

Westhide Solar Power Proposal: Consultation & Planning Application Update October 2022

Current status & update

The planning application for the Westhide Solar Power Proposal is currently undergoing formal consultation with Herefordshire Council.

As part of this process, we have been reviewing comments from statutory consultees received to date and feedback from the planning team.

As of September 2022 there were three remaining issues left to resolve with respect to clarification requests from relevant officers and/or amendments to the proposal.

These were:

- The use of Best & Most Versatile (BMV) land
- Drainage
- Noise

As a result of further engagement with the Council on the issues above, we have now made the following amendments to our proposal:

- **BMV land** – We have removed all the fields that primarily contain BMV land from the proposal and have produced an updated masterplan. (Further details below).
- **Drainage** – We have taken on board the latest comments provided by the drainage officer and in view of the amended masterplan, have produced an updated Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy.
- **Noise** – We have provided responses to the queries raised by the Environmental Health officer and in view of the amended masterplan have also produced an updated noise modelling report.

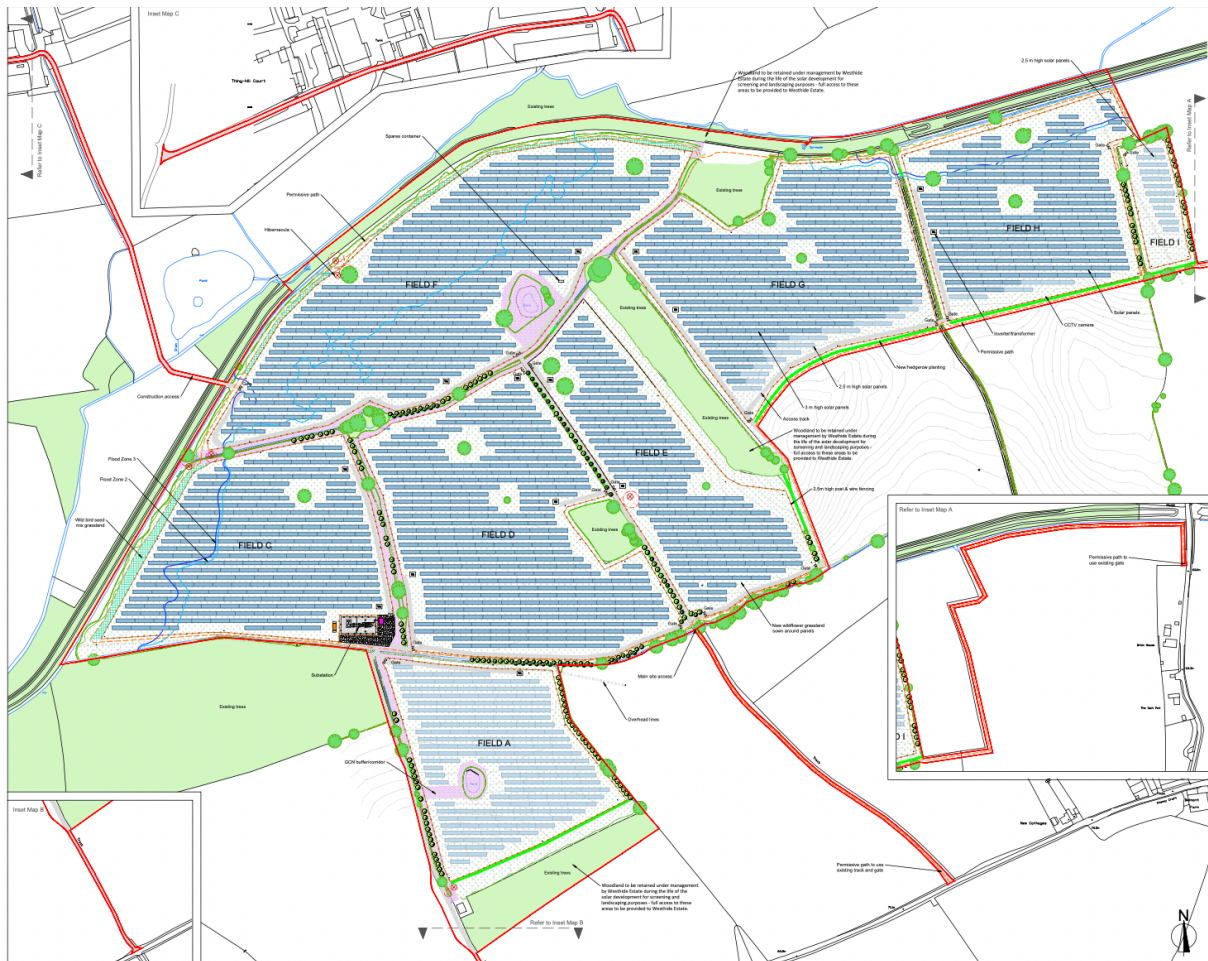
These amended plans and documents have been submitted to Herefordshire Council's planning team this month (October 2022).

1. Reduced site size & removal of BMV land

Original site (Dec 2021)

The site design included as part of the original planning application submission in December 2021 entailed solar infrastructure being located on eight adjoining fields.

Copy of original masterplan



Whilst the total application area comprised circa 152 acres (which included access roads etc), solar infrastructure was to be placed on circa 118 acres of agricultural land, the vast majority of which would have been turned to species-rich managed grassland, thereby creating a major biodiversity enhancement for local ecology.

The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) report that also accompanied the application showed that although the site predominantly contained lower-grade land (47% of the site was grade 3b, some of the lowest-grade land available in this part of Herefordshire), parts of the site also included pockets of grade 1 and 2 land. (The proportion of grade 3a, also considered BMV, was an insignificant 6.5%).

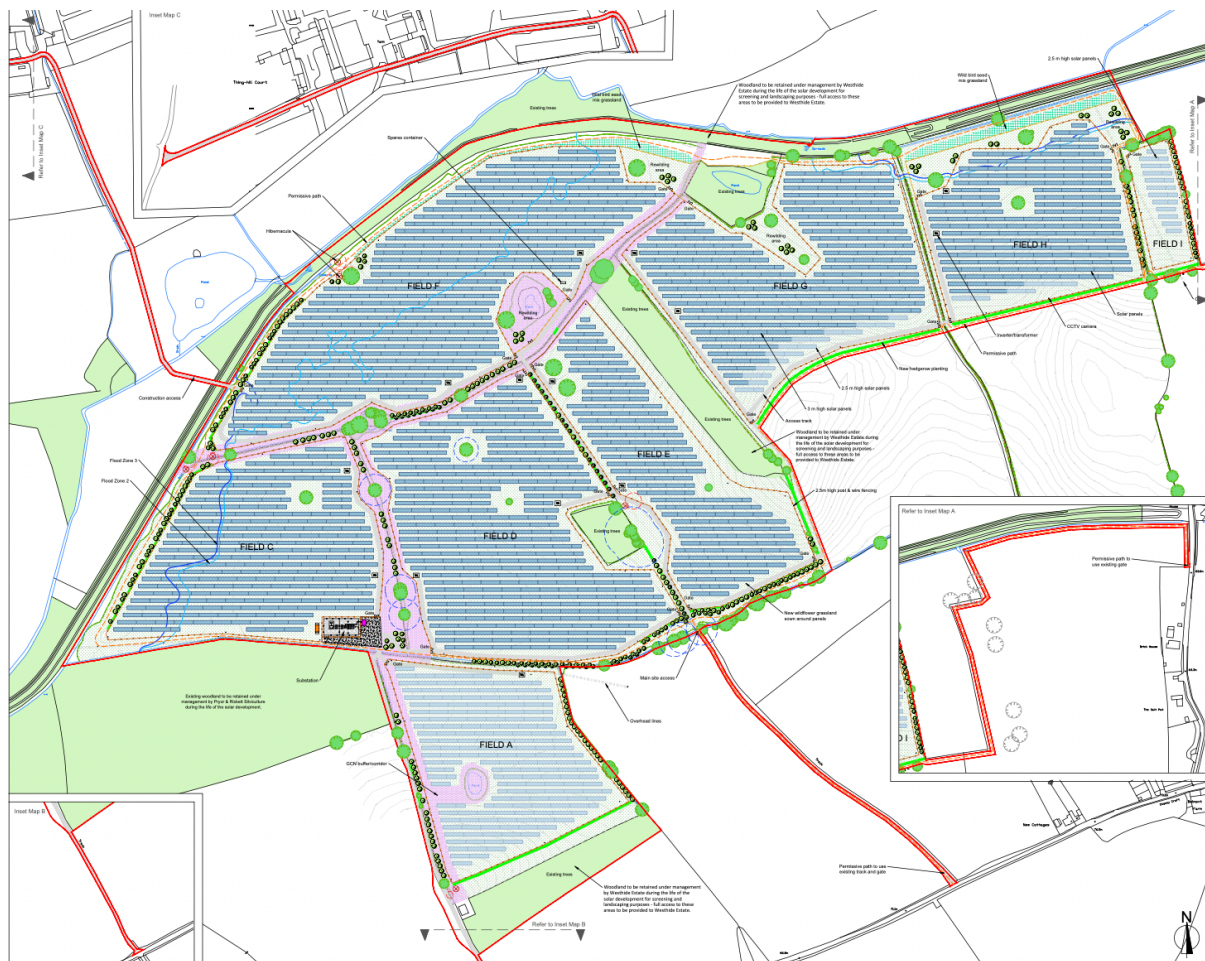
The proposal looked to generate enough green electricity every year to cover the needs of 12,500 households and displace 8,400 tonne of CO₂.¹

Amended masterplan (June 2022)

Upon further ecological feedback from Herefordshire Council's ecology officer, the onsite substation compound was moved further west from its original position, in order to avoid any potential damage to the roots of the rare Black Poplar trees found on site.

An amended masterplan was submitted to reflect this change.

Copy of amended masterplan



Reduced size masterplan (October 2022)

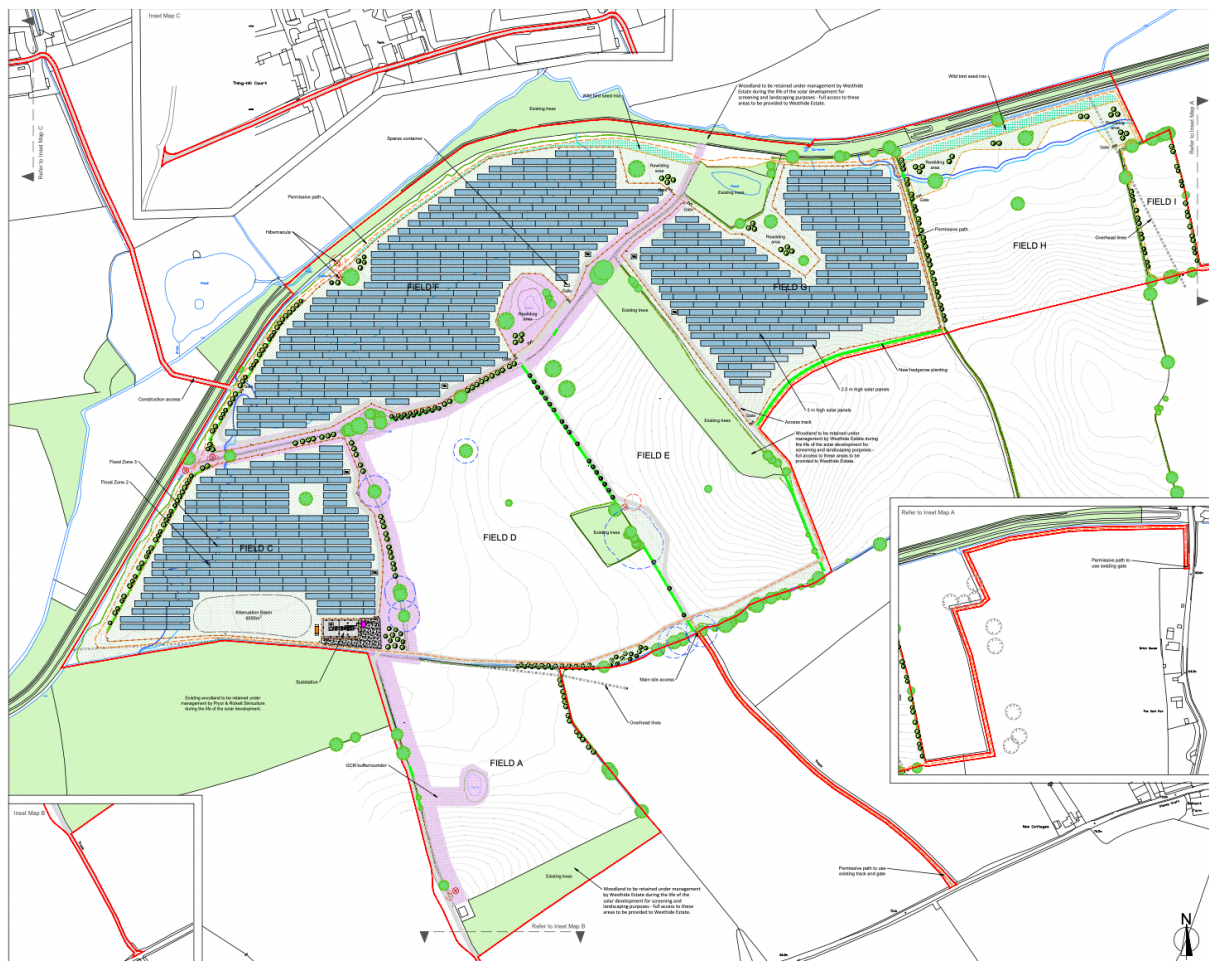
As further feedback was obtained from various statutory consultees, including Natural England, it became clear that the use of BMV land in this location for solar was on balance

¹ The environmental benefit figures were 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.

not considered an acceptable use of land by the Council, despite the site satisfying a range of other viability criteria and showing minimal impacts from the various environmental and technical studies that were carried out.

As such, it was decided to remove all solar infrastructure from fields primarily containing BMV land.

Copy of reduced masterplan



In its latest iteration, the proposal looks to place solar infrastructure on 60 acres of agricultural land. The area proposed for development now consists almost entirely of grade 3b land (96% of the site, with the remaining 4% being 3a).

The panel configuration has been amended and the solar arrays placed closer together.

The proposal still entails massive environmental and ecological benefits, including the generation of enough green electricity every year to cover the needs of 8,900 households and to displace 6,000 tonnes of carbon.² It should be noted that although the size of the

² The environmental benefit figures are based on 24.6MW 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

proposal has essentially halved, site capacity hasn't, due to an amended panel configuration and having the option of using higher-capacity panels now available on the market.

The site now proposes circa 60 acres of species-rich grassland, along with a total of 0.38 km of native species-rich hedgerow, and 0.79 km of native species-rich hedgerows with trees, as well as re-wilding areas. The Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation shows a 69% increase in habitat and a 59% increase in hedgerows.

2. Drainage

Having reviewed the latest comments from Herefordshire Council's drainage officer, we have amended the Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy to address these.

The amended masterplan now includes the addition of an attenuation basin (an area where excess water can collect) in field C. (Please see the reduced masterplan above).

3. Noise

The Environmental Health officer has requested some technical clarifications in relation to the noise report carried in 2021. Clarifications have been provided by our noise consultants and form part of the latest submission of documents, including raw data for the noise monitoring.

Due to the reduced development area and the reduction in the number of central inverters, updated noise modelling has also been carried out. It shows that there will be even less impact on existing background noise levels at the nearest properties than before.

We have reconfirmed to the Council our willingness to enter into a planning condition to provide assurance on noise.

4. Community benefit

Permitted path

The proposed permitted path that goes around the periphery of the solar scheme has been retained.

(Ofgem 2020), UK government figures on the carbon emissions for homes on the average energy fuel mix (2019) and 2011 Census figures.

Community benefit fund

The community benefit fund is still being offered alongside the solar scheme. As before, this will be based on a payment of £350 per **installed** megawatt for a period of 10 years.

For a 24.6MW scheme, this means an annual payment of £8,610, amounting to a total of £86,100 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.