

## **Westhide Solar Power Proposal: Applicant responses to points raised within consultation feedback from parish councils and residents**

**May 2022**

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### **1. Most commented topics**

#### **1.1 Noise**

*Numerous comments were received expressing concerns about potential noise impacts from the proposed scheme.*

- **Operational/constant noise from inverters and substation** – The noise generated by the proposed scheme has been shown to be of such levels and nature that by the time it reaches the nearest residential properties (at least 400m away) it will remain within existing background noise levels and form part of the ambient soundscape. Solar PV generates power during daytime hours and will therefore not generate noise ‘constantly’.
- **Construction noise** – Piling (to install the supporting frames for the solar panels) is typically done as a single stage within the construction programme. There will be no constant piling throughout the entire construction programme. The construction programme leaves Saturday afternoons and Sundays/Bank Holidays as non-working days, ensuring that residential amenity is protected whilst construction is completed as quickly as possible.
- **Provision of noise data** – The development team’s previous experience in developing solar schemes in the UK points to no issues with operational noise from solar PV. As soon as it became clear that operational noise was a key concern for local residents, we offered to carry out a full noise impact assessment, supported by background noise monitoring. Interim data was provided at a consultation drop-in event for discussion with local residents and a full Noise Impact Assessment was submitted alongside the application in December 2021 – please see “21-168 Westhide Solar Farm - Noise Assessment Report - V2”.
- **Planning condition** – From the outset we have expressed our willingness to include a noise-related planning condition alongside any future planning permission, as we are confident that the proposed scheme will not affect residential amenity and will operate within existing background noise levels, as per the assessments carried out.
- **No details of specific equipment** – Final choice of inverter will be determined by the technical design after planning permission is granted and the best available options on the market at the time of tendering. Further information demonstrating compliance with the recommendations set out in the Noise Impact Assessment will

be provided to the planning team, as per the Environmental Health Officer's comments.

- **Independent surveys different** – The background noise monitoring surveys and the ensuing Noise Impact Assessment were carried out by a well-respected established acoustics consultancy in line with relevant competency standards. As such, the work provides a robust basis for impact evaluations.

## 1.2 Cable route

*A large number of comments were received in relation to the cable route (connecting the scheme to the grid network at the substation in Dormington), mainly in relation to routing and associated impacts, expected infrastructure and route crossings.*

At the start of the scheme, the baseline option for the connection route was the local highways network, permits for which would be sought via the Section 50 licensing route, separate from the planning application for the solar farm.

As a result of community consultation, with residents and councillors expressing concerns about the impacts of associated works on the local road network, we agreed that we would investigate options for diverting as much of the route as possible over agricultural land.

This process has been ongoing for several months and we have now identified our preferred route, which would avoid any roadworks in Westhide and Withington altogether, fully bypassing those villages and thereby not affecting local residents.

The route will be confirmed once land agreements have been signed with the relevant land owners.

The cabling will be located fully underground.

The new route incorporates several road, river and railway crossings, all of which will be managed with the use of a Horizontal Direction Drill (HDD), thereby avoiding any impact on those features.

## 1.3 Community benefit fund

*Whilst several of the responses suggested that there were no direct benefits to the community, a large number of responses provided comments in relation to the proposed community benefit fund (CBF). The main points are addressed below:*

**Table 1 – CBF comments & applicant responses**

Comment	Applicant response
<i>The CBF has not been included in the planning application.</i>	This is because community benefit funds are <b>not a planning matter</b> and are arranged as a parallel/side agreement between the developer and the local community.

	<p>TEKSS wrote to Withington Group Parish Council in December 2021, offering a community benefit fund and requesting feedback. We haven't had any direct responses on this to date.</p>
<p><i>Consent should only be granted if the CBF is included in the planning application (including as a Section 106 agreement).</i></p>	<p>As above, the provision of CBFs does not constitute a planning consideration.</p> <p>Section 106 agreements are only used to address impacts not covered by the planning application.</p>
<p><i>The rate offered is too low and not in line with other schemes.</i></p>	<p>A number of responses included examples of other CBFs, pointing to higher amounts offered. However, all of these examples were from schemes that were developed under the subsidy regime and which therefore benefitted from higher revenues.</p> <p>For schemes developed post-subsidy (i.e. after 2019), the amounts offered are smaller, in line with revenues associated with developing a purely commercial and unsubsidised scheme.</p> <p>The rate offered at Westhide of £350 per installed megawatt is very much in keeping with the emerging industry standard in the post-subsidy post-2019 solar sector, which appears to be in the £200-400/MW range. <b>Please see table 2 below for a contextual overview of payments pre and post subsidy.</b></p>
<p><i>The CBF should be for the lifetime of the scheme and not 10 years.</i></p>	<p>There is a wide range of arrangements for CBFs, with some offering an upfront payment at the start of the scheme, some providing annual payments for a set number of years or for the lifetime of a scheme, or a mix.</p> <p>Whatever the arrangement, it is at the discretion of the developer and with consideration of the local community in mind.</p> <p>We believe the CBF offered at Westhide (amounting to £121,000 over 10 years based on 34.6MW installed) provides a meaningful amount of money that can contribute to local community life at a time of reduced community spending and price increases across the board. Upfronting the payments to 10 years allows for an opportunity for larger projects to be funded, especially if they obtain match funding.</p>
<p><i>Guarantees of the CBF agreement being fulfilled.</i></p>	<p>We have offered to enter into a Unilateral Undertaking between the project applicant (Ersun Westhide SPV Ltd) and the relevant administrative</p>

	body (to be confirmed upon further consultation with the community), whether the parish council or a new bespoke entity. This is a legal agreement guaranteeing the CBF obligations being fulfilled.
<i>There should be no conditions associated with the CBF and an independent body should be set up to manage the fund.</i>	<p>As a general practice CBFs have conditions attached in order to protect the money from being misspent.</p> <p>Our initial proposal was to link the spending to environmental and educational projects, but we would be happy to engage in discussions with the local community to ensure its needs are reflected.</p> <p>We would be happy to engage with either the parish council or a new entity on all CBF arrangements.</p>
<i>It should be output linked, not based on installed capacity.</i>	The practice of linking CBF amounts to installed capacity rather than output is a long-established industry practice and protects the CBF from any potential variation in performance or intermittence.

**Table 2 – examples of CBFs**

Project Name	Year	Location	Duration (years)	Capacity	Community benefit contribution	
					£ per MW	£ annually
<b>Post subsidy period - (2019 onward)</b>						
<a href="#">Westhide Solar Farm</a>	2022	Westhide	10	34.6MW	£350	£12,110
<a href="#">Longfield Solar Farm</a>	2022	Chelmsford	40	500MW	£130	£64,000
<a href="#">Kemble Solar Farm</a>	2022	Kemble	40	49.9MW	£350	£17,500
<a href="#">Bloy's Gorove Solar Farm</a>	2021	Norwich	35	49.9MW	£400	£20,000
<a href="#">Sutton Bridge Solar Farm</a>	2021	Lincolnshire	40	49.9MW	£200	£10,000
<a href="#">Tye Lane Solar Farm</a>	2021	Suffolk	35	49.9MW	£400	£20,000
<b>Government subsidy (2010 - 2019)</b>						
<a href="#">Maeswyn Solar Farm</a>	2014	Wales	25	3.7MW	£1,621	£6,000
<a href="#">Homeland Solar Farm</a>	2014	Dorset	25	14MW	£1,088.29	£15,236
<a href="#">Canada Farm Solar Park</a>	2014	Dorset	TBC	8.7MW	£1,000.00	£8,700
<a href="#">Manor Farm Solar Park</a>	2011	Cornwall	TBC	5MW	£3,069.20	£15,346

<a href="#">East Langford Solar Farm</a>	2011	Cornwall	TBC	5MW	£5,555.40	£27,777
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#### 1.4 Land grade

*The vast majority of comments related to the objection of the use of high-quality agricultural land for a renewable energy proposal, with a range of points raised. These are addressed below.*

- **Use of grade 1 & 2 land** – Whilst part of the site consists of grade 1 and 2 land, the vast majority of the site is 3b land, the preferred land grade for renewables schemes, as per planning guidance. The site is located in Herefordshire, which hosts a very high proportion of grade 1 and 2 land, and where grade 3 land is rare. The high proportion of grade 3b land at the site shows it to be an unusually suitable location for a utility-scale renewables scheme, due to the rarity of grade 3b land in Herefordshire.
- **Reducing the size of the site** – Reducing the size of the site to only grade 3b land would make it unviable. A key component of any renewables scheme is the availability of spare grid capacity to absorb the energy from the new scheme onto the grid. A suitable site has to be found close enough to the grid connection location for it to remain viable and be large enough to account for the high cost of the connection.
- **Alternative locations** – Several comments related to the alternative use of brownfield sites and rooftops. The full extent of the Westhide Estate land ownership was initially assessed to try and identify suitable land. Enough lower grade was assessed as suitable in order to host a utility-scale scheme. Westhide Estate is a farming and managed woodland estate. The proposed scheme is for circa 34.6MW of installed capacity, from a single location. Finding the equivalent amount of space on rooftops would amount to dozens if not hundreds of domestic/commercial scale projects. The UK's energy security requires rooftop, commercial and utility-scale schemes – we cannot just rely on one type.
- **Loss of farmland & duty of care** – Whilst the land used for the site cannot be used for crop growing during the lifetime of the solar scheme (30 years), after the scheme comes to an end, it can be returned to farming crops, with better soil quality. Hosting solar allows farmers to diversify their income streams and helps to protect farming businesses, especially at a time of very high costs (energy, fertiliser etc). Westhide Estate will continue to function as a farming and managed woodland estate, with the income from the solar not only supporting a local rural business but also providing revenue for investment into other local sustainability projects.
- **Food security** – Whilst food security is an important concern, so is energy security. Recent global events only seek to underline the importance of pursuing both food and energy security and finding the right balance in our national strategy. Every county in the UK needs to play a part in generating renewable energy, including counties with established crops sectors.
- **Brownfield** – The land retains its agricultural status. It does **not** become brownfield.

## 1.5 Landscape & visual impact

*A large number of comments expressed concerns about the potential for landscape & visual impacts, with a range of points raised. These are addressed below.*

- **Views of the site** – The vast majority of the site is hidden from view by the form of the landscape and existing planting. Most of the houses in Westhide will **not** have direct views of the scheme, nor will it be seen from the centre of the village. The scheme will also not block views of the canal, since the canal is largely hidden behind an existing treeline. Nor will the substation be seen, as it is located behind a substantial block of woodland. The substation location was changed in response to community consultation.
- **Polytunnels** – Opportunities to view both the solar scheme and the polytunnels to the north of the site are very limited and have been assessed as not having a cumulative impact. (Nor does the scheme have a cumulative impact with the other solar proposal in Dormington due to the distances involved).
- **Impact on footpaths/tourism** – The site is currently inaccessible to the public. There are no footpaths crossing the site. Views from the nearest footpaths are either blocked by existing woodland or constitute very thin slithers in distant views. Only the proposed permissive path would experience significant direct views of the solar proposal. The proposal will not prevent the continued enjoyment and use of existing footpaths but will add an additional walking resource to the area. Nor will the site be any more visible to cyclists using the Withies Road.
- **No lighting or reflections** – There is no night-time lighting proposed for the scheme, as all the security cameras will be infrared and operate in the dark. Nor do the steel support frames cause reflections.
- **Harm to rural setting** – Rural settings constitute a range of landscapes and land uses, from preserved and protected areas valued for their views through to large operational farms with all their associated infrastructure, including machinery. Solar PV does not constitute the industrialisation of the countryside. Not only does it help to support the rural economy, but it also plays an important part in boosting local wildlife.
- **Landscape plan management** – As part of the application we have provided a detailed Landscape Mitigation & Enhancement Plan. The plan can be guaranteed and conditioned as part of any planning approval. All landscape planting will take place in the first available planting season.
- **Size of the scheme** – The proposed site has been assessed over many months and its boundaries reduced over time to reflect the data from assessments and as a result of consultation. The existing site boundaries are well contained within the local landscape form and any remaining effects will be sufficiently mitigated with additional screening planting. Whilst the project is of utility-scale, it is by far not one of the largest in the country, where it is now common to see anything in the 50-500MW range.

## **2. Other topics**

### **2.1 Permissive path**

*A number of comments have been received in relation to the proposed permissive path, namely in relation to its routing and maintenance, and questioning its value as a benefit to the local community, as well as the views experienced from it.*

- From the earliest stages of consultation with the community it became clear that additional access to estate land for walking would be of value to some of the residents. As such, we sought to incorporate the provision for this within the boundaries of the application and introduced a permissive path along the site periphery, providing (1) community access to previously-inaccessible land and (2) circa 4.5km of new walking path in the vicinity of Westhide village.
- The two entry/exit points to the south and east of the site connect to the local road network, one which local residents have mentioned is much used for walking, cycling and horse-riding, alongside standard road traffic. This is also the case for the vast majority of local footpaths, including ones near The Kymin, Belmont Farm, Old Grove and Withington Court – all of these footpaths come off the same road.
- Whilst walking alongside a solar farm may not be to everyone's taste with respect to views, the proposed permissive path will introduce an alternative walking route/shortcut from Dodmarsh to The Kymin, avoiding the road network and ongoing traffic.
- The permissive path is located in between the security fencing and the field boundaries, an area of land that is within the red line of the application site and one that will be maintained as part of the operational & maintenance arrangements for any permitted scheme.

### **2.2 No subsidies**

Solar PV does not receive any Government subsidies. This has been the case for several years now. Solar PV proposals are commercially-viable without subsidy, largely due to the falling cost of and improvements in solar technology in recent years.

### **2.3 Construction impacts – timing, noise, traffic**

*A few comments were received in relation to impacts associated with construction, namely timings of work, construction noise, and impacts from construction traffic.*

The timings of works as proposed in the planning application, i.e. Monday to Friday 08:00-18:00 and Saturdays 08:00-13:30, with no construction or deliveries taking place on Sundays or Bank Holidays, are a set industry standard and strike a balance between completing construction as quickly as possible whilst protecting residential amenity.

Noisy works, and in particular piling, are temporary. Piling tends to take place at a particular stage of the construction programme and is typically carried out as a single stage, limiting

the piling works to a period of a few weeks, as opposed to over the course of the entire construction period.

A lot of consultation effort has gone into addressing the concerns raised by local residents over the course of consultation with respect to construction traffic. As a result, the main construction route was diverted to entirely avoid Westhide and Withington, with the C1131 only being used to deliver some of the substation components and to act as a supplementary route for particular instances when the main route cannot be used.

A construction compound has been secured to the north-west of the site with deliveries and the vast majority of construction traffic coming in from the north of the site.

## **2.4 Transport**

*Comments relating to transport focus on the enforceability of the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), the safety of roads and footpaths, impact on hedgerows and properties, the increase in traffic volumes/disruption, the use of the supplementary route and concerns about operational traffic.*

- The enforceability of the CTMP can be enforced as part of a planning condition, which we would be happy to have attached to any planning permission.
- The section of the Three Choirs footpath that runs along the access route is subject to existing high levels of farm traffic; this section will be subject to a low speed limit for construction traffic, additional signage and the use of banksmen at the turning to the road for entry/exit, ensuring the continued safe use of the footpath.
- Whilst an increase in the volume of traffic is expected during the construction, this is temporary and has been assessed as not impacting local road safety. Disruption to the local road network is not anticipated as the proposal entails no road closures.
- We fully understand the local community's concern about construction traffic, which is why we did the additional work to identify and secure an alternative access route for the construction period. The use of the supplementary route is intended for the delivery of substation components, e.g. the transformer, and to provide supplementary access in certain instances. As a result of community consultation, our plan is to use the main construction route for as much of the construction traffic as possible.
- The CTMP states that a highway condition survey can be carried out and submitted to the highway authority prior to commencing construction on-site. This ensures any damage from the construction works is noted and corrected before construction ends. We would be happy for this to be conditioned to any planning permission.
- Concerns about operational traffic impacting local roads do not account for the very low levels of anticipated traffic, nor the size of the vehicles, likely to be 4 x 4 or a small van. This would in fact constitute a significant reduction of vehicles on the roads as farm vehicles normally associated with farming the site would no longer be on the road network.



## 2.5 Decommissioning

*Comments in relation to decommissioning have centred on the safe and/or environmentally-friendly disposal of solar panels (in particular with regards to solar panel composition), guarantees surrounding effective decommissioning and its financing, and what decommissioning would entail/its impacts.*

- **Panel composition** – With respect to the composition of panels, these are made largely of silicon, glass, aluminium and other supporting materials. Modern crystalline silicon solar panels contain virtually no toxic materials. They are designed to withstand tough weather conditions and are designed/manufactured in such a way that even when damaged and/or broken trace amounts of materials do not leach out and cause any contamination. This is because the cells are encapsulated within very durable polymer layers and contain no readily soluble materials.
- **Recycling** – We will ensure that PV suppliers for the schemes are members of a Producer Compliance Scheme (PCS), such as PV Cycle, for example – a legal requirement under the UK's WEEE Regulations, which ensures that the legal obligations for the collection and recycling of old PV panels are met. PV Cycle is a photovoltaic-focused, Government-approved, not-for-profit Producer Compliance Scheme, providing full compliance services under WEEE Regulations for UK-based PV businesses that fall under the Producer definition.
- **Decommissioning** – When the time comes for decommissioning the solar PV scheme, the owner and operator of the scheme will be bound by a planning condition to decommission the site within a given time period. Decommissioning includes the disassembly and disposal of the solar equipment (with a particular focus on the recycling of materials and the extraction of other salvageable materials) and site restoration. It is likely that from the outset a given scheme will be insured against decommissioning risks, which covers the funding of the process. It is expected that the owner of the scheme will need to submit a Decommissioning & Restoration Plan to the planning authority for input and approval prior to decommissioning taking place. The owner of the scheme will pay for decommissioning.

## 2.6 Environmental/energy

*A few of the comments related to the general environmental benefits (aside from ecology) associated with solar PV. The main themes are addressed below:*

- **Carbon payback** – Depending on the scale of the project, the type of infrastructure installed and the type of panel used, it takes anywhere between 1-4 years to generate enough energy and carbon emission savings to account for the energy used in the construction of the solar plant. That means that for a 30-year scheme (such as the one in Westhide), there would be a minimum of 26 years of net green energy generation and net carbon savings.
- **Source of panels** – Panel selection will take place during the technical design stages if planning permission is obtained. Technology is evolving very rapidly in this sector

so it makes perfect sense to finalise solar panel selection based on the best available options on the market when the time comes. The vast majority of solar panels are currently produced in China, which has been at the forefront of solar PV design from the outset, and which is the world's leading manufacturing country, with almost 29% of *all* products manufactured in China to internationally-recognised standards.

- **Other renewable technologies** – The site has been assessed as being suitable for ground-mounted solar PV. The UK requires the full gamut of commercially-available renewable technologies (onshore wind, offshore wind, solar, marine, bio etc) to deal with the climate and energy security crises in the shortest time frame possible.
- **Energy security/local use** – Locally-generated energy will not only help in the fight against climate change, but will help in increasing the UK's energy security, especially in light of recent events and very high energy prices. The energy generated at Westhide will join the local grid network at Dormington. (It cannot be exported abroad due to the distances involved).
- **Efficiency/capacity factor/energy output** – For indicative energy generation figures the applicant used a 12% capacity factor in order to provide conservative estimated figures. The UK Government, in fact, typically uses a 17% capacity factor for solar. All forms of power generation have varying capacity factors (which indicate the ratio between the theoretical maximum and likely output based on conversion losses, variability etc). Whilst capacity factors are important, they shouldn't be the sole focus for the selection of technologies as other critical factors are discounted from this calculation. The technologies with the highest capacity factor are nuclear, natural gas and coal. Few would agree, however, that we should be pursuing only those at the expense of other technologies, due to the highly polluting role of gas and coal in the climate change crisis we are all facing.

## 2.7 Ecology

*The comments relating to ecology point to the presence of existing wildlife and habitat, whilst disputing the value added by the scheme.*

Great care has been taken of assessing the existing habitats and the wide variety of species that are present on site. (Please see Ecological Appraisal, Dec 2021).

Whilst there is plenty of wildlife using the site and there is plenty of valuable habitat around the field boundaries, due to the fact that the fields themselves are heavily farmed, they do not constitute a particularly rich or varied habitat.

Buffer distances (where no development can be present or works take place) have been incorporated into the overall proposal to avoid/minimise impacts from construction and operation. This relates to both plants and animals.

Careful thought has been put into the management of the ecological improvement and maintenance of the site. (Please see the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, Dec 2021).

A detailed Biodiversity Net Gain study was carried out to calculate the additional value that the proposal would bring. It showed that there will be an impressive 134% increase in habitat gain and a 62% increase in hedgerow value. (Please see Biodiversity Net Gain, Dec 2021). This goes far beyond the 10% increase often stipulated for proposals as a minimum.

The landowner has completed many significant ecological improvements throughout the Westhide Estate over the past 20 years. The solar proposal would not only constitute an ecological improvement project in its own right but can help finance further ecological and biodiversity improvements around the estate.

## **2.8 Flood risk**

*A number of comments raised concerns about the proposal increasing flood risk in the area.*

A full Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken for the site. This included the generation of detailed hydraulic modelling and onsite percolation testing (to test the ability of the land to soak up water).

The vast majority of the site will remain permeable, as the extent of the impermeable areas introduced across the site by the proposed development (foundations for the central inverters and the substation compound) is relatively small.

Any additional runoff from the impermeable areas will be small and more than adequately managed by an appropriate SuDS. As such, there will be no impact on the nearby watercourses and neighbouring sites as a result of the proposed development.

The applicant has taken on board the comments from the Drainage Board provided during the consultation period and will look to apply relevant changes to the proposed swale system design should the scheme obtain planning permission, with the view to obtaining relevant consents from the Drainage Board prior to construction.

## **2.9 Substation**

*A few residents commented on the DNO substation being potentially left in place.*

The substation compound within the scheme is made up of several components, one of which includes the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) compound area. Once the scheme is connected to the grid, the DNO components will be 'adopted' by the DNO who will take ownership of this particular bit of equipment.

All other substation equipment and the rest of the equipment (solar panels, central inverters, security fencing, cabling, CCTV cameras etc) will remain the property of the solar farm owner and will be privy to decommissioning.

It will be the DNO's decision whether to retain the compound at the end of the solar farm's life (30 years) or leave it in place.

## **2.10 Heritage**

*Comments in relation to heritage impacts mainly focused on general impacts on the historic setting.*

A full Heritage Desk Based Assessment has been carried out for the proposal by Cotswold Archaeology, a long-established and well-respected archaeology and heritage consultancy. The assessment established that the setting of the nearest heritage assets will not be affected by the proposal. This also appears to be the view of the Council's heritage officer.

## **2.11 Legal structure/commercial integrity**

*A few responses questioned the applicant's capability in delivering the proposal and the lack of information on the legal & commercial structure behind the proposal.*

TEKSS Ltd, the developer spearheading the proposal, was set up in 2020. Its directors and the development team have over 12 years of solar PV development experience and between them have developed hundreds of megawatts of solar PV both in the UK and abroad.

The Westhide proposal is a joint development between TEKSS Ltd and Erikoglu Ltd, the UK branch of Erikoglu Holdings.

Ersun (Westhide SPV) Ltd is a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) company set up for the solar power proposal at Westhide. This is the standard approach to developing renewables schemes in the UK. This way, regardless of eventual ownership, all permissions, obligations and agreements are tied to the scheme, ensuring its safeguarding and deliverability.

Developers typically sell projects (at various stages of development) to investors looking to own operational assets. These can be large energy companies, through to investment funds and pension funds. Whoever ends up owning Ersun (Westhide SPV) Ltd when it is sold by TEKSS and Erikoglu Ltd, will inherit all the permissions, obligations and agreements tied into the SPV and will be legally obliged to fulfil all of them.

The scheme will be constructed using project financing. This means there is significant institutional capital backing it. The way this is structured means it is extremely unlikely for insolvency to occur.

## **2.12 House prices**

*A couple of comments related to potential impacts on house prices, mainly based on the idea of altered residential amenity.*

A variety of studies have been carried out over the past 20 years or so in relation to the impact of renewables schemes on nearby house prices (mainly in relation to onshore wind schemes). Most have proven inconclusive on the impact of renewables on nearby house

prices, with some suggesting that once operational, there was no discernible effect from the schemes.

The vast majority of these studies have been in relation to onshore wind, which is a highly-visible form of energy installation. The solar PV scheme proposed at Westhide will not only be mainly contained by the landform but also screened by existing and new planting.

Operational noise will be kept within existing background noise levels (please see 'Noise' section).

Therefore, overall residential amenity will not be negatively affected.

Reference in residents' responses to a likely 2-3% decrease in value seem to stem from an online article about a 2020 study in the Netherlands, which cannot be directly applied to the UK housing market.

### **2.13 Support**

*Some of the comments claim that the scheme is not supported by local residents, nor is it community-led.*

Whilst there have been a number of objections submitted from local residents, out of a circa 50-household Westhide-centred mailing list that has been kept informed throughout the development process, the objections stem from circa 12 households within Westhide and Withington. This means that the vast majority of the households in Westhide have not objected to the scheme, recognising that whilst it will pose an inconvenience during the short construction phase, once operational, it will have no bearing on day-to-day life in the village.

The site is located on land owned by Westhide Estates, which forms a key part of Westhide, not only in its heritage but also as a local rural business. The landowner lives and works in Westhide and is a member of the local community.

### **2.14 Policy**

*Some of the comments suggest the proposal contravenes a number of planning policies and that it will set a precedent for future sites.*

The Planning Statement (Dec 2021) that was submitted as part of the application sets out how the proposal fits in line with all the relevant local, regional, national and international policies and obligations.

### **2.15 Available information**

*A number of comments suggested that there was insufficient information on the application and/or that information was missing:*

- **Type of security fencing** – Please see “3352\_P\_DT\_3\_02\_Fence & Gate Detail Rev A” submitted with the application in December 2021.
- **Number of panels** – The masterplan for the proposed scheme consists of circa 34.6MW of installed capacity, equating to circa 70,000 individual panels.
- **CCTV set-up and location** – The submitted masterplan sets out the locations of 88 infra-red CCTV cameras, please see “3352\_L\_GA\_0\_01\_Masterplan Rev F” and “3352\_P\_DT\_3\_03\_CCTV Detail” for an indicative structure, both submitted with the application in December 2021. Final CCTV locations, equipment and offsite monitoring arrangements will be based on the final technical design, should the scheme obtain planning permission.
- **Type of inverters** – Please see “3352\_P\_DT\_3\_06\_Inverter Detail” submitted with the application in December 2021 for indicative inverter details. The type of inverter selected for the scheme will be based on the final technical design and privy to noise restrictions as agreed as part of the noise assessment work.

## 2.16 Canal

*A few comments were raised in relation to the disused canal to the north of the scheme:*

- **Red line boundary** – As a result of discussions with local stakeholders during the consultation process the red boundary for the planning application was amended to include some key areas of land that contain existing planting which is key to the screening of the proposal. This includes the section of the canal to the north-east of the application that is owned by Westhide Estate.
- **Access route across the canal** – The proposed (construction) access route to the north-west of the site crosses the canal via an existing bridge. It is already extensively used by farm machinery that is used on site and no modifications are envisaged for the access provisions for the solar PV construction as equipment will be ferried on site from the construction compound at Thingehill Court using smaller vehicles.
- **Flood alleviation** – The Flood Risk Assessment carried out for the proposal envisages no increase in flood risk to the area and proposes a series of swales to assist in managing surface run-off. There is no requirement for canal restoration in relation to the solar proposal with respect to managing flood risk.
- **Biodiversity** – The proposal has already incorporated a number of valuable ecological enhancements, including for water-dwelling species, such as Great Crested Newts. Biodiversity Net Gain calculations confirm a 132% increase in habitat.
- **Canal restoration** – It is clear that a lot of effort is going into restoring the historic canal and that this process adds benefits to the local community. A community benefit fund has been offered as part of the scheme. Once the administrative body for the fund has been decided/set up, the Canal Trust could approach the body for funding of this community-level project.