

Cobholden Solar Farm 24/00858/MAF

edrms.bedford.gov.uk/SearchResults.aspx?appNumber=24/00858/MAF

See contents page for list of documents but as there are 57 documents and many are over 50 pages long I thought it might be helpful to summarize them.

If you only have 10 minutes to look at this I recommend you open and examine V05 to give you an idea of the layout of the site and the landscaping, read the summary tables from V19 explaining the impacts and proposed mitigations and look at the visualisations for Duloe, A1 bridge, Shakers Way and Staploe Road (V28-V32) which give you an idea of what the scheme will look like in year 1, 5 and 15 from various viewpoints.

Here is a summary of the documents available on the website.

V01-V18 are maps, elevations and plans of layouts. I found V05 the landscape plan particularly helpful and I've printed off an enlarged copy if anyone would like to look at it. Please contact clerk@staploe-pc.gov.uk if you would like to see this and any of the documents below in a printed version.

V19 is a 73 page document- the environmental report with design and access statement – see the summary tables below

COBHOLDEN SOLAR FARM

Topic	Mitigation / Improvement Measures Proposed	Residual Impacts Anticipated Post Mitigation
Ecology and Biodiversity (Continued)	Lighting impacts: Design of the scheme will limit lighting impacts, with limited security lighting will be required in areas of key infrastructure Nesting birds: Removal of vegetation or areas with potential for nesting birds should avoid the nesting bird season, or follow an inspection to confirm that nesting birds are not present. Mammal access: Access is to be retained for medium sized mammals present in the locality, including badgers and hares, throughout the development site, to enable access post-construction. This is provided in the form of security fencing incorporating regular 20cm gaps at the base, along the entire fence line. Works near water: Suitable working methods and measures used to limit soil run-off to the stream along with any pollutants. All details are to be secured by planning condition.	-
Landscape and Visual	New vehicular access points to utilise existing field entrances and/or gaps in hedge line as far as possible, and to be constructed from cellular permeable paving grids to minimise vegetation loss. Visible north facing slope in the northern portion of the Site adjacent to the residential area of Duloe to be retained free from built form and utilised as an area for biodiversity. Ground disturbance to be minimised and new species-rich grassland to be introduced. Existing trees and hedgerows within field boundaries to be retained and gaps filled with native species to increase existing levels of enclosure and provide enhanced Green Infrastructure connections.	There are no national or local landscape designations covering the Site or the local surrounding area and the Site is located within an area of ordinary landscape at the fringes of Eaton Socon. It is considered to be an area of medium - low landscape sensitivity. The Proposed Development would change the character and appearance of the Site with the introduction of energy infrastructure all set within a framework of new and retained structural planting. However, effects on the wider landscape and more distant views would be limited. Over time, as the proposed planting matures, the visibility of the Proposed Development from the surrounding area would gradually reduce and integrate further within the landscape context.

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT WITH DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Table 4 - Environmental Impacts Summary Table

Topic	Mitigation / Improvement Measures Proposed	Residual Impacts Anticipated Post Mitigation
Agricultural Land Classification	It is possible to undertake some farming practices within the solar array itself (bee keeping), maintaining food production during the life of the solar farm.	The proposed development mainly uses Grade 3b agricultural land. There are parts of Grade 3a land within the site area but it would be impractical to continue farming these areas and limit the solar farm extent. There is no permanent loss of agricultural land.
Construction, Traffic and Transport	A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) will be agreed with Bedford Borough Council via planning condition, to detail matters such as: site working hours; means of access and route to site; management of delivery vehicles; environmental protection measures, such as wheel washing and dust prevention; ecological protection measures; advance notification procedure; and road condition survey methodology.	There are no residual cumulative impacts on highway safety or operational capacity of the surrounding network. The construction movements are anticipated to occur over approximately 9-12 months. The total number of HGV movements (including for deliveries and vehicles leaving site) is predicted to be approximately 3 338, equating to an approximate maximum daily average of 13 movements per weekday (based on a 50 week construction programme).
Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage	A maintenance regime together with filter strips as a pre-treatment strategy is advised to prevent minimal pollutant risk of increased standing water and surface water runoff, to be secured by planning condition.	The proposals meet the aims of the National Planning Policy, being safe from all sources of flooding during its lifetime and not increasing flood risk elsewhere.
Ecology and Biodiversity	Green Infrastructure: reinforcement of the stream corridor in Honeydon Brook, providing a semi-natural track to encourage animal movements across the landscape and providing new habitat. Enhancement planting: shrub and tree planting and wildflower swards both within and outside the fenced areas.	Increase in non-arable habitat for foraging and /or general habitat for farmland birds, bats, and invertebrates The Biodiversity Net Gain calculator returned a substantial gain of +97.5% for habitat, +67.4% for hedgerows and 15.5 for watercourses.

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT WITH DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Topic	Mitigation / Improvement Measures Proposed	Residual Impacts Anticipated Post Mitigation
Glint and Glare	Mitigation is required to screen the High impact views into the Proposed Development from Road Receptors 36 – 38 (on Bushmead Road) and mitigation is included to screen the Low impact ground floor views into the Proposed Development from Residential Receptors 7 (Cobholden Farm). This includes native hedgerows to be planted/infilled and maintained to a height of at least 3m along the southern boundary of the North Array and inner boundaries of a northern section of the South Array in the Proposed Development as shown in the G&G Mitigation Planting figure.	The effects of glint and glare and their impact on local receptors has been analysed in detail and is predicted to be only Low and None impacts, and therefore No Significant Effects.
Socio-economic	-	Generation of 72 400MWh (net) of electricity per annum (to 3 s.f.). Equivalent to 18 200 average Bedford Borough households. Offsetting 15 000 tonnes (to 3 s.f.) of CO₂ per annum, as well as other pollutants associated with fossil fuel power generation. Materials and services for the proposal will be sourced, where practical, from suitably qualified local and regional contractors. All of the business rates income from new renewable energy projects, including solar, can be retained by the local planning authority. Whilst not a planning matter, the Developer is proposing to set up a Community Benefit Fund for the joint benefit of Staploe and Wyboston and Chawston Parish Councils.

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Topic	Mitigation / Improvement Measures Proposed	Residual Impacts Anticipated Post Mitigation
Archaeology	Discussions with the LPA's archaeological advisor have been held and after a review of this assessment and the geophysical survey report it was agreed that further investigation is required requirement for targeted evaluation trenching to understand the nature and preservation of the archaeology and the inform appropriate mitigation. Any further archaeological investigations will be dealt with as conditions, should planning consent be granted. It is anticipated that the LPA's archaeological advisor may require the study site to be subject to archaeological evaluation in the form of targeted trial trenching, the timing and scope of which will need to be agreed with the LPA's archaeological advisor. Should such work have positive results, further follow-on mitigation excavation and recording may be necessary.	No statutory designations (Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Registered Battlefields or World Heritage Sites) are located within or adjacent to the study site boundary. None are recorded within the 1km study area. As such the assessment has not identified any designated archaeological assets which will be negatively impacted by the proposed development. The impact of the proposed development on the archaeological potential of the study site could be adequately mitigated, and the development made acceptable in terms of archaeological impacts. It, therefore, accords with the requirements in paragraph 203.
Noise	Acoustic fencing around a few of the transformer units closes to property R1 (Cobholden Farm) is proposed to ensure no noise impacts even in worst case cumulative scenarios.	The results of the noise modelling shows that the rated level of noise for the solar farm achieves the criteria stated in BS4142:2014+2019 during the daytime and night-time periods. The cumulative noise impact with both the solar farm and BESS operational shows that the predicted level of noise is acceptable given the context of the Site. The predicted noise levels from proposed operations at the Site achieve the noise criteria stated in BS4142:2014+2019, as such are considered to be sufficiently low enough to afford compliance with the 'No Observed Adverse Effect Level' as detailed in the PPG and as such noise should not be deemed to be a determining factor in the granting of planning permission for this Site.

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT WITH DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Topic	Mitigation / Improvement Measures Proposed	Residual Impacts Anticipated Post Mitigation
Landscape and Visual (Continued)	Historic field boundaries to be reinstated with native hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees to break up the perceived scale of the solar arrays. Development setback from public footpath and existing water course within a wide green corridor with new planting improving wildlife connectivity and preserving amenity of the footpath. Provision of hedgerows, hedgerows with trees, open woodland, scrub planting, and meadow grassland areas to help to disperse and filter views towards the Proposed Development and contribute to local objectives for landscape and green infrastructure enhancements as set out on the Landscape Strategy Plan	A Landscape Strategy has been prepared which identifies a framework for the retention and management of existing landscape features on site and the introduction of new planting to mitigate potential landscape and visual effects of the proposals. The proposed tree and hedgerow planting would improve the ecological value of the landscape and enhance parts of the landscape structure. This would reduce the overall harm on the landscape character and views from the surrounding area. The residual effects of the Proposed Development would not be significant.
Cultural Heritage	The proposed solar farm has the potential to be visible in limited views, and in the experience and appreciation of the wider setting from the group of listed buildings along Woodhouse Lane and Duloe Road. These include 53 Woodhouse Lane, the Dovecote at 49 Woodhouse Lane, the Thatched Cottage at 39 Duloe Road and The Ankor – all Grade II listed buildings. This would therefore cause a degree of harm to the contribution made by the largely rural agricultural setting to the significance of these heritage assets. However, this harm would be at the low end of the less than substantial harm classification (as per paragraph 202 of the NPPF) and would only effect part of the overall setting of these heritage assets. The application material demonstrates that opportunities have been taken to minimise this heritage harm through the proposed siting, layout and landscaping associated with the solar farm. In time, with the successful establishment of the proposed planting enhancements, this harm would be further minimised and, potentially mitigated.	Development of the study site will have no direct physical impacts on any designated heritage assets. It is considered that the proposed development will be likely to result in less than substantial harm on the lower end of the scale as per NPPF paragraph 205.

V20 is an 8 page document – Appendix 1(p I-VIII) is the initial cumulative appraisal – ie. the impact of this scheme in view of other solar schemes in the area. It concludes that even if all the proposed solar schemes in the area were to go ahead the total area would be a small proportion of the total agricultural area in the borough. That the access points will be different from those of other schemes, there is no cumulative impact in terms of flood risk, ecology impacts are likely to be additive, such that the positive and negative impacts will not interact to have a disproportionate effect. Sylarks are likely to be most sensitive but the local landscape is likely to be able to accommodate them. There is unlikely to be cumulative impact in terms of landscape and visual effects because the other schemes are almost 1.5km from that proposed at Cobholden. (Eastpark is considered to be unlikely to have cumulative impacts but it is in its early stages so difficult to say).

V21 planning statement 48 pages. It concludes that there is a need for clean renewable energy, the location next to Eaton Socon substation is good, it is sustainable development, it is on lower grade agricultural land, the landscape, archaeology, heritage, ecology, flood risk, transport, noise and glint and glare assessments have been found to be minimal and there would be significant biodiversity enhancements and landscape mitigation.

V22 Heritage Statement – the only listed buildings in the area likely to be affected are those in Duloe. This will be mitigated by landscaping with trees.

V23 – V26 Flood risk assessments – no significant issues

V27 Landscape and visual assessment – 51p document.

“7.13 To conclude, there are no national or local landscape designations covering the Site or the local surrounding area and the Site is located within an area of ordinary landscape at the fringes of Eaton Socon. It is considered to be an area of medium - low landscape sensitivity. The Proposed Development would change the character and appearance of the Site with the introduction of energy infrastructure all set within a framework of new and retained structural planting. However, effects on the wider landscape and more distant views would be limited. Over time, as the proposed planting matures, the visibility of the Proposed Development from the surrounding area would gradually reduce and integrate further within the landscape context. The Proposed development is reversible and following the 40-year lifespan the solar panels could be decommissioned and removed from the Site; and the land could return back to agricultural uses.

7.14 A Landscape Strategy has been prepared which identifies a framework for the retention and management of existing landscape features on site and the introduction of new planting to mitigate potential landscape and visual effects of the proposals. The proposed tree and hedgerow planting would improve the ecological value of the landscape and enhance parts of the landscape structure. This would reduce the overall harm on the landscape character and views from the surrounding area. The residual effects of the Proposed Development would not be significant”

V28 – V32 Visualisations showing existing baseline, year 1, 5 and 15

V28 Duloe

V29 Shakers Way

V30 A1 bridge

V31 Staploe Road (towards Tythe Farm and Wyboston)

V32 Tythe Farm

V33 photos showing the existing views from footpath 8 between Tythe Farm and the substation

V34 a 2 page summary of the Landscape Strategy showing the landscape, planting and biodiversity objectives

V35 a 127 page document saying there are no issues!

V36 – the traffic data

V37 – noise report. Due to existing background noise levels eg from A1 the noise from solar inverters and BESS is not expected to exceed the ‘No Observed Adverse Effect Level’. But they say that acoustic fencing around the inverters closest to Field Farm (Cobholden) can be installed if necessary.

- V38 - summary from V38

- 9.1 The nearest designated site abuts the north-west boundary, this being a Roadside Nature Reserve designated for various grassland species.
- 9.2 The Site is mainly arable with boundary hedgerows plus small areas of improved sward and semi-improved sward along field margins. A stream runs through the Site and a second stream abuts the southern boundary.
- 9.3 The hedgerows qualify as priority Hedgerow Habitat of Principal Importance, but not as Important Hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations. None of the other habitats qualify as priority habitat.
- 9.4 Most protected species and species of conservation concern are scoped out. The species scoped in are: • Foraging bats, as a small assemblage. • Birds, as nesting and overwintering species. Skylarks are present. • Hedgehogs. • Invertebrates, in particular species of dead wood and also moths with generalist habitat requirements.
- 9.5 The species scoped in would be minor components of larger local populations and the Site is of generally low ecological value, equivalent to value at a Local scale.
- 9.6 The key points of the scheme are: development is located largely on arable land; and landscaping is included beneath and near the arrays, and also outside of the fenced area.
- 9.7 During the construction phase, the impacts identified without mitigation are: run-off into the streams; any artificial lighting; loss of nesting habitat for skylarks, plus potential destruction of nests. Impacts on designated sites are not anticipated, with access being via existing field access points and not over designated verges.
- 9.8 Species mitigation is proposed for: lighting impacts; nesting birds; works near water; access by mammals into the fenced area.
- 9.9 The proposed landscaping scheme will comprise shrub and tree planting and wildflower swards, and the benefits will be:
 - At a landscape scale via contribution to the Bedfordshire Biodiversity Opportunities Network.
 - Water quality in the streams would be expected to improve.
 - Providing new foraging habitat and resources for most of the species scoped in. The net impact on skylarks may be negligible or positive but tight uncertainty in this assessment. A suite of species with similar

conservation status (priority species) will certainly benefit: many birds including farmland birds, various bats, invertebrates such as the widespread moths, and hedgehogs.

- V39 – Archeological Report
 - *Archaeological Assets No statutory designations (Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Registered Battlefields or World Heritage Sites) are located within or adjacent to the study site boundary. None are recorded within the 1km study area. A review of the available evidence has confirmed that the study site has a high potential to contain Prehistoric and Roman remains of up to regional significance. There is moderate potential for medieval archaeology and low potential for finds and features of post medieval date of likely agricultural origin and local significance. The development would have a negative physical impact. However, there is an opportunity to more precisely define its character, which may be considered beneficial in a largely un-investigated landscape. It is anticipated that there will be a requirement for targeted evaluation trenching to understand the nature and preservation of the archaeology and to inform appropriate mitigation. The form of all intrusive works will be developed with the LPA Archaeologist in order to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development in line with the NPPF.*

V40 Agricultural Report. In summary the land is 30% 3a and 70% 3b. They argue that the land will not be completely removed from agricultural production because sheep can be grazed and there is mention of bee keeping in the Design and Access statement V19. The development is temporary and reversible.

V41 Glint and Glare – 53 page document – summary below

8. SUMMARY

This assessment considers the potential impacts on ground-based receptors such as roads, rail and residential dwellings as well as aviation assets. A 1km study area around the Application Site is considered adequate for the assessment of ground-based receptors, whilst a 30km study area is chosen for aviation receptors. Within 1km of the Application Site, there are 70 residential

receptors, including five residential areas, and 67 road receptors which were considered. As per the methodology section, where there are a number of residential receptors within close proximity, a representative dwelling or dwellings is/are chosen for full assessment as the impacts will not vary to any significant degree. Where small groups of receptors have been evident, the receptors on either end of the group have been assessed in detail. 27 residential receptors, including two residential areas, and 18 road receptors were dismissed as they are located within the no reflection zones. 31 aerodromes are located within the 30km study area; One of which, Old Warden Airfield, required a detailed assessment due to the Proposed Development falling within its respective safeguarding buffer zone, which is outlined in paragraph 4.25.

Geometric analysis was conducted at 43 individual residential receptors, including three residential areas, and 49 road receptors as well as two runway approach paths and one air traffic control tower (ATCT).

Following an initial assessment, rail receptors were scoped out as assets that will be impacted upon from the Proposed Development as no rail receptors fell within the 1km study area. The assessment concludes that:

- Solar reflections are possible at 20 of the 43 residential receptors assessed within the 1km study area. The initial bald-earth scenario identified potential impacts as High at three receptors, including one residential area, Low at 17 receptors, including one residential area, and None at the remaining 23 receptors, including one residential area. Upon reviewing the actual visibility of the receptors, glint and glare impacts reduce to Low at two receptors and to None at all remaining receptors. Once mitigation measures were considered, glint and glare impacts remain **Low** at two receptors and **None** at all remaining receptors.
- Solar reflections are possible at 37 of the 49 road receptors assessed within the 1km study area. The initial bald-earth scenario identified potential impacts as High at 32 receptors, Low at five receptors and None at the remaining 12 receptors. Upon reviewing the actual visibility of the receptors, glint and glare impacts remain High at three receptors and reduce to None at all remaining receptors. Once mitigation measures were considered, glint and glare impacts reduce to None at all receptors.

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- No impact on train drivers or railway infrastructure is predicted.

- *No glare was predicted to impact the runway approach paths or ATCT at Old Warden Airfield Therefore, the impact on aviation assets is None.*

Mitigation is required to screen the High impact views into the Proposed Development from Road Receptors 36 – 38 (on the Bushmead Rd between Shakers Way and Cobholden drive) and mitigation is advised to screen the Low impact ground floor views into the Proposed Development from Residential Receptors 7 and 8 (houses at Cobholden). This includes native hedgerows to be planted/infilled and maintained to a height of at least 3m along the southern boundary of the North Array and inner boundaries of a northern section of the South Array in the Proposed Development as shown in the G&G Mitigation Planting figure.

The effects of glint and glare and their impact on local receptors has been analysed in detail and is predicted to be only Low and None impacts, and therefore No Significant Effects

V42-47 Glint and glare supporting information

V48

V48 Statement of Community Involvement – consulted with Staploe and Wyboston Parish Councils, held a public consultation event, and met with the owners of Two Brewers.

V49 Biodiversity study and report. 8 page report. Conclusions: *“The scheme will deliver a substantial Biodiversity Net Gain for all three categories of habitats (meadows, field margins, woodlands etc.), hedgerows and watercourses. The driver is the conversion of arable to other habitats, new hedgerow planting and an enhancement of watercourses via the reduction of local arable runoff.”*