

Planning, Design and Access Statement

Spalding Solar

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The following plans and documents are submitted alongside the planning application.

- Site Location Plan
- Site Layout Plan PILGR-SPALD-01-100D
- Landscape Mitigation Plan
- Indicative Panels PILGR-SPALD-01-400B
- Indicative CCTV and Stock Proof Fence PILGR-SPALD-01-401A
- Indicative Gates PILGR-SPALD-01-402A
- Indicative Transformer Station PILGR-SPALD-01-405A
- Indicative Ring Main Unit PILGR-SPALD-01-404A

The following environmental and technical reports are appended to this Planning Statement as Appendices:

- Appendix A: Landscape and Visual Appraisal
- Appendix B: Ecological Impact Assessment
- Appendix C: Biodiversity Net Gain Statement and Assessment
- Appendix D: Flood Risk Assessment
- Appendix E: Glint and Glare Assessment
- Appendix F: Noise Assessment
- Appendix G: Historic Environment Desk-based Assessment
- Appendix H: Transport Statement
- Appendix I: Letter to Local Community

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This Planning, Design and Access Statement ('the Statement') has been prepared to accompany the planning application submitted to South Holland District Council ('the Council/SHDC') by EDF Energy Renewables Ltd ('the Applicant') for installation of a c. 1.64 MW solar photovoltaic ('PV') array/solar farm with associated infrastructure ('the Development') on 4.9 ha of land to the south of the existing Pilgrim's Pride factory which is currently managed as grassland. The footprint of the developed solar area would cover c. 2.6 hectares.

1.2 THE APPLICANT

EDF Energy Renewables Ltd is part of one of the world's largest electricity companies and is the main vehicle for developing, constructing and operating renewable energy projects within the UK. The Applicant has a total of 965 MW of renewable energy projects in operation and more than 2 GW consented, in planning and development.

The Applicant believes solar energy can and will play a greater part in helping the UK achieve its target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The ambitious targets of EDF Energy Renewables Ltd reflect the desire to be a part of this growth in progressing solar PV developments such as this.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT

If consented, the Development would contribute to the delivery of international and national policy objectives to diversify the energy mix and facilitate the transition to low carbon energy, whilst decreasing the dependency on fossil fuels.

The UK has committed to meeting a legally binding target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% from the 1990 baseline by 2050, which would result in net zero greenhouse gas emissions. Meeting this target requires major investment in new technologies, the electrification of heating, industry and transport, prioritisation of sustainable energy and cleaner power generation.

An integral part of the UK energy strategy is to reduce the dependency on fossil fuels. To address this objective, and meet the emissions reduction targets, the electricity being consumed will need to be almost exclusively from low carbon sources.

Pilgrim's Pride is the largest higher welfare producer of pork products in the world. The firm's Spalding factory employs 550 people and works with approximately 350 farms and is an important asset for the company to attain its objectives in supplying higher welfare pork to its customers.

Pilgrim has targets for net zero emissions by 2030 with onsite electricity generation at Pilgrim sites being a vital component in achieving net zero emissions targets. The firm has already invested £10 million into GHG reduction projects in the last year.

Following significant recent increases in energy costs for all businesses, the proposed development looks to support the future feasibility of the Spalding Pilgrim site, through renewable electricity generated onsite. This will also provide greater job security for those employed by Pilgrim. The energy produced from the Development would only be used internally with there being no plans to export electricity to the national grid.

1.4 BENEFITS OF SOLAR ENERGY

Solar PV is one of the most sustainable forms of energy production worldwide. Generation does not require fossil fuels, and can be highly reliable, despite daily and seasonal variability of sunlight.

Solar power production also generates electricity with a limited impact on the environment as it is temporary and reversible. There is no need for extensive ground disturbing foundations, there are no tall vertical structures or moving parts involved, and there is no significant noise associated during operation.

Solar PV is also now one of the most cost-effective sources of energy, leading to more affordable and secure energy supply to consumers.

1.5 SITE SELECTION

The Site was initially selected due to its proximity to the Pilgrim's Pride factory which it will serve. This will reduce impacts of construction, providing short cable laying distances. The potential for installing a solar development at the Site has been assessed through feasibility work, which examined key technical and environmental issues.

The relatively flat topography of the Site is well suited to solar PV development. The Site is well contained by existing field boundaries and is separated from residential properties by the river to the east, the main road to the south and west, and the existing industrial area to the north. The Site benefits from access via the factory car park with an established HGV route which would enable construction and maintenance vehicles to gain entry via main road networks.

The characteristics of the Site are further described in Section 3 of this Statement and the potential impacts of the development are considered in Section 7 of this Statement.

2 PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATIONS

EDF Renewables UK's approach to consultation was to ensure that local community representatives and residents are well informed and could provide feedback as the proposal developed.

Key stakeholders were contacted in October and November 2023 and offered a face-to-face briefing with the EDF Renewables team, prior to the project being announced more widely. They included the ward councillor Robert Gibson, who represents Spalding East at a county level as well as Spalding St Paul's Ward on South Holland District Council, and the MP, Sir John Hayes.

A letter containing information about the project was sent to residents living close to the proposed site in December 2023. A copy of this letter is provided at Appendix I for information purposes.

A face to face meeting was subsequently held with Sir John Hayes to discuss the project and listen to his feedback. Comments received from Sir John Hayes on the visual impacts of the Development were taken into account when designing a landscaping scheme and natural screening including native species hedge planting was provided as part of this. No other comments were received in response to public consultation.

2.1 CONSULTATION WITH SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

South Holland District Council provided a written response to pre-application enquiry ('the Enquiry') on 12th October 2023. The purpose of the Enquiry was to determine the scope of the Application and the supporting technical reports, agree on the approach to addressing the main issues and seek the Council's views on the principle of the Development.

The response indicates that the Council supports the Development in principle, providing that consideration is given to the technical issues highlighted by the case officer as follows:

- Justification for need of the development and the loss of agricultural land;
- Protection of existing recreational amenity;
- Explanation for the exploration of alternative sites and why they have been discounted;
- The proximal local wildlife site;
- Heritage and archaeology;
- Transport assessments;
- Flood risk and drainage; and
- Land contamination risks.

Engagement with the Council has informed the design development and the scope of the technical documents submitted with this application.

2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE EIA REGULATIONS (2017)

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, (EIA Regulations) define EIA development as either:

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

Solar PV development is not listed in Schedule 1 of the regulations but under Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations a development area threshold of 0.5 ha is applied to category 3 (a) industrial installations for the production of electricity. The Development exceeds the Schedule 2 area threshold and, as such, whether the Development is EIA development or not depends on an assessment against the screening selection criteria, as set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations, which comprise:

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

An EIA screening request for solar development on the application site, was submitted to the Council in September 2023. The Council's Screening Opinion, which was issued on 14th November 2023, confirms that the solar farm would not be EIA development and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

3 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

3.1 SITE LOCATION

The Site is located within the town of Spalding, and lies within an industrial area approximately 1.7 kilometres (km) east of the town centre, and adjacent to the Coronation Channel of the River Welland. The Site is bound to the north by the A151, the east by the A16 and the south by Low Road as shown on the Location Plan.

The Site ownership boundary is approximately 9.3 hectares (ha) overall with 5.4 ha of this land initially identified as being feasible for solar development. The solar array is proposed on 2.6 ha of this identified area, with additional land within the grounds of the factory (north) being available for access from the public highway, and the electrical connection to the Pilgrim factory.

3.2 SITE DESCRIPTION

The land identified for solar development is currently unused agricultural land, consisting solely of grassland, with sporadic coverage of hedgerows and in-hedgerow trees creating the Site boundary, supplemented by post and rail timber fencing. There is a drainage ditch running east to west (E-W) across the Solar Area, dividing the agricultural fields into two smaller parcels, with a crossing point on the western side. There is a National Grid 11kv overhead line running through the Site.

The Site is greenfield and has not been previously developed. South Holland District Council online map¹ does not document any known previous applications for development of the Site since 2006. The land within the Site is largely flat, ranging from approximately 2 metres (m) to 7 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) across the entire Site. The area proposed for solar development ranges from approximately 2 m to 5 m AOD.

3.3 SURROUNDING LAND USE

The Site lies on the western boundary of Spalding town. The Pilgrim factory and other industrial buildings lie adjacent north. The nearest residential properties are located approximately 130 m from the west of the Site boundary, on the other side of the Coronation Channel of the River Welland. There is also a small cluster of residential buildings located approximately 100 m to the south of the Site. There is a coffee shop and café approximately

¹ South Holland District Council, *Public WebMaps*, [Accessed Online 13/06/2024]
shdc.dynamicmaps.co.uk/MapThat_SHDC_Public/Default.aspx

153 m to the east, on the other side of the A16, and allotments approximately 250 m to the south east.

The Site lies on the edge of the countryside with agricultural fields to the south and east, although it is separated from these by the A16 road. A public bridleway follows the eastern boundary of the economic area to the north of the Site. There is a public footpath on the opposite side of the A16, north east. An informal footpath along the eastern side of the river, runs adjacent to the west boundary of the Site, this has been proposed as a cycle route within the current Local Plan.

The Corridor of River Welland is a designated local wildlife site. Vernatts Local Nature Reserve is the closest ecological statutory protected area and lies approximately 1.6km northwest, separated from the Site by significant urban infrastructure. The closest listed buildings are Fulney Hall (Grade II), The Church of St Paul and Schoolroom (Grade I) and The Vicarage to the Church of St Paul (Grade II*) these lie approximately 0.3 km northeast of the Site boundary.

A more detailed description of the Site and its surroundings is included in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal at Appendix A.

4 THE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

4.1.1 Summary Description

The Development would be a Solar photovoltaic (PV) Array with a generating capacity of 1.64 MWp and an onsite connection to the existing Pilgrim factory at the north of the Site. Alongside the Solar PV Array, associated infrastructure and equipment would include: fencing, security cameras and underground cabling. The layout of the Development is shown on the Site Layout Plan, ref: PILGR-SPALD-01-100D.

Design of the Development has been informed by environmental surveys and assessments in order to design out any potentially significant environmental impacts and to take advantage of opportunity for biodiversity enhancement. Given the nature of the installation, no significant ground excavation is required. Areas of new hardstanding would be limited to the transformer foundations, with the ring main unit placed on existing hardstanding within the factory area to the north.

Construction of the Development would likely be completed within 6 months and so any effects arising from this would be short term and reversible upon completion. At the end of the operational period of 40 years, the Development would be decommissioned in accordance with best practice at that time and decommissioning effects are considered similar in nature to those arising during construction. The land may be re-instated and restored as agricultural land, thus the Development is considered temporary and reversible.

4.1.2 Size and Appearance

The Development would consist of rows of solar panels known as strings, which are dark in hue and are designed to maximise the absorbency of the sun's rays. Each string of panels would be mounted on a rack comprising metal poles anchored to the ground. Panels are typically tilted 10 to 25 degrees from the horizontal to face south towards the sun. There is a distance of 3-4 metres proposed between strings of panels in order to avoid inter-panel shading, this distance will be influenced by slope and aspect. Indicative drawings are provided with the application but final designs may vary.

Planning permission would be sought for the construction and operation of the Development, which is anticipated to include the following components:

- Strings or rows of solar panels (each panel approximately 1 m x 2 m) mounted on metal frames, likely to be screwed or driven into the ground to a depth of 1-2 m, depending on ground conditions;
- Lower edge of panel typically 0.8 m from the ground;
- Highest point of panel typically 2.5 m in height from the ground;

- The frames would be arranged in parallel rows orientated to the south and would be spaced 3-4 m apart to prevent shading by adjacent panels and to take account of access requirements.
- Located along the western edge of alternate rows of solar panels would be fifteen string inverters, each measuring approximately 1100 mm x 600 mm x 350 mm and frame mounted beneath the solar panels.
- A transformer station would be situated at the north western corner of the southern field. This would be housed in a container measuring approximately 4 m x 4 m x 2 m high.
- A ring main unit would also be positioned directly adjacent to the existing commercial premises. This would be housed in a container measuring approximately 6.1 m x 2.5 m x 2.9 m high.
- The solar fields will be secured by perimeter fence / deer fence c. 2.5 m high;
- Fourteen CCTV cameras mounted on 5 m high poles would be provided inside the security fence. No lighting is currently proposed.
- Access to the Site would be gained via the existing access arrangements leading to the commercial premises, with a new gated access formed off the existing staff car park at the southern extent.
- Within the Site, there would be no requirement to provide new (hard) access tracks.
- Underground cables will link the two separate solar fields to the inverters / transformers and back to the ring main unit. There would be no requirement for offsite cables as the connection point for the grid would be onsite and therefore would limit any disruption during construction.

Typical elevations of the solar panels are shown on the Indicative Panels, ref: PILGR-SPALD-01-400B. Due to the rapid advancement of solar PV technologies it possible that the design of the solar panels may differ slightly from those shown on the plan. Any design changes are unlikely to alter the key parameters of the Development such as the footprint of the Development and the height of the panels.

4.1.3 Site Access

The Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) route to Site is proposed to be from the A16, to A151 and Fulney Lane North, which is the existing access route for the Pilgrim factory and is an established route for heavy good vehicles. There are existing access points between the two field parcels of the Solar Area, which will facilitate movement between the proposed areas of panelling. Full details of the access arrangements are presented in the Transport Statement provided at Appendix H.

4.2 LANDSCAPING

The landscape proposals for the Site have been designed to preserve and enhance the existing landscape features, to screen views of the solar panels from outside the Site and to enhance the biodiversity and habitat value of the Site. The planting proposals and enhancements proposed as part of the Development are detailed in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (Appendix A) submitted as part of this application.

The landscape scheme will include the following elements:

- Existing boundary vegetation within and to the perimeter of the Site would be retained and incorporated within the scheme to maintain landscape character.
- Existing grassland beneath the area covered by the solar panels would be retained and modified to enhance its biodiversity value.
- Existing grassland between the perimeter fence and Site boundary adjoining the A16 would also be retained and managed over time to enhance its biodiversity value.
- Retention of existing drainage ditches including along field boundaries and that which runs east/west across the Site;
- New native hedgerow would be planted along the length of the eastern boundary (approximately 400 m) to filter and screen views of the Development from the A16. Once established, it would be maintained at a height of approximately 3 m.
- Native hedgerow trees would be planted to the new hedgerow adjoining the A16 (approximately 12 no).
- The Transformer will be painted a recessive colour, this is assumed to be dark green or grey but the final choice of colour would be agreed with SHDC and could be subject to an appropriately worded condition.

4.3 DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The scheme has been designed to be as visually unobtrusive as possible. The proposed tree and hedge planting and landscape improvements have been designed to provide visual screening using native species which will integrate the Development in the wider landscape, enhance the existing landscape character and provide biodiversity enhancement.

The design of the Development has evolved to take advantage of opportunities for biodiversity and landscape improvements while minimising the vulnerability of the Development to flood risk. Changes to the design which have been made following the pre-application enquiry, detailed surveys and consultations are summarised as follows:

- Set-backs from ditches and bank tops as well as hedgerows and other field boundaries;
- Set back from the overhead line;
- Improvement and maintenance of the existing grassland and a new hedgerow has been incorporated into the design to provide further visual screening and to enhance the habitats onsite.

5 CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

5.1 CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES

The construction and installation of the Development will take approximately 6 months. The construction process would consist of the following principal activities:

- Construct temporary access ways (potentially using track matting if necessary) and site preparation;
- Delivery of materials;
- Construction of the solar PV arrays, inverter substations, underground cables etc.;
- Testing and commissioning; and
- Restoration of ground disturbed during construction and landscaping.

Most of these operations would be carried out concurrently in order to minimise the overall length of the construction programme. Site restoration would be programmed and carried out to allow restoration of disturbed areas as early as possible.

5.2 CONSTRUCTION COMPOUND

A temporary construction compound comprising storage, parking and welfare facilities will be installed close to the Site access. Following completion of construction period the compound will be removed and the ground will be restored.

5.3 CONSTRUCTION CONTROL MECHANISMS

5.3.1 Traffic Management

Traffic effects would largely be limited to the construction period when materials and equipment are delivered and installed at the Site. Peak vehicle trips will equate to approximately 198 vehicles per week or 33 per day. Once operational, given the Site will be remotely operated and un-manned, impacts on the road network will be negligible, a small number of regular trips to site will be undertaken for maintenance purposes. Further details are provided in the Transport Statement.

It is assumed that traffic measures during construction could be adequately controlled through a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) where any required mitigation could be agreed with the Highways Authority as part of a condition to planning consent. An outline (CTMP) is included within the Transport Statement submitted as part of this planning application.

5.3.2 Waste Management

Any topsoil not stockpiled for later reinstatement will be spread over adjacent land. The topsoil shall consist of friable surface soil reasonably free of grass, roots, weeds, sticks, rocks or other unsuitable materials. Any non-hazardous waste produced is likely to be primarily packaging and cable off cuts. This waste will be stored in a covered skip and

recycled or appropriately disposed of. Revegetation of working areas will occur as soon as naturally possible after construction.

5.3.3 Operational Phase Overview

The Development will have an operational period of 40 years during which time it will not be permanently staffed and will be monitored remotely. Maintenance would be overseen by suitably qualified contractors who would visit the Site as required. Activities would be restricted principally to vegetation management, equipment/infrastructure maintenance and servicing including replacement of any components that fail, and monitoring to ensure the continued effective operation of the Development.

5.3.4 Decommissioning Overview

When the operational phase ends, the Development will require decommissioning. All Development infrastructure would be removed from the Site and recycled or disposed of in accordance with good practice and market conditions at that time. Decommissioning would be expected to take between 3-4 months. The effects of decommissioning are similar to, or often of a lesser magnitude than construction effects.

As engineering approaches and technologies are likely to change over the operational life of the Development, planning for decommissioning will be undertaken towards the end of the operational life of the Development. Notice will be given to the Council in advance of commencement of the decommissioning works, with all necessary licenses or permits being acquired. Decommissioning will be timed to minimise its environmental impact. The Applicant will develop a decommissioning plan, and the works will be undertaken in accordance with a statement of operations, covering safety and environmental issues during decommissioning.

6 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the Statement reviews the key national and local planning policies which relate specifically to the Development. The aim of this section is to establish the land use implications of the Development, consider its compliance with the Development Plan, and identify other material considerations to be taken into account during the determination process.

6.2 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 70(2) states that: *“In dealing with such an application the authority shall have regard to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations.”*

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 forms an amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that: *“If regard is to be had to the Development Plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.”*

The process for determining a planning application can be defined as:

- Identification and consideration of the key provisions within the Development Plan;
- Clarification of whether the Development is in accordance with the Development Plan;
- Identification and consideration of relevant material considerations; and
- Conclusions on whether planning permission is justified.

6.3 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (2023) (NPPF)

The NPPF was first published in March 2012 and has most recently been revised in December 2023. It sets out Central Government's planning policies for England and how these are to be applied. The NPPF reiterates that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations

indicate otherwise.² The NPPF also identifies that national planning policy is a material consideration when making decisions on planning applications. The most relevant aspects of national planning policy contained within the NPPF are as follows:

6.3.1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Central to the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In achieving sustainable development, three overarching objectives are identified for the planning system; economic, social and environmental. The environmental objective includes *“mitigating and adapting to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy”*.

6.3.2 Renewable Energy

The NPPF is clear that planning has a key role in supporting renewable energy and associated infrastructure. Whilst there is no specific policy for solar energy development contained in the NPPF, Paragraph 157 proposes that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and

“...should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure”.

In order to increase the supply of renewable and low carbon energy, Paragraph 158 states that plans should provide a positive strategy that maximises the potential for suitable renewable energy development and their future repowering and life extension (whilst ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed appropriately) and consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources and supporting infrastructure.

The NPPF is also clear that LPAs should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and should recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions (Paragraph 163). Applications for renewable and low carbon development should be approved if the impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

On 30th July the Government published a draft revision of the NPPF for consultation. Changes have been proposed to policy relating to developments for renewable energy in order to strengthen support for these proposals. Proposed text at Paragraph 164 reads: *Local planning authorities should support planning applications for all forms of renewable and low carbon development and should give significant weight to the proposal’s contribution to renewable energy generation and a net zero future;*

6.3.3 Guidance on Environmental Issues

The NPPF contains policies on a number of environmental issues in achieving sustainable development. These requirements have been considered throughout the relevant assessments accompanying the Application and have been addressed, to demonstrate compliance of the Development in Section 7.

6.4 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The relevant Development Plan for the Site consists of the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (‘SELLP’) (2011-2036)³ and the Lincolnshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan⁴.

The adopted South East Lincolnshire Local Plan was produced by the South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee (the Joint Committee), a partnership of Boston Borough, South Holland District and Lincolnshire County Councils. The Local Plan guides development and the use of land in South East Lincolnshire up until 31 March 2036.

² Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2012, 2023 update) *National Planning Policy Framework* [Accessed Online 13/06/2024]

³ South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee, *South East Lincolnshire Local Plan* (2019) [Accessed Online 24/05/2023], southeastlincslocalplan.org/adopted-plan

⁴ Lincolnshire County Council, *Lincolnshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan* (2016), [Accessed online 13/06/2024] www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/2361/core-strategy-and-development-management-policies

The Site is not subject to any allocations or designations within the Site Locations Map of the Lincolnshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

6.4.1 South East Lincolnshire Local Plan 2011-2036

The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (2019) ('SELLP') seeks to promote growth of the Local Plan area in a sustainable manner. Embedded within the vision of the Plan is a strategic aim to reduce carbon emissions, with new development required to help South East Lincolnshire mitigate and adapt to climate change. To this end, the Plan states that it will be imperative that renewable energy technologies be used to minimise carbon emissions.

The following policies detailed in the SELLP (2019) are considered to be of relevance to the Development:

Policy 1 – Spatial Strategy: The Development is located in the Countryside as defined by the accompanying Policies Map for SELLP⁵. This policy states that within the Countryside *“development will be permitted that is necessary to such a location and/or where it can be demonstrated that it meets the sustainable development needs of the area in terms of economic, community or environmental benefits”*.

Policy 2 – Development Management: This policy requires new development to be sensitively sited, designed and serviced appropriate to the amenity of the surrounding area. In order to further meet with the provisions of this policy, development will be required to ensure compatibility with existing environment, development and land uses, minimising visual and environmental impacts, maximising the use of sustainable materials and resources, and provide acceptable access arrangements.

Policy 3 – Design of New Development: This policy contains detailed criteria including in relation to landmarks, views, landscape character, accessibility (including for public rights of way and cycle ways), storage and parking, mitigation of flood risks, landscaping, and the orientation of the development to maximise the efficiency of renewable energy technology.

Policy 4 – Approach to Flood Risk: The Development lies within an area identified as Flood Risk Zone 3. This policy states that development proposed within areas at risk of flooding will be permitted where a sequential test is passed which demonstrates that there are no alternative site available which are at lower risk of flooding unless there is specific need for development in that location. If the development consists of essential infrastructure or is classed as vulnerable development it must also be demonstrated that the development provides wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk. The policy requires proposals for development in areas of flood risk and for sites of over 1 ha to be accompanied by a flood risk assessment. Proposals must demonstrate that surface water from the development can be managed and not increase the risk of flooding to third parties.

Policy 7 – Improving South East Lincolnshire's Employment Land Portfolio: This policy states that proposals will be supported in principle which assist in the delivery of economic prosperity. The Policies Map identifies Established Employment Sites which play an important role in the local economy. This includes site reference SP003 Fulney Land North which lies immediately north of the Site, where the Pilgrim's Pride factory is located.

Policy 28 – The Natural Environment: This policy seeks a net gain in biodiversity, along with the protection and enhancement of geological interest. Existing biodiversity and geodiversity is to be conserved and enhanced.

Policy 29 – The Historic Environment: This policy seeks to protect distinctive elements of the South East Lincolnshire historic environment from inappropriate development proposals which may otherwise have a detrimental effect on the character, integrity and or setting of the asset in question.

Policy 30 – Pollution: This policy states that development must not have any unacceptable impacts in terms of health and safety, amenity, noise, air quality or other types of pollution. Where there is reason to suspect contamination, proposals must include an assessment of contamination and possible risks.

⁵ South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee, *South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (2019) Policies Map Inset Map No 2*, [Accessed Online 24/05/2023] southeastlincslocalplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2-Spalding.pdf

Policy 31 – Climate Change and Renewable and Low Carbon Energy: This policy emphasizes the need to reduce carbon emissions within South East Lincolnshire and indicates support for renewable and low carbon energy generation where it can be demonstrated that proposal meets several criteria with reference to visual impacts, landscape, amenity, agricultural land take, and environmental considerations. Provision is to be made for monitoring and decommission.

The Development is assessed in relation to the SELLP Policies listed above throughout Part 7 of this Statement. The sections within which each policy is addressed are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Policy	Addressed within Statement Section
Policy 1 – Spatial Strategy	7.1
Policy 2 – Development Management	7.1, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.9
Policy 3 – Design of New Development	7.1, 7.3, 7.4, 7.6, 7.7, 7.9
Policy 4 – Approach to Flood Risk	7.5
Policy 7 – Improving SEL's Employment Land Portfolio	7.1
Policy 28 – The Natural Environment	7.3, 7.4, 7.5
Policy 29 – The Historic Environment	7.8
Policy 30 – Pollution	7.5, 7.7, 7.9
Policy 31 – Climate Change and Renewable and Low Carbon Energy	7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.9

7 ASSESSMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT

7.1 THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DEVELOPMENT

7.1.1 Countryside Location

The Development will function as ancillary to an existing business located within an established employment zone. With reference to SELLP Policy 1, the Site has been selected due to its location adjacent to the existing Pilgrim's Factory which the Development is intended to serve. Its proximity to the factory will minimise disruption to the environment and landscape caused by associated infrastructure including electrical cables. The purpose and function of the Development requires an area of relatively flat land without significant overshadowing in order to maximise energy output. As such, built-up urban locations are not suitable.

The Site is a well contained parcel of land with strong defensible boundaries (the industrial land and A151 road to the north, Coronation Channel to the west and A16 road to the south and east) which separate the development both from residential properties and the wider countryside. This limits impacts on amenity and potential for encroachment into the countryside.

7.1.2 Supporting the Local Economy

The Local Plan identifies the land immediately adjacent north as an Established Employment Site *SP003 Fulney Lane North*. With regard to SELLP Policies 7 and 1, The Development would support the existing use of the employment site and the sustainability of businesses there by providing a local source of renewable energy. It would also support the existing Pilgrim's Pride business which is a major employer in the area, supporting both factory workers and other employees, and the integrity of the local farms who supply it.

7.1.3 Climate Change and Energy

As a renewable energy scheme providing low carbon, clean energy, the Development will make a valuable contribution towards the reduction of carbon emissions, increase renewable energy capacity and make efficient use of sustainable resources, as supported by SELLP Policy 31.

7.1.4 Agricultural Land Uptake

Regarding agricultural land value, although the Site will not be used for cultivation for the lifespan of the facility, it can still be grazed, and the Development is reversible and the resumption of cultivation will be possible upon decommissioning. The impact on agricultural land is considered in more detail in Section 7.2.

In summary, the Site is considered to be a suitable location for the proposed Development, in principle with reference to NPPF Paragraphs 11 and 158 and SELLP Policies 1, 2, 3, 7 and 31.

7.1.5 Impacts of the Development

With regard to the relevant SELLP policies the effects of the Development on the character, appearance and general amenity of the area have been assessed throughout the various environmental and technical reports which have informed the design and which are summarised and discussed in the relevant sections below.

7.2 SOIL AND AGRICULTURAL QUALITY

The Site has been classified as Grade 1 (excellent) agricultural land according to the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) provisional land classification England. The surrounding area is also made up of mainly Grade 1 agricultural land, with large areas of Grade 2 agricultural land to the south, and there are large swathes of suitable agricultural land existing to the east of the Site.⁶ There are no alternative sites available in reasonable proximity for the Development which are of lower agricultural land value.

The Site consists of a small area of land cut off from surrounding fields by urban infrastructure. The size and shape of the land parcels make it unsuitable for arable cultivation on an economical scale. The Site lies just to the east of a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ), suggesting that this area may not be best suited to intensive agricultural use due to restrictions that this imposes. It is not currently in active agricultural use and previous agricultural use has been limited to occasional grazing.

Solar development is temporary and reversible. Planning permission is sought for a temporary period of 40 years, after which the infrastructure can be fully removed. Following decommissioning there will be no adverse effects on the land's capability for agriculture and cultivation can resume. It is expected that temporarily removing the land from agricultural use would have benefits for soil quality.

In summary, it is considered that although the Site is classified as Grade 1 agricultural land there are restrictions which limit its effective functioning as agricultural land. The land is not currently in agricultural use. There are no alternative sites of lower ALC available for the Development but there is a large amount of high ALC land available in the local authority area which is more suitable for cultivation.

It is to be noted that the Pilgrim Pride Factory which the Development will serve directly supports the economic vitality of around 350 farms and is itself a functioning part of national food production. It is thus considered that the benefits of the proposed use of this Site will outweigh the temporary loss of this small amount of land for agricultural purposes.

The Development is therefore in accordance with NPPF Paragraph 180 in regard to soils and agricultural land and SELLP policy 31.

7.3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal ('LVA') has been carried out in order to identify the baseline conditions of the Site and the surrounding area to assess the likely effects that the

⁶ Natural England (2010) *Agricultural Land Classification Map East Midlands Region (ALC005)* [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/143027>

Development may have on identified landscape and visual receptors, and to recommend mitigation measures to offset or reduce any adverse effects. The (LVA) report is provided at Appendix A.

7.3.1 Baseline Assessment

There is one National Character Area within the 2 km radius study area, NCA 46 – The Fens. Locally, the Development lies in The Wash Regional Character Area, within Character Zone WSH6 Townlands.⁷ The greater part of this area is made up of arable fields, which are used to cultivate a variety of food and cash crops. There are some areas of pasture most of which is found in close proximity to historic settlements.

Neither the Site nor the wider study area lie within a designated landscape. Land use in the area is primarily residential, agricultural and industrial and the LVA identified that landscape quality is considered to be low.

The LVA found that the Site consists of agricultural land of low landscape value. The Site is in close proximity to visible human built elements including the adjacent economic site, Coronation Channel, the townscape of Spalding, electricity lines which cross the Site, and A roads to the south, east and north. Both the site itself and its surrounding contextual landscape were found to be of low landscape value with low sensitivity to change.

7.3.2 Changes

The existing neighbouring man-made infrastructure suggests the landscape does have the capacity to change and accommodate the Development, which would not detract from the overall existing local landscape character.

There would be a change in land use from agricultural land to renewable energy. Negative effects of Development on Landscape character include introduction of urbanising infrastructure. Change to the character of the site and the contribution it makes to the setting of Spalding and changes to or loss of views.

Changes would be limited due to the following features. The Development would retain existing flat topography and proposed infrastructure would not protrude the open skyline due to the low-level nature of the Development. The Development would also retain all landscape features which define field margins such as drainage ditches and hedgerows.

Positive effects of the Development on landscape will include planting of new native hedgerows and trees to the perimeter of the Site and improvement of existing grasslands. These measures will result in localised enhancements.

The area of influence in the contextual landscape will not extend beyond the Site and its immediate setting due to the limited height of the development and the strong containment of the Site afforded by the built form and infrastructure including the main roads, Coronation Channel and flood bund.

The LVA concluded that whilst the Development would give rise to varying degrees of negative landscape and visual effects on a number of receptors, the degree of effects predicted to arise would be very small and restricted to the Site and its immediate setting. Where possible, these effects have been reduced or minimised as a result of the mitigation measures embedded with the Development.

7.3.3 Trees

The Development has been designed to retain all existing healthy trees within the Site and therefore will not have an adverse impact on trees. The Development therefore meets the requirements of NPPF paragraphs 136 and 180 and SELLP Policies 2, 3 and 28 with regard to trees.

⁷ Lincolnshire County Council (2011) *The Historic Character of Lincolnshire* [Accessed online 24/05/2024]
<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/2205/the-historic-character-of-lincolnshire-pdf>

7.3.4 Landscaping Proposals

The landscaping proposals aim to screen elements of the Development from key receptors (e.g. nearby residential properties and the A16), soften views of the Development from the informal footpath and to reflect and enhance existing landscape elements and character.

In terms of ecology, the landscape design aims to minimise impacts on existing habitats and species, extend and enhance existing habitats, create new habitats to reflect the natural flora and fauna of the area and to improve biodiversity within the Site and the surrounding area. Ecological mitigation and enhancement is discussed further in section 7.4.

The landscape mitigation measures and enhancements proposed are summarised as follows:

- Retention of existing boundary vegetation
- Retention, modification, enhancement and maintenance of existing grasslands
- Retention of existing drainage ditches
- Planting of new native species hedgerow along the eastern boundary to the A16
- Planting of c.12 new native species trees within the new hedgerow
- Use of recessive colours for Development infrastructure

Given the limited landscape impact and the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures, it is considered that the Development meets the requirements of NPPF Paragraphs 135, 180 and 186, and SELLP policies 2, 3, 28 and 31 with respect to habitats, landscape character and visual impacts.

7.4 ECOLOGY AND ORNITHOLOGY

An Ecological Impact Assessment has been carried out to identify and assess the likely effects that the Development may have on ecological resources at the Site, and to recommend appropriate mitigation measures. The appraisal incorporates the results of a desk study, preliminary ecological appraisal survey, breeding birds survey and protected and priority species survey. A Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment (PBRA) was also undertaken to determine the value of trees and structures for roosting bats. The results from these various assessments are provided in the Ecological Impact Assessment report submitted alongside the Application n at Appendix B.

7.4.1 Habitats and Designations

In terms of ecological designations within 2km of the site, there is one statutory designated site (Vernatts Local Nature Reserve (LNR)) and two non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites.

Vernatts LNR is situated approx. 1.6 km to the northwest of the proposed Development. It is separated by significant urban/industrial infrastructure, making any potential impacts unlikely.

Arnold's Meadow LWS lies around 830m to the south, it is a seasonally flooding hay meadow with shallow ponds bounded by mature hedgerows and trees and containing a small wooded area in its northern corner. The reserve attracts a variety of birds and butterflies and supports populations of water voles, toads, frogs and grass snakes. There is also a variety of plant species present. Arnold's Meadow lies upstream of the proposed development. It is separated from the development by agricultural land and Low Road main road.

The Coronation Channel is identified as a Local Wildlife Site on the SELLP Policies Map, *Spalding and Pinchbeck Inset Map No 2*. Coronation Channel LWS supports a range of aquatic and riparian habitats and plant species. However, none of these features are represented in the Site and it is unlikely that the integrity of the LWS depends on the Site. Coronation Channel LWS lies beyond 20m of the site and nearest construction activities will be offset further into the Site with a buffer from the site boundary.

To protect the environment a range of good construction practices are proposed and will be secured through implementation of an agreed Construction Management Plan. Due to the scale and nature of the Development and distances from the designated areas it is considered unlikely to result in any direct adverse impacts on these designated sites.

In terms of habitats, the majority of the Site comprises suburban mosaic to the north and species poor modified grassland and bare ground intersected and bound by hedgerows to the south. Field one showed evidence of sheep grazing and molehills. The modified grassland was considered to be of low value due to low diversity of common species. The hedgerows form boundaries of much of the Site and were considered to be of local value. No non-native invasive species were identified on the Site. Planned ecological improvements to the Site as part of the proposed Development will be expected to improve on-site biodiversity and strengthen the ecological network of the wider local area.

7.4.2 Protected and Priority Species

Priority Species

The Site is considered to have potential to support priority species including common toad and hedgehog but no evidence of priority species was found at time of survey.

Great Crested Newt

Based on the results of desk study and survey, the Site was considered to be of negligible value to Great Crested Newt.

Bats

A preliminary bat roost assessment was undertaken during survey. Roosting opportunities for bats on Site were found to be limited due to the young age of trees and lack of Potential Roost Features (PRFs). The adjacent Factory buildings will not be impacted by the proposed development but lacked external PRFs with lighting and noise further reducing suitability. Hedgerows on Site afford possible opportunities for foraging but overall the Site is considered to be of low suitability for foraging and commuting bats. The Site is considered to be of low value to bats.

Hedgerow planting and tree planting is proposed within the Site and as such will provide a net increase for foraging resources for bats in the local area.

Badgers

The hedgerow offers potential foraging and sett creation with open grassland providing further foraging opportunity for badgers. The Site was considered to be of low value for badger. No badger activity or signs of badger, such as setts, snuffle holes, latrines or hair were recorded during the walkover survey. However a precautionary approach will be adopted to safeguard the species during construction.

7.4.3 Birds

The Site provides potential for nesting and foraging birds within the open grassland fields and hedgerows. The factory buildings offer nesting opportunities and during the PEA survey, a common gull *Larus canus* was seen nesting on a roof.

A six visit breeding bird survey ('BBS') was completed between March and July 2023 to identify breeding bird territories within a 500 m buffer of the Site Boundary.

The Breeding Bird Survey Report indicates that a total of 31 species of bird were recorded within the survey area including 18 species of conservation concern (SoCC), 11 of which were assessed as breeding within the survey area. No schedule 1 species were identified breeding on or adjacent to the Site.

7.4.4 Ecological Mitigation and Enhancements

Arable practices often employ chemical inputs, through application of pesticides, fertilisers or herbicides. During the operation of the land for solar development there will be no chemical input onto the land. Therefore the impact of solar development will be to reduce pollutant loadings on the land which in time will likely lead to species and habitat recovery and improved biodiversity.

The majority of existing habitats on site are to be retained with exception of the loss of a small section of ornamental non-native hedgerow on either side of the existing access to the northern field and a small area of grassland at the footprint of the transformer unit. This loss is to be mitigated through enhancement of the retained habitats and new hedgerow and tree

planting along the eastern boundary, as shown on the Landscape Mitigation Plan which accompanies the Application.

The Development consciously incorporates landscape/biodiversity enhancements in the design to deliver a net gain in biodiversity at the Site as follows:

- Retention and improvement of existing grassland to create species rich grassland with wildflowers surrounding the field margins, and directly below and in between solar panels. This will provide beneficial foraging and ground nesting resources for invertebrates and birds and food sources for pollinators;
- Enhancement of existing hedgerows through native species planting;
- Mixed native species rich hedgerow with evenly spaced trees will be planted along the eastern boundary to offer more opportunities for nesting birds, badger and other wildlife; This will also provide foraging and roosting opportunities for bats and sheltering habitat for a variety of protected species; and
- Landscape planting will utilise species native to the local area including berry and fruit bearing species and pollinator species, which will increase foraging opportunities.

A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been prepared and is provided as Appendix C: Biodiversity Net Gain Statement and Assessment. This demonstrates that the net gain for biodiversity which will be delivered by the Development exceeds the net gain requirement of 10% set by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990⁸.

A precautionary approach will be taken to safeguard wildlife species including badger, bat and birds during construction these measures will be set out within the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) prior to implementation of planning consent which may be secured through an appropriately worded condition.

Measures will include but are not limited to:

- Avoidance of site clearance works during nesting bird season (March to August);
- Construction to be undertaken during daylight hours;
- Pre-construction checks for badger within 4 weeks of Site clearance works commencing;
- Lighting specs to be informed by BCT guidance to reduce impacts on bats and other wildlife; and
- Gaps left in fencing to facilitate movement of small animals around and through the Site.

In view of the above measures the Development is considered to be compliant with NPPF Paragraphs 180 and 186, and SELLP Policies 2, 3, 28 and 31, and is acceptable in terms of the protection and enhancement of ecology and biodiversity.

7.5 GROUND CONDITIONS

The Site is currently greenfield land adjacent to the Pilgrim factory site. There are no records of historic landfilling within or adjacent to the Site. The Site also has no history of coal mining activity.

There are no known existing or historical potentially contaminative land uses on the location of the Development itself. Neither the Applicant nor landowner are aware of any areas on or around the location which are already subject to pollution or environmental damage, based on a desk study using publicly available information.

The proposed land use of solar PV would not create any new pathways or linkages for pollution over and above the existing baseline.

As the potential risk arising from land contamination has been considered and assessed, the proposal meets the requirements of NPPF Paragraphs 180 and 189 and SELLP Policies 2, 4, 28, 30 and 31.

7.6 GLINT AND GLARE

A Glint and Glare Study has been undertaken to assess the potential impact of the Development on surrounding road users and dwellings, as well as aviation. 'Glint' is defined as a momentary flash of bright light, while 'Glare' is defined as a continuous source of bright light. The report is provided at Appendix E.

⁸ Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

Previous studies have measured the intensity of reflections from solar panels with respect to other naturally occurring and manmade surfaces. The results show that the reflections produced are of intensity similar to or less than those produced from still water and significantly less than reflections from glass and steel.

Glint and glare effects can only occur when the weather is clear and sunny. When a solar reflection towards a road user or resident is possible, the individual will also be looking in the direction of the Sun. This means the Sun and solar reflection will be visible simultaneously. The Sun is a significantly brighter source of light than a reflection from a solar panel. Furthermore, at any one location, only a particular area of solar panels will produce a solar reflection towards it. In all cases, a clear view of the reflecting solar panels at the particular time of day when a solar reflection was geometrically possible would be required.

The Glint and Glare Study has considered ground based receptors within 1 km of the Site.

In terms of road users, the Study indicates that of possible road receptors there will be low impact on a 300 m section of the A16, a 100 m section of the B1173 and the 600 m section of Halmer Gate. Views of reflecting panels will be outside a road user's primary field of view and mitigation is not recommended for this level of impact.

Regarding residential amenity, 85 dwellings were assessed as relevant. Solar reflections would be geometrically possible towards 36 of the dwellings in the study area. However, in practice, solar reflections were found to affect only one property due to significant screening. Views from this dwelling were found to be partially screened resulting in low impact which coincide with direct sunlight. Mitigation is not recommended for this level of impact.

In respect of aviation receptors; Cowbit Airfield lies c. 3.7 km to the south west, in addition Crowland Airfield lies approximately 8.9 km to the south and Fenland Airfield lies approximately 8.7 km south-east of the Site. All of these airfields are unlicensed General Aviation aerodromes without an Air Traffic Control Tower. Aviation activity is dynamic and does not necessarily follow the typical approaches or flight paths of larger aerodromes or airports. The most frequently flown flight paths and critical stages of flight have been assessed. Following assessment the Glint and Glare Study found that no significant impacts on aviation activity would result from the Development.

Given the orientation of the panels and the existing and proposed landscape screening, the Development will not give rise to significant impacts in terms of glint and glare. As such, the Development complies with the requirements of SELLP Policies 2, 3 and 31 with regard to glint and glare.

7.7 NOISE AND VIBRATION

The development is located adjacent to main roads and existing industrial development. Solar development does not typically generate a significant amount of noise or vibration outside of the construction period. Existing background noise is therefore likely to mask any noise generated by the development during operation. Generated noise would be unlikely to be audible beyond a few metres from the Development Site. Given the distance from residential properties, it is therefore not anticipated that the Development would give rise to noise of a volume that would be audible from these properties.

A Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) has been undertaken for the Development which compares baseline noise conditions to the predicted noise outputs following Development. The report is included at Appendix F. The NIA concluded that there was no reasonable prospect of any adverse impact occurring in terms of BS4142. A desk based assessment of noise rating (NR) curves was therefore undertaken to determine acceptable indoor sound environments for property receptors in the area. The NIA found that the level on noise emitted by the Development would be comfortable compliant with criterion of NR20 which is typically used as the most stringent assessment criterion for internal noise within bedrooms during night-time periods.

Construction-related noise for solar development is typically regulated through a Construction Environmental Management Plan covering working hours and best construction practices which can be secured by planning condition.

The Development is therefore in accordance with NPPF paragraphs 180 and 191 and SELLP Policies 2, 3, 30 and 31 with regard to noise.

7.8 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

A Historic Environment Desk-based Assessment (HEBDA) has been undertaken to evaluate the effects of the Development on the archaeological and cultural heritage assets within and adjacent to the Site. The Report is provided at Appendix G.

7.8.1 Heritage Assets in the Wider Area

The closest conservation area is Spalding Conservation Area which lies approximately 1.4 km southwest of the Development Site beyond existing urban built form. The closest listed buildings are Fulney Hall (Grade II), The Church of St Paul including attached former Sunday Schoolroom (Grade I) and The Vicarage to the Church of St Paul (Grade II*) which lie approximately 0.3 km northeast of the Site boundary beyond the established employment site. These are screened from the Site by the existing factory buildings. Further listed buildings are located c. 1.0 km west of the Site and are screened by existing urban landscape.

The HEBDA identifies that the Site does not form part of the setting of any of these assets and there is no potential for harm on their significance which would arise from the Development. There are no scheduled monuments, designated parks and gardens, World Heritage Sites or registered battlefields within 1 km of the site.

7.8.2 Site Assets and Archaeology

There are no designated heritage assets within the Site. The HEBDA identified that the Site lies within an area of archaeological potential. This is largely derived from Romano-British activity identified across the 1km Study Area, as well as the potential for agricultural activity from at least the medieval period to be present within the Site. Given the likely low-level of previous activity impacting the Site, it is assumed that as yet unknown archaeological remains may survive and could potentially be adversely affected. It is considered that potential adverse effects could be reduced through the implementation of an appropriate scheme of archaeological mitigation, to be agreed and the subject of an appropriately worded planning condition.

On the basis of construction of the Development requiring excavation and intrusion into the ground, although limited, there is a modest risk of damage/loss to any unknown assets of architectural interest, a similar risk posed by agricultural activities which have previously been carried out on the Site. Any adverse impacts to buried archaeological features as a result of the implementation of the development proposals could be permanent and irreversible in nature. However, based on the nature of the Development, with panels being mounted only by driven poles of up to 1.5 m depth, no requirement for new access tracks, and the scale of the Development etc., there will be very limited excavation required on Site. It is unlikely that damage to assets may occur, and precautionary mitigation measures can be implemented to reduce this risk. The proposed Development can therefore meet the requirements of NPPF paragraphs 200-214 and SELLP Policies 2, 29 and 31.

7.9 HYDROLOGY AND FLOOD RISK

A Flood Risk Assessment ('FRA') of the site has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Environment Agency ('EA'), South East Lincolnshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment ('the SFRA') and the NPPF. The Assessment has been informed by consultation with the Environment Agency.

The Site lies within the primary catchment of the River Welland. The Coronation Channel was constructed adjacent west of the Site in 1953 to protect Spalding from floods. The Coronation Channel is a fluviially dominated watercourse with earth embankment flood defences. Flows enter Coronation Channel from the River Welland at Cowbit Sluice, approximately 1.9 km southwest of the Site.

The tidal limit is located approximately 820 m north at Marsh Road, where a tidal sluice gate operates to prevent tidal propagation upstream. Similarly, the River Welland through Spalding is fluviially dominated and Fulney Lock, tidal defences are located approximately 915 m northwest of the Site.

There is a man-made drainage ditch in the centre of the Site draining northwest which discharges into a linear field ditch which drains from north to south.

7.9.1 Flood Risk Analysis

The EA Flood Map for Planning shows that the Site is entirely located in Flood Zone 3a, as is much of the wider area, and in an area classed as having a Reduction in risk of flooding from rivers and sea due to the presence of flood defences. The EA historic flood outline dataset indicates that the Site has not previously flooded.

The FRA found that the Site was not at significant risk of flooding from surface water, ground water or reservoir sources. The only identified mechanisms for flooding at the Site were found to be extreme tidal surge causing tidal locking and fluvial breach. Both scenarios are considered unlikely and present a residual risk to the Development.

7.9.2 Mitigation of Construction Effects

Given the relatively short construction phase and gently sloping Site, it is not anticipated that significant amounts of sediment will be generated. The Development will adhere to a Construction Environmental Management Plan ("CEMP" - to be provided by the Construction Contractor), which will comply with the relevant guidance.

A suitable grassland sward will be developed in areas underneath the PV arrays before the construction phase, where appropriate to provide sustainable drainage. The PV modules are likely to be secured to the racking system by hand and therefore soil compaction is unlikely to occur during this stage. Should vehicles cause compaction during the installation of the PV arrays then this should be ameliorated using typical small-scale horticultural machinery.

Due to the flat topography of the Site and the nature of the Development, the effects associated with runoff from the solar panels and associated infrastructure are assessed as negligible. In terms of surface water runoff, the installation of PV solar arrays does not involve the introduction of hardstanding at ground level, meaning the superficial cover will remain the same as the baseline. The PV array tables will have regular rainwater gaps to prevent water being concentrated along a single drip line. As such, rainfall landing on the proposed solar panels will drain through rainwater gaps and infiltrate into the ground beneath and between each row of panels.

The transformer has a dimension of 4 x 4 x 2 m and as such increase in Site run-off caused by its instalment will be negligible.

7.9.3 Flood Risk Mitigation

The risk of surface water flooding at the Site is low and measures such as maintenance of native grassland throughout the site will provide an improvement in terms of overland flow and infiltration compared with the existing situation. The establishment of grassland beneath the panels will be beneficial in terms of vegetation cover and soil stabilisation, as the land will not be tilled.

The Site is primarily drained by existing man-made ditches with water being transferred slowly to the wider hydrological system, there are no changes to this system proposed as part of the Development.

Control of run-off from the PV Arrays will be implemented through the land management techniques based upon RSuDS methods that will be implemented before the construction phase, in accordance with the EA's guidance.

The only infrastructure located within the 1 % AEP event is the PV arrays which will be raised off the ground by 0.8 m on a racking system and therefore will not be affected by the shallow pluvial depths (0 – 0.15 m depth). Electrically sensitive infrastructure will be located outside the 3.3 %, 1 % and 0.1 % AEP surface water flooding extent.

7.9.4 Sequential and Exception Tests

The NPPF states that in determining development proposals in areas at risk of flooding the LPA should apply Sequential and Exception tests. Paragraph 168 of the NPPF states that *'Development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonable available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding.'* This is known as the Sequential test.

The Development is ancillary to the Pilgrim's Pride Factory which it will supply with renewably sourced electricity. It is proposed on land which is in adjacent to the Factory. Due

to the close proximity of the Site to the point of connection into the existing factory to the north means that there will mean minimal environmental disruption and power loss due to the short cable route. Locating the Development in Flood Zone 1 (assuming a suitable site could be located) would lead to a substantial cable route and associated environmental damage and power loss.

South East Lincolnshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (March 2017) identifies that approximately 74 % of South Holland lies within the floodplain (68 % in Flood Zone 3, 6 % in Flood Zone 2), meaning the wider area offers very few sites available for solar development in Flood Zone 1. EA Flood Maps for Planning show that there is no other land in reasonably close proximity to the factory which is of lower flood risk and could provide an alternative Site for this Development. The Development therefore passes the Sequential test.

Paragraph 169 of the NPPF states that *"If it is not possible for development to be located in areas with a lower risk of flooding (taking into account wider sustainable development objectives), the exception test may have to be applied."*

Part a) of the exceptions test is that the Development provides wider sustainability benefits to the community. The solar farm will provide renewable energy to the Pilgrim's factory which will contribute to the decarbonisation of the energy supply and to meeting the U.K. Net Zero target and as well as the other commitments set out in Section 8 of this statement. By supporting the factory the Development also helps to safeguard jobs of those who work there and the Pilgrim business as a whole, as well as the farms which supply the factory, and other further associated economic impacts.

Part b) of the Exceptions Test requires the Development to be safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere and also to reduce flood risk overall where possible. The FRA demonstrates that the Site is not at risk up to, and including, the 0.5 % AEP event plus climate change event and will not contribute to flooding offsite. In accordance with the NPPF paragraph 173 a number of mitigation measures have also been proposed to protect the development from possible flood events including under climate change scenarios.

In summary, the Development will be safe for its lifetime and will not increase flood risk elsewhere. The proposal meets the requirements of the Sequential and Exceptions Tests as set out in NPPF paragraphs 168-171 and 173 and meets the requirements of SELLP Policies 2, 3, 4 and 31 in terms of Flood Risk.

7.9.5 Access, Transport and Traffic

A Transport Assessment has been produced to examine any potential traffic impacts of the Development, the Transport Statement is provided at Appendix H. The Statement assesses the existing conditions of the highways network and the potential impact of the Development and proposes traffic management measures to be followed during the construction and operation of the Development.

7.9.6 Access

The Site is located on the edge of the urban extent of Spalding town, it has excellent links to the local road network. The A16 lies to the east of the proposed development site and provided the main road link in a north/south axis. The A151 lies to the north of the Site and provides east/west links. These roads are suitable for HGVs and currently serves economic and industrial areas including the existing factory adjacent to the Site.

Fulney Land North provides access to the Site from the A151. This road currently serves large industrial units and is an established route for HGVs. 200m from the junction with the A151 the road has a barrier controlled entry and is subject to 10mph speed limit including speedbumps and uncontrolled pedestrian crossing points. Access to the Site will be taken from the southern extent of Fulney Lane North, to the south of the Pilgrim's Pride factory and on the northern boundary of the Site. No new junctions from the public road network will be required.

There are no specific routes that need to be avoided as part of the construction stage of the proposed development and the identified routes are all currently used by HGVs.

A construction compound will be located close to the Site access point and the existing factory hardstanding. This will provide sufficient space for staff welfare, parking and material unloading, loading and storage.

7.9.7 Traffic

The Development will be largely autonomous in nature and vehicle trip generation during the operational stage is therefore expected to be negligible. The majority of generated traffic will therefore be during construction and decommission of the Site.

The Site may be accessed safely by walking, cycle and public transport. However, due to the nature of the Development the majority of trips to Site are expected to be by private transport means.

There are expected to be a total of 4,740 vehicle trips over the course of the 6 month construction period, with a peak of 790 vehicle trips per month. This includes all staff vehicle trips and deliveries. This equates to approximately 198 per week, or 33 per day over a six day week. All materials can all be brought to site using standard sized HGVs.

Other vehicles which will travel to site during the construction phase will include small and medium delivery vans, cars and small work vans. Excavators, dumper trucks, telehandlers and Mobile Elevating Work Platforms will be used for construction purposes and will typically remain on Site until each construction stage is complete.

Given the expected level of traffic generation, it is not anticipated that the development will create additional congestion or delay on the strategic or local road network and there will not be any significant impacts on road links or junctions.

7.9.8 Traffic Mitigation

An outline CTMP is included within the Transport Statement submitted as part of this planning application, details of a finalised CTMP will be agreed with the Highways Authority.

Proposed mitigation methods include but are not limited to:

- Works hours will be between 7am and 5pm weekdays and 7am-4pm on Saturdays. No work will take place on Sundays or Bank Holidays.
- Operations Planning
- Minimising the volume of imported and exported materials through re-use on Site
- Minimising the volume of waste through recycling where possible
- Delivery control including timing and co-ordination of vehicular trips and vehicular sharing
- Control of dust and debris through cleaning and sweeping
- Staff inductions and code of conduct
- Risks Assessment and Emergency procedures

In terms of decommission stage the traffic and onsite activity is expected to be similar to the construction stage. A decommissioning CTMP may be provided ahead of this operation.

Given the minor impact of the Development on the highways network and the traffic management measures to be implemented, it is considered that the Development complies with NPPF Paragraphs 108 and 114-117 and SELLP Policies 2, 3, 30, and 31 with regard to access, vehicle generation, control of construction activity, and highway safety.

8 OTHER RELEVANT MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE (PPG) (FIRST PUBLISHED MARCH 2014)

The Government's PPG website went live on 6th March 2014 and contains guidance on the planning system and provides web-based advice across a variety of planning matters which is continuously updated. The web-based guidance should be read alongside the NPPF and is a material consideration in the consideration of planning applications. *Renewable and Low Carbon Energy* is one of the chapters in the PPG which was most recently updated in August 2023.

The guidance states that:

- The need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections;
- cumulative impacts require particular attention; and
- protecting local amenity is an important consideration

The guidance also states that:

“Active solar technology, (photovoltaic and solar water heating) on or related to a particular building is often permitted development (which does not require a planning application) provided the installation is not of an unusual design, or does not involve a listed building, and is not in a designated area.”⁹

8.2 UK RENEWABLE ENERGY ROADMAP

The *UK Renewable Energy Roadmap* (2011)¹⁰ (‘the Roadmap’) set out the UK Government’s commitment to increasing the use of renewable energy with targets to generate 15% of UK energy use from renewables by 2020. It set a framework and set of actions for delivery of renewable energy deployment. The *UK Renewable Energy Roadmap Update* (2013) (‘the Roadmap Update’) reports on the progress made in the renewable energy sector since and re-iterates Central Government’s commitment to renewable energy). The Roadmap Update also recognises that a number of barriers continue to present challenges, including pre-consent delays.

The Roadmap Update also identifies that solar PV has the potential to form a significant part of the renewable energy generation mix and that solar received the highest public approval rating of all renewable energy technologies, at 82% in 2012 and 85% in 2013.

8.3 UK SOLAR PV STRATEGY¹¹

8.3.1 UK Solar PV Strategy Part 1: Road Map to a Brighter Future

Part 1 of the *UK Solar PV Strategy* was published in October 2013 and sets out four guiding principles which form the basis of the Government’s strategy for solar PV. These principles are:

- Support for solar PV should allow cost-effective projects to process and to make a cost-effective contribution to UK carbon emission objectives in the context of overall energy goals;
- Support for solar PV should deliver genuine carbon reductions that help meet the UK’s target of 15% renewable energy from final consumption by 2020;
- Support for solar PV should ensure proposals are appropriately sited, give proper weight to environmental considerations such as landscape and visual impact, heritage and local amenity, and provide opportunities for local communities to influence decisions that affect them; and
- Support for solar PV should assess and respond to the impacts of deployment on: grid systems balancing; grid connectivity; and financial incentives.

Part 1 establishes the principles for solar PV deployment in the UK and states that solar PV can be deployed in a variety of locations, including on the ground on greenfield sites.

8.3.2 UK Solar PV Strategy Part 2: Delivering a Brighter Future (2014)

Part 2 of the *UK Solar PV Strategy* was published in April 2014 and focuses on the Government’s ambition for the key market segments, and the benefits that this will bring for jobs and investment in the UK, in addition to vitally important emissions reduction.

Part 2 of the Strategy recognises the opportunities for greater clean energy generation and how solar farms can be beneficial for wildlife if they are well planned and screened and avoid harm to biodiversity.

Part 2 emphasises that innovation and clean energy are at the centre of the Government’s economic plan. One of the key topics is the delivery of commercial and industrial onsite generation. The report gives examples of how businesses might gain greater pricing

⁹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (August 2023) *PPG: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy* [Accessed Online 13/06/2024] www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy

¹⁰ Department of Energy and Climate Change (2013) *UK Renewable Energy Roadmap* [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-renewable-energy-roadmap

¹¹ Department for Energy and Climate Change (2013) *UK Solar PV Strategy* [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-solar-pv-strategy-part-1-roadmap-to-a-brighter-future

certainty for the future and reduce their carbon footprint through developing their own solar energy generation.

8.4 UK CLEAN GROWTH STRATEGY: LEADING THE WAY TO A LOW CARBON FUTURE

The UK Clean Growth Strategy (2017) was last updated in April 2018. This sets out Government's proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy. The report conveys the Government's objective of achieving clean growth, whilst ensuring an affordable energy supply for businesses and consumers.¹²

8.5 NET ZERO – THE UK'S CONTRIBUTION TO STOPPING GLOBAL WARMING

In May 2019 the Committee on Climate Change published *Net Zero – The UK's contribution to stopping global warming*. It was last updated in April 2022. The report recommends a new target for the UK of net zero emissions by 2050.¹³ The Report highlights the falling cost of key renewable technologies including solar PV, which is now generally comparable or low cost than power from fossil fuels, while bringing significant co-benefits such as reduced air pollution. On 27 June 2019, the Climate Change Act 2008 was amended to introduce a target for at least a 100% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (compared to 1990 levels) in the UK by 2050.

8.6 THE ENERGY WHITE PAPER

The UK draft National Energy and Climate Plan (2019) was superseded by the Energy White Paper (EWP) in December 2020. The EWP set out a long term plan for an economy wide transition to net zero over the next three decades.

The EWP noted that a four-fold increase in clean electricity generation will be required in order to deliver the net zero target. It recognised that a low-cost, net zero consistent system is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar.

The EWP notes how the costs of energy impacts the competitiveness of UK-based industry. It notes the challenges faced by the industrial sector in achieving decarbonisation and the support which it needs to lower carbon emissions and adopt clean energy technologies.

8.7 RECENT STRATEGIES FOR INDUSTRY AND ENERGY SECURITY

The Government's *Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener*¹⁴ was published in 2021 to plan for green economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, the Government voiced intentions to decarbonise industry, supporting industry to switch to cleaner fuels and helping them to improve their resource and energy efficiency. The *Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy* was published in March 2021¹⁵. It sets out how UK industry can decarbonise in line with net zero, while remaining competitive and without pushing emissions abroad.

The *British Energy Security Strategy*¹⁶, published in April 2022 further reinforced ambitions and the importance of addressing the vulnerability of the UK to international prices and reducing dependence on imported oil and gas. The Government set up a new Department for Energy Security and Net Zero in February 2023. *Powering Up Britain*¹⁷, published in March 2023 and updated in April 2023, set out how government will enhance the country's energy security, seize the economic opportunities of the transition, and deliver net zero commitments.

¹² Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2017) *Clean Growth Strategy* [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-growth-strategy

¹³ Committee on Climate Change (2019) *Net Zero – The UK's contribution to stopping global warming* [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/

¹⁴ HM Government, *Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener* (2021) [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6194dfa4d3bf7f0555071b1b/net-zero-strategy-beis.pdf

¹⁵ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy *Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy* (2021) [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-decarbonisation-strategy

¹⁶ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy *British Energy Security Strategy* (2022) [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-energy-security-strategy/british-energy-security-strategy#introduction

¹⁷ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, *Powering Up Britain* (2023) [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.gov.uk/government/publications/powering-up-britain

8.8 CARBON BUDGET 6

The Government committed to reducing Green House Gas emissions by 78% by 2035 under carbon budget 6.¹⁸ This means that by 2035 all electricity will need to come from low carbon sources, subject to security of supply, whilst meeting a 40-60% increase in demand.

8.9 REDUCING UK EMISSIONS – 2023 COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

The 2023 Committee on Climate Change Progress (CCC) *Report to Parliament* was published in June 2023 and provided a review of Government efforts over the previous 12 months with regards to Climate Change.

The Report highlighted that the UK had not made sufficient progress towards meeting the 2050 Net Zero commitment. The report found policy development to be too slow and raised concerns with the *Carbon Budget Delivery Plan* (CBDP). The Committee recommended radical reform to Planning Policy to support Net Zero targets. The report highlighted the need for greater support for industrial electrification.¹⁹

8.10 ENERGY ACT OCTOBER 2023

The Government's *Energy Security Bill* overarching factsheet²⁰ stated the aim of the Energy Act is to “*deliver a cleaner, more affordable and more secure energy system for the long term*”, building on the commitments in the April 2022 *British Energy Security Strategy* to “*invest in homegrown energy and maintain the diversity and resilience of the UK's energy supply*”.

9 CONCLUSION

The Development is an opportunity to provide low carbon renewable energy to an existing business in line with Government aspirations. The Development will make a small yet important contribution to the aims of the UK Renewable Energy Roadmap, UK Solar PV Strategy, UK Clean Growth Strategy, The Energy White Paper and the legally binding Net Zero 2050 emissions target. The Applicant has several similar projects which benefit from short construction timescales providing the ability to commence operation in 2025. Successful implementation of these schemes will provide a cumulative contribution to green energy targets for UK industry in the near future.

The Development will provide renewable energy to an existing business adjacent to the Site. This will enable the business to reduce its carbon footprint and its energy security, bringing down costs of running the business in the long term. In turn this will act to protect jobs of those employed by the business and have knock on economic benefits for the local area, as well as supporting the economic vitality of the firm which has premises across the UK. This Development, and developments of its kind will help to maintain a competitive UK market during energy transition.

It is integral to planning decision-making that a balancing exercise has to occur in respect of considering the benefits of development against the impacts. As has been discussed through this Statement, potential impacts of the development have been thoroughly examined and mitigation of any identified impacts has led the design process.

Few impacts have been identified as a result of this Development. The agricultural classification of the Site has been carefully considered. Although the Development will involve the uptake of agricultural land classed as Grade 1, It is to be noted that the land has not been used for arable cultivation (typical use of BMV land) in recent times. This is due to the Site consisting of an isolated land parcel, constrained in agricultural terms by the size and shape of the land, its isolation from the wider countryside and its proximity to a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone; making it difficult to cultivate. Furthermore, the wider area of surrounding countryside is made up of BMV agricultural land. There is therefore no other land in close proximity to the factory which is of lower agricultural land classification and could be

¹⁸ Committee on Climate Change, *The Sixth Carbon Budget* (2020) [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget

¹⁹ Committee on Climate Change Progress *Report to Parliament* (2023) [Accessed Online 12/06/2024] <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9888/CBP-9888.pdf>

²⁰ *Energy Security Bill* overarching factsheet (2023)

effectively developed for this purpose. It is therefore considered that the benefits of the scheme outweigh the loss of this small parcel of agricultural land.

It is also to be noted that the Development is of a temporary nature which is typically associated with soil improvements. This is due to biodiversity gains and a break from chemical usage associated with agricultural activities. Furthermore, the nature of this business is one which is directly related to food production through the processing of farmed goods. The success of the business will directly support the economic validity of local farms and their continued operations. The proposed use of the Site is therefore not contrary to the issue of food security for the UK.

The Site is identified by the Environment Agency as lying within Flood Zone 3. However, the Site passes the sequential test as, similarly, the wider area in proximity to the factory is also Zone 3 and so there are no alternative sites with less risk of flooding. Flood Risk to the development has been assessed and it has been demonstrated that the Development passes the exception test, being a renewable energy scheme which can be made safe for the lifetime of the development and not increase flood risk elsewhere.

Following assessment of the above points the principle of the Development is found to be supported by Local Plan Policy 31 on Climate Change and Renewable Energy, which seeks a reduction in carbon emissions and supports energy generation, and Local Plan Policies 1, 2, 3, 7 and 31.

Care has been taken in the design of the Development to avoid unacceptable environmental and amenity impacts. As part of this the Development incorporates a scheme of landscape enhancement including the enhancement of grassland, and enhancement and planting of new hedgerows and trees, which will deliver net gains for biodiversity, screen views of the Development, and improve habitat for the site as well as protecting and respecting landscape character.

This Statement has shown how the Development is in accordance with National and Local Plan policies including those regarding preservation of the historic environment; environmental protections; prevention of pollution; protection of public amenity; mitigation of visual impacts; traffic; and safety. In terms of applying a planning balance, there are clear economic and environmental benefits; which arise from the renewable energy credentials of the Development, support of the existing business and the enhancements proposed in respect of biodiversity; which outweigh any adverse impacts. It is therefore respectfully requested that the Council approve this planning application.