Appendix 6 – Consultation update (October 2021)

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Westhide Solar Power Proposal: Consultation Update October 2021

Over the past few months, we've been completing various environmental and technical assessments for the solar power proposal at Westhide and have continued to liaise with the local community, responding to queries and comments.

During our consultation with local stakeholders a number of key issues cropped up early on in the process and over the past few months we have been investigating ways of addressing these concerns and incorporating them into our proposals.

We have worked diligently to address the issues raised by residents and councillors through the consultation process and have incorporated these into the design and the proposals surrounding both construction and operations, in particular with relation to construction traffic management.

We now have a draft design and development proposal which we believe addresses the concerns raised, which we would like to consult the local community on.

The current design contains circa 35MW of installed capacity and could generate enough clean electricity to power circa 12,500 homes – equivalent to around 38% of the number of households in the Hereford locality. A scheme of this size could save around 8,500 tonnes of CO2 annually.[1]

1. Consultation event (Oct 2021) – proposed site design, landscape planting, construction traffic management and permissive path

We are hosting a drop-in session to gauge the community's views on:

1. The draft site design (available at the drop-in);
2. The proposed landscape planting measures (available at the drop-in);

[1] The environmental benefit figures are based on 35MW 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.

3. The traffic management measure (available at the drop-in);
4. The route of the proposed permissive path (available at the drop-in/please also see below); and
5. Noise concerns.

The drop-in session details are:

- Wednesday 20th October 2021
- 2pm – 6pm
- Hewison Lounge, Withington Village Hall, Coppice Close, Withington, Hereford HR1 3PP

We hope local residents and councillors are able to attend to see how data and feedback obtained so far have been incorporated into our proposal, and how we've addressed the key issues raised during consultation.

Comments from the local community obtained during the drop-in will be fed into the further refinement of our proposals before these are finalised in preparation for submission as part of a planning application.

2. Issues we have addressed

2.1 Landscape & visual impact

Panel heights

Using topographical data, our landscape consultants have been able to identify areas where we are now proposing to have lower panel heights to ensure minimal visual impact.

The vast majority of the site will have panels of 3m in height but several sections in the south and east of the site will have areas with a reduced panel height of 2.5m.

Screening planting

Whilst it is proposed that all existing hedgerows will be managed to a height of 3m to help screen the site, new hedgerows will also be planted alongside the proposed planting of new trees, either to create additional screening or to infill gaps in existing locations with trees.

Additional planting has also been added within the site to help break up medium or long-distance glimpsed views.

All existing onsite hedgerows are being retained. There are 3 locations where small 2m gaps will be created to allow for the routing of the permissive path (please see relevant section further below).

Ash dieback

There are several poor-quality declining ash trees onsite that are succumbing to ash die-back disease (chalara). It is proposed to remove six of these trees as they have serious structural defects and their early loss is expected due to collapse. All six of these trees are either within the middle of the site or located in the northern fields, and as such, their removal will not lead to a loss of screening effect.

2.2 Noise

Central inverters have been located as far as possible from residential properties whilst still allowing for technical requirements. The current design ensures that the central inverters and the substation compound do not affect the existing background noise levels. This has been ensured with noise modelling. A full noise report will be available as part of the planning application.

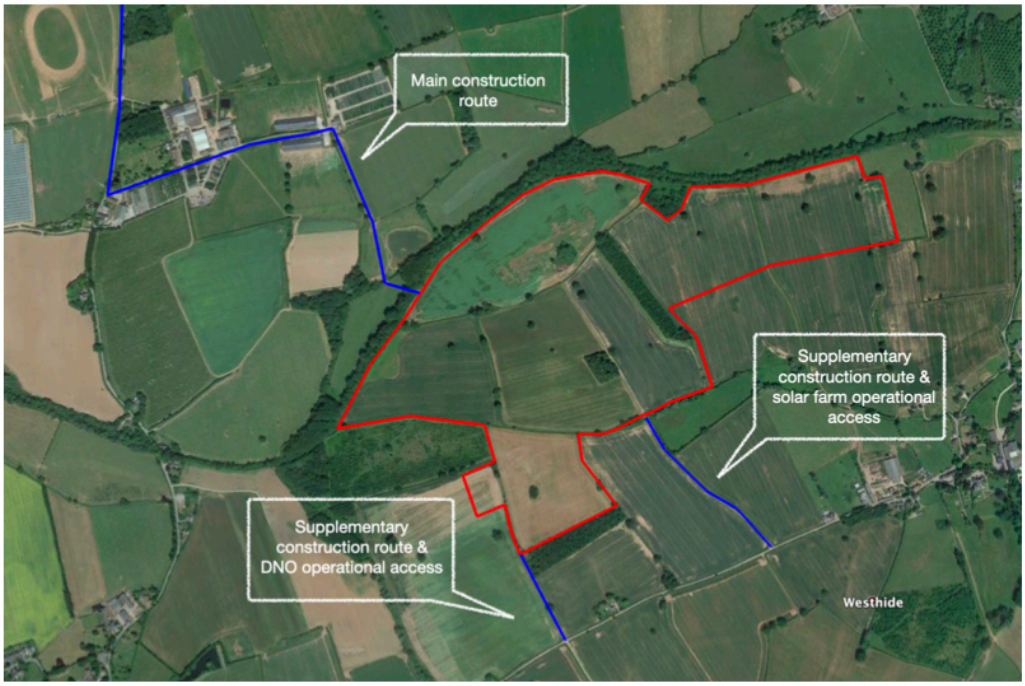
2.3 Access routes

It became very clear from the earliest stages of consultation that the proposed construction access route along Withies Road to the south of the site was of material concern to local residents.

The concern was underlined by the use of Withies Road for recreational use by residents for walking and horse riding.

As a result we have explored various options for reducing the use of this road during construction and have come up with a solution that avoids the use of this route by the vast majority of construction traffic.

Please see the map below for the new access routes:



- An alternative **main construction access route** has been secured to the north-west of the site, thereby avoiding Withington, Dodmarsh and Westhide for the vast majority of construction vehicles.
- The two access routes along Withies Road will only be used as **supplementary access routes** and for the delivery of the transformer.
- They will also be used for operational and maintenance vehicles. These 4 x 4 vehicles or vans are expected to visit the site about twice a month adding a very minor amount to the daily level of delivery and other vehicles using the road. The grid operator (WPD) will have access to the substation compound via Withies Road as well for maintenance.

We are pleased that this option addresses the concerns voiced by local residents about construction traffic impacting daily life in the area. We will be happy to provide further detail where required at our consultation event.

2.4 Cable route

We are aiming to take as much of the grid cable route across agricultural land as possible, thereby minimising the use of the highways network.

Discussions are ongoing with landowners.

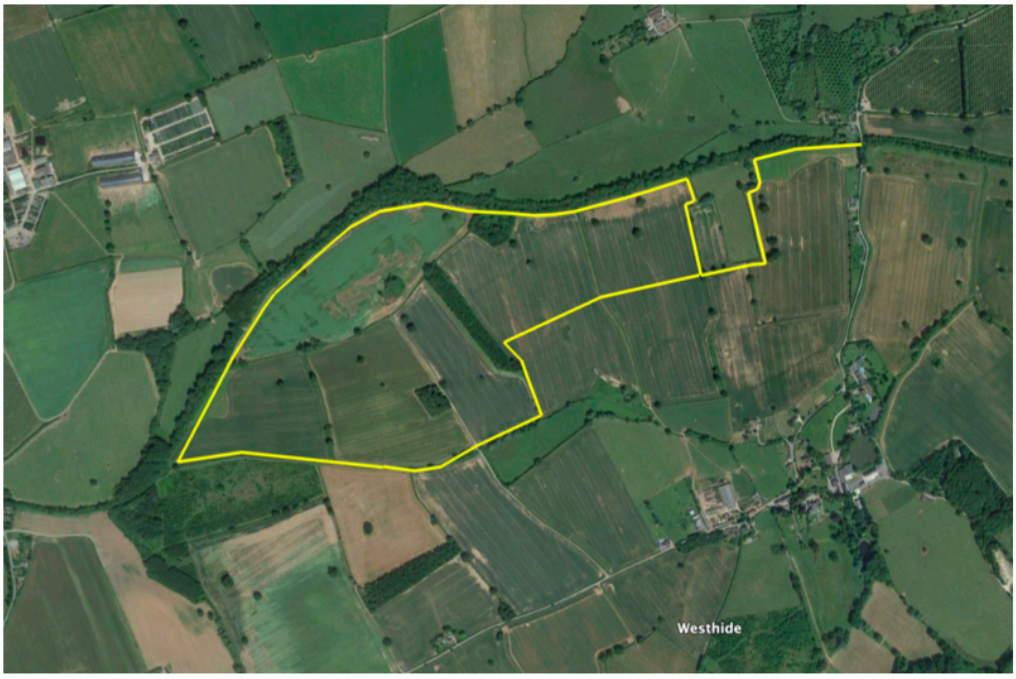
2.5 Public access

Over the consultation period a preference for increasing public access to land within the curtilage of Westhide village was raised many times by various residents.

We are therefore proposing a temporary permissive path to be located alongside the project for the operational duration of the scheme (30 years).

The path runs around the main periphery of the solar farm and provides an entry/exit point to the east of the site, adjacent to the canal.

Proposed permissive path route



The proposed route presents an opportunity for a circular walk around the solar farm, providing approximately 4km of extra walking path in the vicinity of Westhide for the duration of the scheme.

In order to facilitate the educational aspect of the proposal, we are proposing to add an interpretation board at the entrance/exit point, which will provide information on solar power and the ecological habitat of the site.

3. Project overview and timeline

Please see below for an up-to-date overview of the project and its expected timeline going forward:

Date	Consultation		Environmental & Technical		Planning
Oct 2021	**Drop-in session** to obtain feedback on site design, landscape planting & traffic management measures		Final ecology data being collected		Preparing draft documents
					
	Comments are incorporated and site design is finalised		Final reports are produced		Final planning application documents are produced
					
Nov 2021					Planning application is submitted
					
Nov/Dec 2021	Public exhibition is held to present the final planning application to the local community				Planning application is validated (checked to meet required standards)
					
2022					Planning application is determined

4. Additional issues raised

Withington Parish Magazine article

An unattributed opinion piece on solar power "Green & Sustainable or a Toxic Blot on the Landscape – You Decide" was printed in the latest (September/October 2021) issue of the *Withington Parish Magazine*, and references the proposal at Westhide.

The basis of the piece appears to be a Mail on Sunday article dated 29th May 2021 ("A Toxic Blot on the Landscape") and uses several quotations from the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF), a lobby group set up in 2009 by Nigel Lawson (a prominent climate sceptic) that opposes action to mitigate climate change. All the quotations used come from Dr Benny Peiser, currently the director of the GWPF and formerly a sports anthropologist/historian.

The article presents solar power as an unviable and damaging technology. However, the vast consensus on solar power technology by scientists, governments and NGOs is that it is an effective and low-impact form of energy production that can and should play a key role in adapting our energy systems to mitigate against climate change.

- The UK Government sees solar (alongside onshore and offshore wind) as a key building block of the UK power mix: "We will need sustained growth in the capacity of these sectors in the next decade to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions."[2] This view appears to have cross-party support.
- David Attenborough has previously stated that we only need to use one 5,000th of the solar energy that reaches Earth every day, as this would cover all our energy needs and "the fact that we haven't tapped this directly before is really extraordinary".[3]
- Greenpeace's position is that large volumes of renewables need to be built in the 2020s to meet legally-binding carbon targets and maintain the UK's global climate leadership…and that this means unlocking onshore wind and solar, with Greenpeace recommending a solar target of at least 40GW by 2030.[4]
- Friends of the Earth points out that the UK has massively increased its proportion of renewable electricity over the last decade, without causing blackouts. The few problems which have occurred in this time are down to either extreme weather events, or failures in our ageing coal and nuclear power stations.[5]

Solar power forms part of the increasing amount of renewables used in the power sector in the UK. Renewables now account for over one third of electricity generation, up from seven per cent in 2010. This 'green revolution' has been delivered without disruption to the reliability of our electricity supply and the scale of deployment has contributed to a

[2] *Energy White Paper*, December 2020
[3] BBC News, November 2015
[4] *Filling the Energy Gap*, November 2019
[5] *Switching On,* May 2017

significant reduction in the cost of renewables. Increasingly, green power is actually the **cheapest power**.[6]

Westhide solar power proposal

Whilst we recognise that the piece wasn't written directly about the Westhide proposal, we would like to address some of the points raised in relation to it.

- The solar power proposal covers circa 125 acres of land owned by Westhide Estates, which equates to approximately 12% of the estate. It is located on fields that are well set back from main roads and properties and uses topography and existing (as well as additional) landscape planting to effectively nest the proposal within the landscape with minimal visual impact.
- The rows of solar panels will be set approximately 4-6m apart, meaning the vast majority of the site will remain untouched by solar infrastructure and allow for lots of grasses and other plants to grow. The site will be seeded with a diverse seed mix to encourage wildflower meadow in between the panels. This will greatly improve the biodiversity of the site. An exact measurement of the net biodiversity benefit will be provided as part of the planning application.
- Decommissioning is typically ensured by a planning condition and it would be expected that in due course the local authority will require approval of a Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan (DEMP) and/or a Decommissioning & Restoration Plan prior to that process commencing. Disposal and recycling of materials is usually covered by this process, as well as the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations (2013).
- The piece mentions 12% as the capacity figure for solar. A capacity factor is used in energy generation calculation figures to account for energy conversion losses (e.g. for solar, converting sunlight into electricity) and the fact that an energy source may not be available 100% of the time (e.g. with solar, sunlight doesn't hit the panels 24 hours a day, plus there is seasonal variation due to the Earth's tilt). 12% is the capacity figure we are using in our energy generation estimates for the proposal at Westhide. It is at the conservative end of the spectrum for solar, as we want to ensure our estimates are robust.
- The use of agricultural land for solar **does not** alter the land grade of the site – **it does not become brownfield**. Land used for solar schemes retains its agricultural grade and status. In fact, using the land for solar allows the land to rest from intensive agricultural production for the duration of the scheme, leading to improvements in the fertility of the soil.

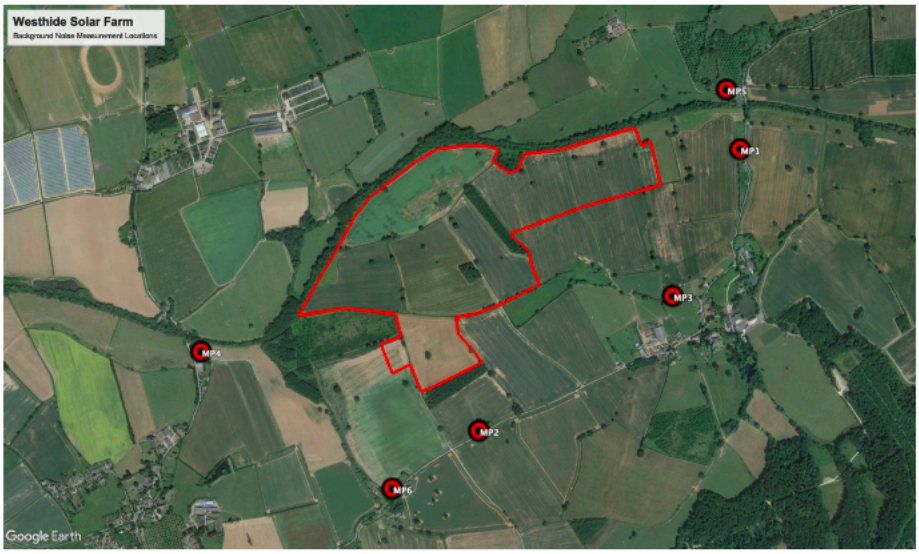
We believe the scheme is well-designed and invite members of the local community to review the draft site design at the drop-in session, as well as the full suite of planning application documents, once these become available in due course.

[6] *Energy White Paper*, December 2020

Appendix 7 – Noise assessment (October 2021)

Background noise levels unchanged (1)

Earlier this year background noise measurements were taken at the nearest noise-sensitive dwellings (we are grateful to the residents for their participation) – please see the map below:



A noise modelling exercise was subsequently undertaken using best-practice standards.

What the results of the noise modelling show is that even with an additional noise margin added to the expected noise levels from the solar farm equipment, they fall comfortably within existing background noise levels at all the measured locations.

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Background noise levels unchanged (2)

The following table outlines the results produced from the noise model:

Measurement Position	Existing background noise level (daytime) for 90% of the time	Existing background noise level (night-time) for 90% of the time	Calculated noise level at location with solar farm equipment*	Noise level plus best-practice adjustment with +3dB extra added**	Daytime difference***	Night-time difference***
MP1	32	32	24.3	27	-5	-5
MP2	33	33	28.4	31	-2	-2
MP3	31	31	24.7	28	-3	-3
MP4	35	34	24.3	27	-8	-7
MP5	34	33	24.7	28	-6	-5
MP6	30	30	22.5	26	-4	-4

* The combined noise level from all noise-generating solar farm equipment at each location.

** The specific sound level plus any adjustment for the characteristic feature of the sound, referenced in BS 4142. In this case a correction of +2 dB has been added to account for the acoustic characteristic of the PV inverters and transformers. Additionally, a +1 dB for calculation uncertainty has been added for robustness.

***The difference between the calculated noise level and the background noise level including corrections.