Westhide Solar Power Proposal:
Consultation Update & Planning Application Summary
January 2022

Current status & update

The planning application for the Westhide Solar Power Proposal was submitted to Herefordshire Council on 20th December 2021 and has now been registered and validated.

The planning application reference number is **P214619/F**.

The full suite of planning application documents and reports will shortly be available to view on the Council's website.

In the meantime, the documents are also available to view on our project website: westhide.tekss-energy.com

The Council will shortly run a formal 21-day consultation period on the proposal, during which time project stakeholders can respond to the Council with their views on the proposal.

Our original intention was to host a public exhibition at Withington Village Hall during this period to present the application in detail. However, due to the current Covid situation we feel it is in everyone's interest and safety to carry out this stage of consultation remotely.

As a result, we have decided to provide a summary overview of the key areas of the application below and to invite residents and councillors to contact us with any follow-up queries and questions.

1. About the application

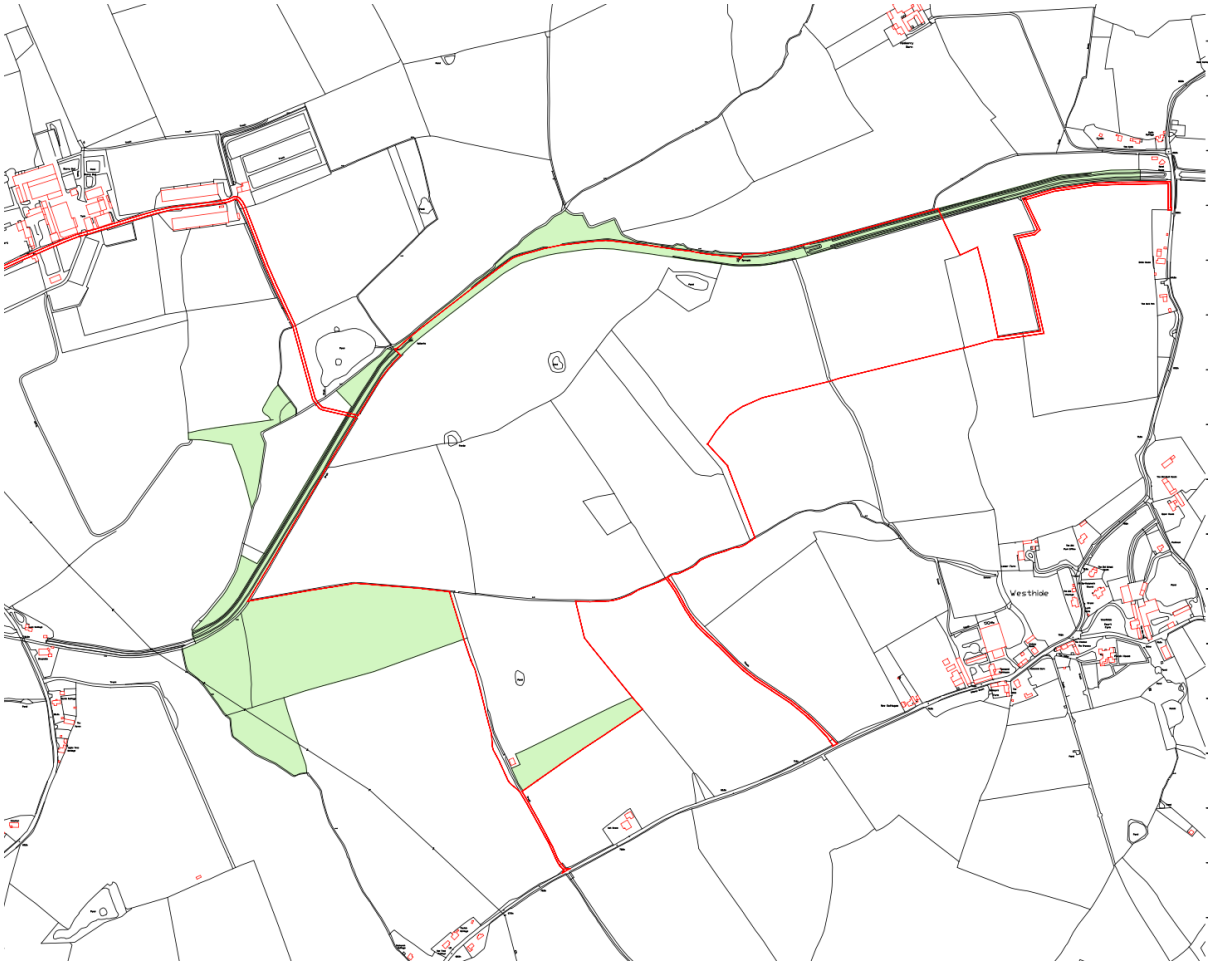
The applicant

The proposal is being applied for by Ersun (Westhide SPV) Ltd, a company set up and co-owned by TEKSS Ltd and Erikoglu Ltd for the purpose of developing the Westhide project.

TEKSS are a renewable energy developer working in the UK energy sector to develop environmentally-sensitive high-quality renewable energy schemes. The development team has significant development and grid connection experience in the UK energy sector and a successful track record.

The proposal

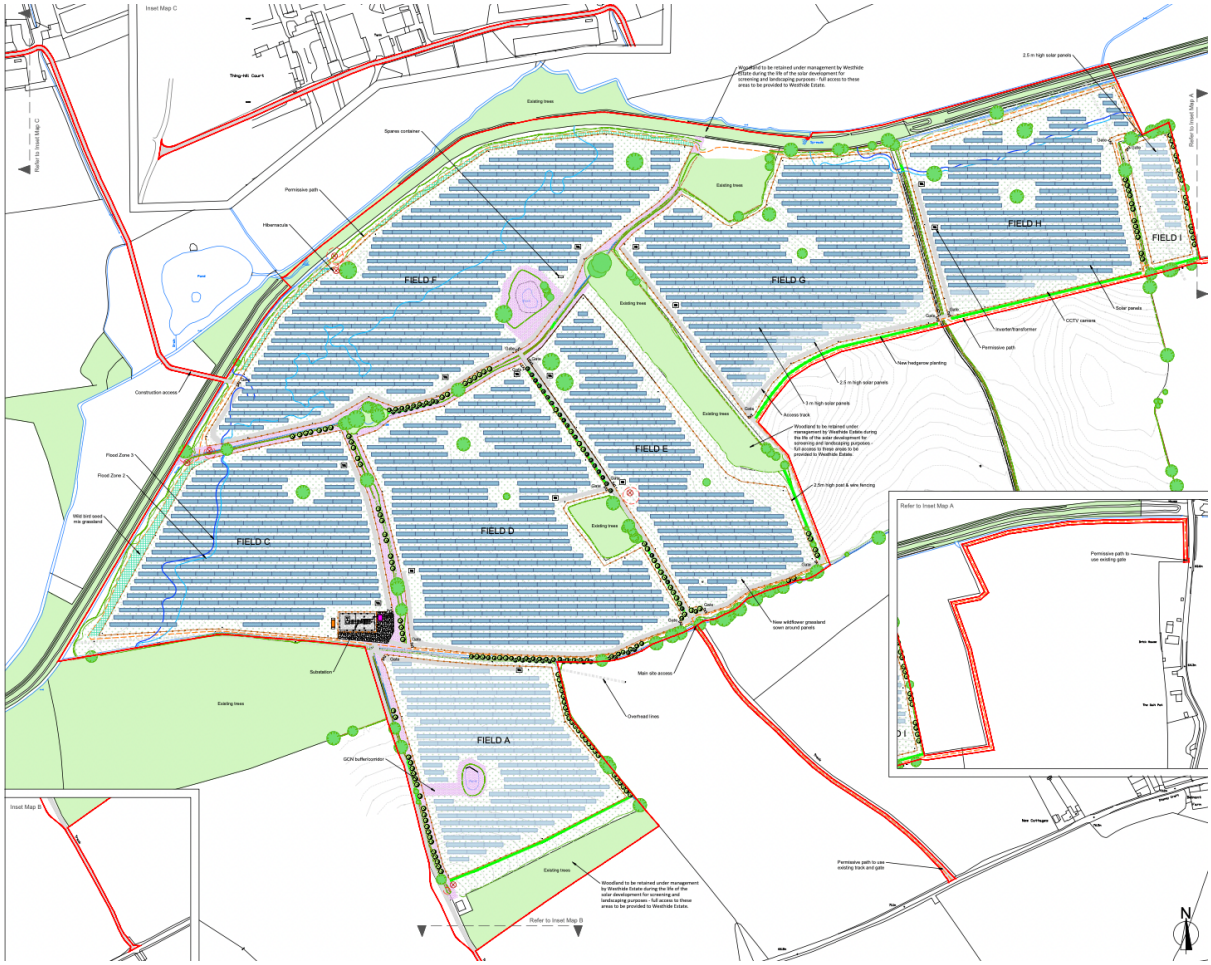
We are proposing to construct a ground-mounted solar power scheme on a site to the north-west of the village of Westhide, on land owned by Westhide Estates.



Over the past two decades Westhide Estate has been undergoing regeneration and ecological enhancements, seeing improvements in estate infrastructure and biodiversity measures, as well as carbon sequestration efforts in its woodlands. The Estate wants to continue this programme of biodiversity enhancement and the solar proposal will go a long way in helping with this aim, by creating a local net gain in ecology, as well as by generating income that can be used for further sustainability projects on the estate.

The site consists of eight arable fields, alongside a new permissive path (with two entry/exit points) and 3 access tracks, totalling circa 152 acres for the entire application area.

The proposal currently consists of approximately 34.6 megawatts (MW) of ground-mounted solar panels, alongside supporting infrastructure, including a substation compound, several central inverters, security deer fencing within individual fields and infrared CCTV cameras along the perimeter fencing.



Energy

A site of 34.6 MW of installed capacity would be expected to generate approximately 36.3MWh of green electricity per annum – enough to cover the needs of 12,500 medium-use households.

This amount of green electricity is expected to make annual savings of 8,400 of CO2.

The environmental benefit figures are based on 34.6MW of installed solar PV, operating with a 12% capacity factor, a Typical Domestic Consumption Value (TDCV) for a medium-use household of 2900kWh per annum (Ofgem 2020), UK government figures on the carbon emissions for homes on the average energy fuel mix (2019) and 2011 Census figures.

The planning application

The full suite of planning application documents can be accessed using the following sources:

- **Herefordshire Council's website** – via the Planning Application Search link, using the planning reference **P214619/F**.
- **Project website** – westhide.tekss-energy.com/documents

For full details, please see:

- Westhide Solar Masterplan
- Westhide Site Location Plan

2. Timeline

Autumn 2020
Commenced preliminary environmental & technical assessments to establish site viability. Applied for a grid connection.

Autumn 2020 – Autumn 2021
Undertook a range of environmental and technical assessments, including studies on:

- Land grade
- Ecology studies (including species-specific studies on bats, wintering and breeding birds, badgers, and Great Crested Newts)
- Flood risk
- Cultural heritage
- Landscape and visual impact
- Noise assessment

March 2021
Submitted a request for Pre-Application Advice from Herefordshire Council.

April 2021
Submitted an EIA Screening Request to Herefordshire Council. Commenced consultation with local stakeholders.

April 2021 – January 2022
Undertook a range of consultation events, including site walkovers, house visits and drop-in events.

July 2021
Received a Screening Response from Herefordshire Council stating that the proposal is not considered to be EIA (i.e. it does not require an Environmental Impact Assessment).

December 2021
Planning application submitted.

Spring 2022 (Indicative)
Planning decision expected.

Autumn 2022 (Indicative)
If approved, construction to commence.

3. Landscape & Visual Impact

The site is located to the north-west of the village of Westhide and is typical of the local rural landscape, containing 8 arable fields, bounded by hedgerows and tree lines and surrounded in part by mature woodland.

The site was selected after careful consideration of topography and existing screening planting.

Over the course of the development process consultation with the local community fed into various design considerations with regards to landscape and visual impact, resulting in several changes to the design including moving the substation further north of the originally-proposed location and additional screening planting being added in several locations. We also decided to lower the height of the panels in several locations to ensure minimal impact.

A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was carried out as part of the site assessment, alongside a Cumulative Assessment, which considered the impact of the proposal on the immediate landscape and how it is experienced visually. These assessments are accompanied by several photomontages (visualisations) to help assess the potential impacts.

The assessment shows that the proposal is sited in a well-enclosed location and is generally well contained within the local landscape. Due to the existing vegetation and land form, alongside all the additional screening planting that is being proposed, it is considered that the landscape & visual effects will be very much localised and not anticipated to be harmful.

The development will retain and enhance all existing landscape features, together with the introduction of new hedgerows along historic field patterns. Mitigation planting will enhance key landscape features such as woodland planting, field patterns and hedgerows.

The project infrastructure is temporary and will be removed after 30 years.

Although the proposed development lies close to the polytunnels at Ocle Pychard, the surrounding vegetation and local landform restricts opportunities to see both developments at the same and does not result in greater cumulativeeffects. There is also no intervisibility between the proposed development and the proposed Larport Solar Farm in Dormington.

For full details, please see:

- Westhide Solar Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment
- LVIA Appendices A-E
- LVIA Appendix F: Visualisations
- Landscape Mitigation & Enhancement Plan (and Insets)
- Westhide Solar LVIA Appendix G: Cumulative Assessment

4. Cultural heritage

A full heritage assessment was carried out in relation to the proposal. The assessment considered the potential effects of the development on surrounding designated heritage assets, through the alteration of their settings. It also looked into potential physical effects on any potential onsite archaeological resource.

Heritage

There are 27 designated heritage assets and two Scheduled Monuments which have been highlighted in proximity to the site (within a circa 1km radius).

It was established that, on account of intervening development, vegetation, and topography, the proposal would not result in any harm to the significance of any of the Listed Buildings or Scheduled Monuments in the study area.

Archaeology

The assessment identified potential for archaeological remains of Romano-British date to be present within the site, likely associated with the known, and possibly high-status, farmstead site.

However, the level of survival of any potential archaeology is not yet known and it is envisaged that should sub-soiling of circa 0.5m have occurred across the site during the preceding decades, any potential archaeology will have been considerably impacted. This could offer an explanation for the poor results of the previous archaeological investigation in 2001 (which surmised that ploughing for cereal crops in the previous 60 years had negatively impacted the survival of any archaeological remains).

Development of the site would likely result in limited impacts on below ground archaeological remains.

For full details, please see:

- Westhide Heritage Desk Based Assessment

5. Noise

During the early stages of consultation with the local community it became apparent that potential noise from central inverters and the substation was a particular concern for several of the nearest residents.

Noise assessments are not typically carried out as part of the solar farm development process. This is because noise dissipates with distance and there is usually sufficient

distance between central inverters and residential properties to make sure that background noise levels at the properties aren't affected.

However, although a noise impact assessment wasn't requested by the Council as part of the application we recognised that this issue was of particular concern to residents and therefore decided to offer a full noise impact assessment to give everyone additional reassurance on the matter.

A sound monitoring survey was undertaken in June 2021 at 6 locations around the site to establish the existing background noise levels in the immediate area.

3D noise modelling was carried out for the final site design in order to quantify the potential noise from the proposal, with the final noise report providing the developer with a *maximum* noise level that the proposal can generate *without* affecting *existing* background noise levels at residential properties.

This approach ensures greater flexibility of final choice of central inverter whilst protecting residential amenity.

The noise report shows that the noise generated by the scheme can stay within the existing background noise levels, thereby not affecting residential amenity.

For full details, please see:

- Westhide Solar Power Proposal: Noise Impact Assessment.

6. Ecology

One of the benefits of solar power is the opportunity it creates for significant local ecology improvements both in terms of habitat creation and an increase in local biodiversity.

As part of the site assessment, a number of ecology studies have taken place over many months, including habitat assessments, badger studies, bat studies, (breeding and wintering) bird studies and Great Crested News studies.

The results of these studies have been incorporated into the proposal which looks to minimise any potential negative impacts from construction via careful design incorporations such as buffer distances and keeping the existing hedgerows and trees in place (apart from 6 poor quality ash trees and 4 x 1m gaps in hedgerows to allow for the permissive path). Temporary protective fencing will also be installed during construction to protect valuable trees and their root zones.

The proposal will also entail significant ecological improvements, leading to a substantial net gain in biodiversity:

- Circa 48 hectares of species-rich grassland
- 1.25km of new hedgerow
- 2.2km of enhanced planting on existing hedgerows
- 219 new trees
- A relaxed hedgerow management regime (leaving hedgerows to grow to 3m in height), leading to better habitat for bats and other species
- Wildlife corridors around the site boundary, including an internal corridor for Great Crested News between the onsite ponds
- 0.5 hectares of wild bird seed planting along the northern boundary of the site
- 5 hibernacula for reptiles
- 10 bird boxes
- 10 bat boxes

An exact Biodiversity Net Gain calculation has also been undertaken and the above measures will lead to an **impressive 134% gain on habitat units** and a **62% gain on hedgerows**, far exceeding the 10% target increase encouraged for solar schemes.

The proposed development will contribute towards national and international green energy targets and is likely to enhance the soil carbon storage value of the site. The change in land use may also help to reduce water run-off rates, with benefits for water supply (both in terms of quantity and quality) and reducing flood risk.

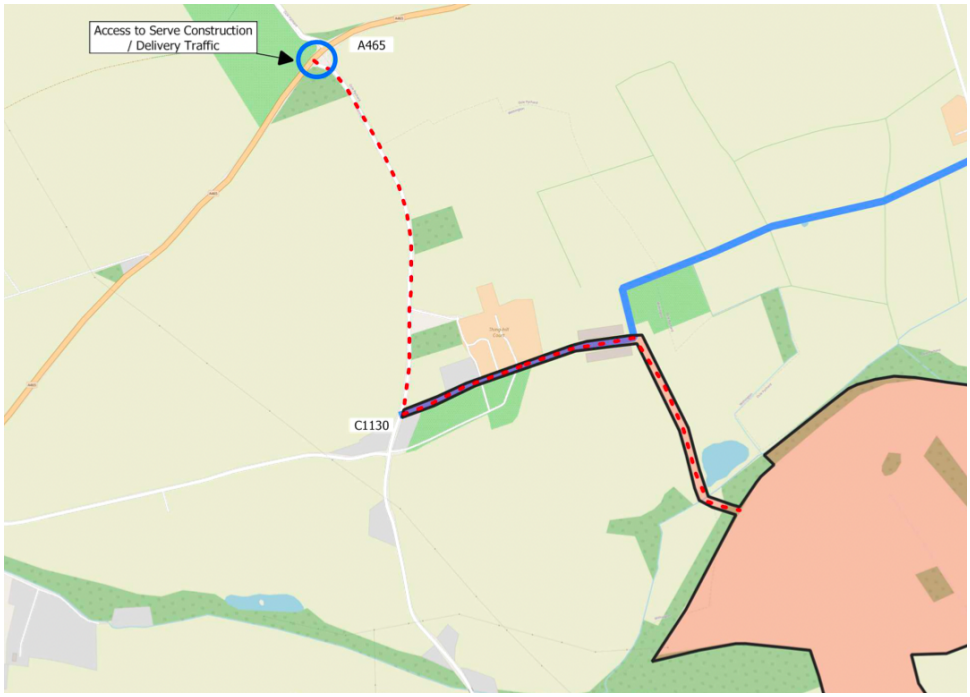
For full details, please see:

- Westhide Solar Ecological Appraisal
- Westhide Solar Natural Assets and Environmental Net Gain Report
- Westhide Solar Bidoversity Net Gain
- Westhide Biodiversity 3.0 Metric
- Westhide Solar Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)
- Westhide Arboricultural Report

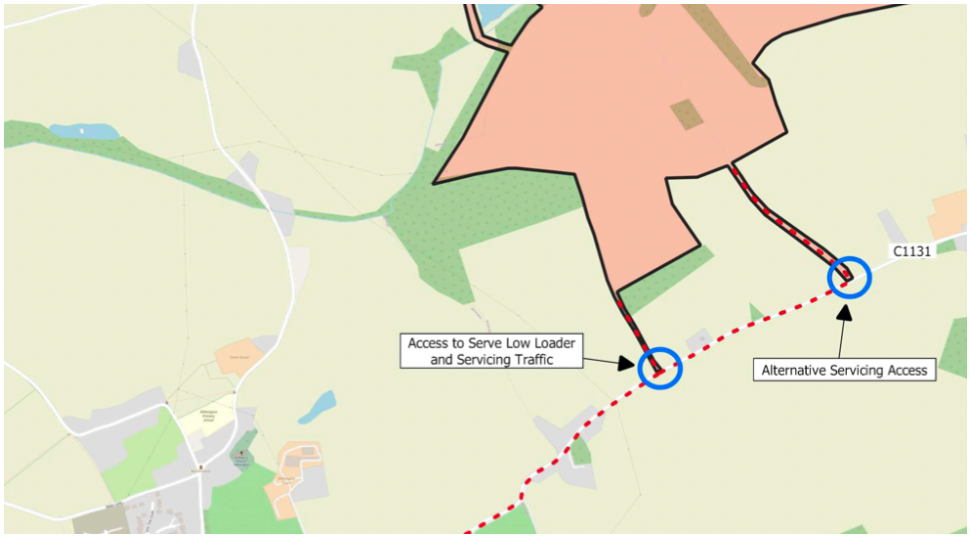
7. Access & Construction

Early consultation resulted in proposed traffic access routes emerging as a key concern for local residents, with the use of Withies Road to the south of the site being of particular concern. As a result, other options were investigated and an alternative main construction access route was secured to the north-west of the site.

The majority of construction vehicles will now travel to/from the A465 to the north of the site to a farmstead (Thingehill Court), where materials will be stored and then transported via smaller vehicles to the site via a temporary construction access route.



Due to the transformer being a large and heavy piece of equipment it will be unable to use the main construction access and will be delivered from the south of the site, via Withies Road.



Whilst the majority of construction vehicles will travel to/from site via the main construction access route to the north-west of the site, it is envisaged that some construction vehicles may need to access the site from the south, alongside the transformer delivery. All operational traffic will also access the site from the south but this is expected to consist of twice-monthly visits in a van/4x4.

No road closures are anticipated to be required during the construction or operation stages of the solar farm.

Construction phase timings

- Construction delivery timings:
    - Monday to Friday 08:00 – 18:00
    - Saturdays 08:00 – 13:30
- No construction or deliveries will take place on Sundays or Bank Holidays
- Vehicle moments will be avoided during peak times below:
    - 08:00 – 09:00AM
    - 15:00 – 16:00PM (School PM Peak)
    - 17:00 – 18:00PM
- A condition survey can be carried out to ensure that any unexpected damage that occurs will be corrected before construction completes.

Wheel-washing facilities will be provided at the site. Other measures will be adopted to minimise any disturbance from construction, including the requirement for all engines to be switched off when not in use; spraying of areas with water as and when conditions dictate; and vehicles carrying waste material off-site being sheeted.

Through consultation significant changes were made to the access routing for the site, addressing the concerns of local residents. The construction traffic assessment concludes that the development proposal will not result in a significant impact on highway safety or a severe impact on the local highway network.

For full details, please see:

- Westhide Solar Power Proposal: Construction Traffic Management Plan

8. Flood risk

A Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken for the Westhide project.

The majority of the site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is not at risk of flooding.

The proposed development is partially located within Flood Zone 3. However, the flooding experienced within the site itself is minimal and generally indicates a maximum potential flood depth of 0.22m.

As the panels in this location are expected to have a minimum height above ground level of 0.8m there is not anticipated to be any impact from this type of rare flooding event.

Furthermore, all electrically-sensitive equipment – inverters, substations and containers – are located in Flood Zone 1 and won't be affected.

A sustainable drainage scheme in the form of swales is also being proposed to manage the surface water runoff from the solar panels. The additional runoff from the impermeable

areas is minimal; however, calculations have been made to determine a suitably-sized swale system to capture the anticipated additional runoff. The swales will provide storage and act as conveyance to the nearby watercourses/ditches.

For full details, please see:

- Westhide Solar: Flood Risk Assessment

9. Grid

The proposed solar farm will be connected via underground cabling to the local 66kV network. The connection point is at Dormington substation.

The baseline option for the connection cable is to go underground via the existing road network between Westhide and Dormington. We have commenced consultation with the local Highways team on a possible route.

However, through consultation it became apparent that the potential road works associated with the laying of the cable are a significant concern to local residents.

We have therefore also commenced discussions with local landowners with the aim of securing access to try and take as much of this cable route as possible onto agricultural land. This would significantly minimise disruption from cabling works on the local road network.

As soon as a route has been finalised and land agreements signed, we will provide further information to the local community.

10. Agricultural land grade

A detailed ALC survey was carried out of the site, which involved examination of the soil's physical properties at 60 locations at a density of approximately 1 auger bore per 1 ha of agricultural land at a depth of 1.2m.

The site consists of the following type of soil:

- Grade 1 (Excellent) – 19.5%
- Grade 2 (Very good) – 18.6%
- Subgrade 3a (Good) – 6.5%
- Subgrade 3b (Moderate) – 47%
- Other (woodland, farm tracks etc) – 8.4%

As Herefordshire has a high proportion of agricultural land in Grade 1, i.e. 4.1% compared with 2.7% in England as a whole, the presence of Grade 1 land at the site is therefore

unsurprising, as it is widespread in the area. However, the high proportion of Subgrade 3b at the site indicates that it is some of the poorest quality land within Herefordshire.

The final ALC report also notes that solar sites are temporary and reversible. The land retains its agricultural grade and can be returned to agricultural use.

Moreover, the management of grassland under solar PV panels can improve soil health, such as increasing soil organic matter (SOM), and hence soil organic carbon (SOC), increasing soil biodiversity, and improving soil structure.

For full details, please see:

- Westhide Agricultural Land Classification Report

11. Local community

Consultation

TEKSS values inclusive and proactive consultation and works diligently to ensure project stakeholders are engaged from the earliest stages to allow for constructive input into project assessment and design.

Consultation at Westhide commenced in April 2021 and has entailed a range of events, including site walkovers and a drop-in session in Withington.

We will continue to engage with the local community throughout the development of the scheme, through to completion of construction, should the scheme be approved and built out.

Public access

During consultation it became evident that increased public access would bring value to the local community. As part of the solar scheme, a circular permissive path of circa 4.5km has been incorporated into the site design. It allows for an off-road walking shortcut between Dodmarsh and the canal crossing north of Westhide, as well as an opportunity to walk along the periphery of the canal.

Community benefit fund

Based on consultation feedback we are also offering a community benefit fund alongside the solar scheme. This will be based on a payment of £350 per installed megawatt for a period of 10 years. For a 34.6MW scheme, this means an annual payment of £12,110, amounting to a total of £121,100 over the course of 10 years.

There are many opportunities for match funding, which could significantly increase this amount.

We believe the fund presents an excellent opportunity to bring long-term benefits to local residents via sustainability and education projects.

Key changes to the proposal as a result of consultation

Our early engagement with the local community has allowed us to run a thorough and effective consultation programme, leading to early identification and addressal of key concerns and to improvements to the proposal in line with local views and preferences.

A number of changes were made as a direct result of consultation, including:

- Amending the main construction access route
- Adding a permissive path/its routing
- Moving the substation further north into the site
- Carrying out a noise impact assessment
- Offering a community benefit fund
- Adding further screening planting in specific locations