2, ENV 3, ENV 4 and ENV 7 of the Northumberland Local Plan.*

5. The solar farm, battery energy storage facility and its ancillary equipment shall be dismantled and removed from the site and the land restored in accordance with the approved decommissioning and restoration scheme within a period of 40 years and 6 months following the first export date.

*Reason: In the interests of natural, built and historic environment in accordance with Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

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

#### **Plans**

- Site Location Plan, Drawing Number P21-3244\_EN\_01 (Rev a). 18 May 2023
- General Preliminary Layout. Drawing Number P008.2-102-Rev 14
- Detailed Landscape Proposals. Drawing Number P21-3244\_EN\_011 (Rev A) 31 May 2023
- Master Site Layout and Landscaping Plan. Drawing Number P21-3244\_EN\_010 (Rev B) 31 May 2023

- Planning Elevations PV Array-Side. Drawing Number P008.2-300-Rev A1
- Planning Elevations PV Array-Front. Drawing Number P008.2-301-Rev A1
- Planning Elevations Perimeter Fence. Drawing Number P008.2-304-Rev A1
- Planning Elevations CCTV System. Drawing Number P008.2-305-Rev A1
- Planning Elevations 5m Acoustic Fencing. Drawing Number P008.2-312-Rev A1
- Transformer Elevations. Drawing Number 10070-E-ELV-05 Rev A
- Flood Constraints Plan. Drawing number B774/04 Rev C dated 19 May 2023
- Natural Catchment Plan Rev. Drawing number B774/14 dated August 2023
- Preliminary Drainage Strategy Rev E. Drawing number B774/06 dated 19 May 2023
- Compound Elevations. Drawing Number 10070-E-ELV-01 Rev C
- Main Control Room. Drawing Number E-ELV-02 Rev C
- BESS Control and Switchroom. Drawing Number E-ELV-03 Rev B
- Palisade Fencing. Drawing Number E-ELV-06
- Substation Location Plan. Drawing Number ESN-E-SP-01 Rev C
- Customer Substation Elevation. Drawing Number P008.2-302 Rev 02
- Inverter Substation Elevation. Drawing Number P008.2-303 Rev 02
- O&M Building Elevation. Drawing Number P008.2-306 Rev 02
- Welfare Office Elevation. Drawing Number P008.2-307 Rev 02
- BESS Elevation. Drawing Number P008.2-308 Rev 02
- PCS Elevation Drawing Number P008.2-309 Rev 02
- BESS Control Room Elevation. Drawing Number P008.2-310 Rev 02

## **Documents**

- Planning Statement Broadway House Farm. Pegasus Group. Reference MH | P20-2730. February 2023
- Ecological Impact Assessment Broadway House Farm. Tyler Grange. Revision A. 30 August 2023
- Breeding Bird Survey. Tyler Grange. June 2023-09-30 Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation. Tyler Grange. June 2023
- Open Space Assessment Broadway House Farm. Pegasus Group. 27 July 2023
- Fire Safety Management Plan Broadway House Farm Battery Energy storage System. Reliance Fire Limited. 2 June 2023
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment Broadway House Farm Solar Farm. Barton Hyett Associates. June 2023
- Agricultural Land Classification Report. Soil Environmental Services Limited. September 2022

- Design and Access Statement Broadway House Farm. Pegasus Group. Reference MH | P21-0063. June 2023
- Transport Statement Broadway House Solar Farm. PFA Consulting. June 2023
- Construction traffic Management Plan. Broadway House Solar Farm. PFA Consulting. June 2023
- Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study Broadway House Solar Farm. Pager Power Urban & Renewables. June 2023
- Heritage Desk-based Assessment Broadway House Farm. Pegasus Group. 7 June 2023
- Noise Assessment Broadway House Farm Solar Farm. LFAcoustics. June 2023-09-30
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Broadway House Farm. Pegasus Group. 6 June 2023
- Coal Mining Risk Assessment. Hydrock. June 2023
- Minerals Reserve Assessment. Hydrock. June 2023
- Geophysical Survey. WYAS. December 2022
- Flood Risk Assessment. PFA Consulting. June 2023
- Technical Note on Flood Risk and Drainage. Proposed Solar Farm, Land At Broadway House Farm, Bedlington, Northumberland Document B774-FN01. August 2023

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

7. Notwithstanding the approved plans, prior to the commencement of development, details of the proposed materials, colours and finishes of all solar panels, frames, buildings and equipment shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details and be maintained as such for the lifetime of the development.

*Reason: Details are required in the absence of accompanying the application and in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with Policies REN 1, QOP 2 and ENV 3 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

8. No development shall take place (including ground works and vegetation clearance) until a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) (Biodiversity) to address potential impacts on biodiversity has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The CEMP shall be based on the principles outlined in the Ecological Impact Assessment dated June 2023 by Tyler Grange Ltd, be proportionate and tailored to the specific works, but include the following considerations.

i) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities (informed by a method statement of the installation).

ii) Inclusion of an appropriate plan identifying the sensitive habitats/features adjacent to the site (e.g., retained habitats on and off-site and protected species) to inform contractors working on site.

iii) Practical measures (both physical measures such as warning signs and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction, including a minimum 15m buffer from the woodland south of the site.

iv) Details for storage and disposal of any waste arising from the works (e.g. excavated soil).

v) Details of remediation works and methods, e.g. making good ground disturbed during construction.

vi) Details of responsible persons and lines of communication.

The approved CEMP shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

*Reason: To ensure that adverse effects on the adjacent ancient woodland and Bedlington Country Park Local Nature Reserve, and wider biodiversity from construction activities are avoided and minimised in accordance with Policies REN 1 and ENV 2 of the Northumberland Local Plan.*

9. The landscaping and habitat creation proposals set out on the Detailed Landscape Proposals DRWG No: P21-3244\_EN\_011 Rev A, including a minimum 15m buffer to the adjacent ancient woodland and Bedlington Country Park Local Nature Reserve shall be fully implemented during the first full planting season (November to March inclusive) following the completion of the commencement of development. Any trees or plants, which, within a period of five years from the date of planting, die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.

*Reason: To maintain and protect the landscape value of the area and to enhance the biodiversity value of the site, in accordance with Policies REN 1, QOP 4, ENV 2 and ENV 3 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

10. The perimeter fence shall include small mammal gaps or two-way gates measuring a minimum of 200mm x 250mm in key locations as determined by the project ecologist to enable badgers to pass freely through fences without causing damage. Prior to installation of the perimeter fence a plan showing the location of the mammal gaps/gates shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

*Reason: To conserve biodiversity in accordance Northumberland Local Plan Policy ENV 2 and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

11. A Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) for the retained and newly created habitats shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to first use of the development. The content of the LEMP shall be based on the proposals outlined in the Ecological Impact Assessment dated June 2023 by Tyler Grange Ltd (including hedgerows, biodiversity enhancement areas, bird and bat boxes) and include the following.

i) Description and evaluation of features to be managed.

- ii) Ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management.
- iii) Aims and objectives of management.
- iv) Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives.
- v) Prescriptions for management actions.
- vi) Preparation of a work schedule (including an annual work plan capable of being rolled forward over a five-year period).
- vii) Details of the body or organization responsible for implementation of the plan.
- viii) Ongoing monitoring and remedial measures.

The LEMP shall also set out (where the results from monitoring show that conservation aims and objectives of the LEMP are not being met) how contingencies and/or remedial action will be identified, agreed and implemented so that the development still delivers the fully functioning biodiversity objectives of the originally approved scheme.

*Reason: To mitigate impacts and enhance biodiversity in accordance with Northumberland Local Plan Policy ENV 2 and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

- 12. Vegetation cover under the solar panels shall be present and maintained throughout the lifetime of development. Any erosion shall be rectified and made right.

*Reason: To minimise the risk of soil erosion and reduce runoff rates.*

- 13. Maintenance of grass filter strips and / or interception swales shall be undertaken throughout the lifetime of development.

*Reason: To ensure that the scheme to dispose of surface water operates at its full potential throughout the development's lifetime.*

- 14. There shall be no control equipment located within 'low' and 'medium' areas of surface flood risk and Solar Panels shall be 0.3m above the ground level as shown on drawing "Flood Constraints Plan" Rev C dated 19-05-2023 by PFA Consulting.

*Reason: To ensure all solar panels are above any overland flood flow routes*

- 15. No external lighting (other than low level lighting required on ancillary buildings during occasional maintenance and inspection visits) or floodlighting is permitted to be installed, used or modified as part of the hereby approved development without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority. To apply for consent the operator must provide a detailed report of the proposed lighting which details:

- a. The specific location of all external lighting units;

- b. Design of all lighting units;
- c. Details of beam orientation and lux levels; and
- d. Any proposed measures such as motion sensors and timers that will be used on lighting units

*Reason: To protect residential amenity and provide a commensurate level of protection against artificial light, in accordance with Policy POL 2 and Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

16. The operator shall ensure that a notice board is erected and maintained at the entrance to the site during its construction and operation indicating the name, address and telephone number of a representative of the operator who would be available to deal promptly with any complaints.

*Reason: In the interests of the proper working of the site in accordance with Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan.*

17. The development shall not be brought into use until the car parking area indicated on the approved plans has been implemented in accordance with the approved plans. Thereafter, the car parking area shall be retained in accordance with the approved plans and shall not be used for any purpose other than the parking of vehicles associated with the development.

*Reason: In the interests of highway safety, in accordance with Policy TRA 4 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework*

18. The development shall not commence until details of the temporary construction vehicular access have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Construction works shall not commence until the highway works have been constructed in accordance with the approved details. Upon completion of the construction works the highway including roads, kerbs, footway and grass verge shall be reinstated.

*Reason: In the interests of highway safety, in accordance with and Policy TRA 2 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

19. Development shall not commence until a Construction Method Statement, together with a supporting plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved Construction Method Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The Construction Method Statement and plan shall, where applicable, provide for
- a. details of temporary traffic management measures, temporary access, routes and vehicles;
  - b. vehicle cleaning facilities;
  - c. the parking of vehicles and cycles of site operatives and visitors;
  - d. the loading and unloading of plant and materials;



- e. storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development;
- f. site contact details - name, telephone number etc.;
- g. measures to control the emission of dust during construction; and
- h. details of methods and means of noise reduction, or controlling noise impacts during construction;

*Reason: To prevent nuisance in the interests of residential amenity and highway safety, in accordance with Policy TRA 2 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

20. Means of vehicular access for all Heavy Goods Vehicles (16.5m long articulated vehicles) to the permitted development site shall be from the A1068 Hartford Road to the north of Bedlingtonshire Golf Club only, as set out in Paragraph 3.3 Construction Access Arrangements of the approved Transport Statement.

*Reason: In the interests of highway safety, in accordance with Policy TRA 2 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

21. During the construction period, there shall be no noisy activity, i.e. audible at the site boundary, on Sundays or Bank Holidays or outside the hours: Monday to Friday 0800 to 1800, and Saturday 0800 to 1400.

*Reason: To protect residential amenity and provide a commensurate level of protection against noise, in accordance with and Policy POL 2 and Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework*

22. Deliveries to and collections from the construction and/or decommissioning phase of the development shall only be permitted between the hours:
- a. Monday to Friday - 08:00 to 18:00
  - b. Saturday - 08:00 to 14:00

No deliveries or collections shall take place on a Sunday or Bank Holiday, unless agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

*Reason: To protect residential amenity and provide a commensurate level of protection against noise, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy POL 2 and Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan.*

23. No development shall commence until:
- a. a scheme of intrusive investigations has been carried out on site to establish the risks posed to the development by past coal mining activity;
  - b. any remediation works and / or mitigation measures to address land instability arising from coal mining legacy, as may be necessary, have been implemented on site in full in order to ensure that the site is safe and stable for the development proposed; and

- c. a signed statement or declaration prepared by a suitably competent person confirming that the site is, or has been made, safe and stable for the approved development has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This document shall confirm the methods and findings of the intrusive site investigations and the completion of any remedial works and / or mitigation necessary to address the risks posed by past coal mining activity.

The intrusive site investigations and remedial works shall be carried out in accordance with authoritative UK guidance.

*Reason: The site is in an area affected by historic coal mining and in the interests of the safe working of the site in accordance with Policy POL 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan.*

24. A programme of archaeological work is required in accordance with NCC Conservation Team (NCCCT) Standards for Archaeological Mitigation and Site-Specific Requirements document (dated 05/10/23). The archaeological scheme shall comprise three stages of work.
  - a. No development or archaeological mitigation shall commence on site until a written scheme of investigation based on NCCCT Standards and Site-Specific Requirements documents has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
  - b. The archaeological recording scheme required by NCCCT Standards and Site-Specific Requirements documents must be completed in accordance with the approved written scheme of investigation.
  - c. The programme of analysis, reporting, publication and archiving if required by NCCCT Standards and Site-Specific Requirements documents must be completed in accordance with the approved written scheme of investigation.

*Reason: The site is of archaeological interest in accordance with Policies ENV 1, ENV 7 and ENV 9 and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

### **Informatives**

1. Under the Highways Act 1980 a vehicle crossing point is required. These works should be carried out before first use of the development. To arrange the installation of a vehicle crossing point (and to make good any damage or other works to the existing footpath or verge) you should contact the Highways Area Office at [blythdepot@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:blythdepot@northumberland.gov.uk).
2. A highway condition survey should be carried out before the commencement of demolition and construction vehicle movements from this site. To arrange a survey contact Highway Development Management at [highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk).
3. Building materials or equipment shall not be stored on the highway unless otherwise agreed. You are advised to contact the Streetworks team on 0345 600 6400 for Skips and Containers licences.

4. In accordance with the Highways Act 1980 mud, debris or rubbish should not be deposited on the highway.
5. Road Safety Audits are required to be undertaken. Northumberland County Council offers this service. You should contact [highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk)
6. You are advised to contact the Council's Highway Development Management team at [highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk) concerning the Section 59 Agreement of the Highway Act 1980 relating to extraordinary expenses.
7. A CEMP (Biodiversity), as required by condition no. 8, sets out construction stage environmental mitigation in sufficient detail to allow it to be incorporated into the construction programme and to be implemented on the ground. Many construction companies/contractors now prepare a CEMP as standard, incorporating a range of topics such as pollution, traffic management, noise, public access etc. For this project it must also include specific measures for the natural environment (particularly the woodland to the south of the site and hedgerows within the site) and may need the input of a suitably qualified ecologist but be written for a non-ecological audience. All contractors working on site should familiarise themselves with the CEMP (Biodiversity) and site-specific requirements prior to work commencing.
8. With appropriate land management, solar farms have the potential to support wildlife and enhance local biodiversity. Published guidance from the BRE providing high-level guidance on solar farms and biodiversity is available online <https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdf/Brochures/NSC-Biodiversity-Guidance.pdf>.
9. In relation to condition no. 24, you should follow the brief for the 'strip, map and record' mitigation provided by the County archaeologist

**Date of Report:** 19 October 2023

**Background Papers:** Planning application file 23/02205/RENE