

Public Consultation Document

Proposed Solar Farm at
Grid Ref SP792573
The Green
Great Houghton
NN7 2DS

On behalf of Grange Farm Partnership

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This public consultation document has been prepared to assist those interested in the proposed solar farm, with any queries or questions they may have.

As agents preparing and submitting the application it is our responsibility to source and submit reports from appropriately qualified experts in their respective fields including, but not limited to, ecology, archaeology, noise and landscape. Whilst we can give you overviews, contained within this document, the full technical detail will be consulted upon within the main application period within which there will be a full public consultation.

Where required the appropriate experts who have produced technical reports will be asked to respond to any matters raised, or which require further work or clarification, during the application period in conjunction with any Council requests which we received as agents managing agents.

The proposal is for a 78.2-acre solar farm, which will include 51,090 panels, and all associated and required infrastructure. The solar farm will in turn generate up to 27.8 MW of electricity, which will provide well over 3,000 homes within the locality with electricity and go towards the Governments goal of achieving net zero by 2050. Part of this ambition from the government is to increase the UK's currently solar capacity fivefold. In order to do this, sites such as this one are important contributors.

This document outlines all of the relevant considerations that have been had and summarises the various surveys and reports that have been produced as a result of the proposal.

The intention for this document is for those interested to use it as a first port of call when looking for information relating to the proposal or for any answers to queries or questions they may have.

Where this document is unable to assist with queries, we ask that you contact us on:

Email: consultation@eldnarconsultancy.co.uk

Telephone: 0330 0563339

At the end of this consultation process, a public consultation document summarising the process and feedback received will be produced for submission as part of the overall application.

The consultation begins on Friday 4th August 2023, with the two in person consultation events taking place on Friday 18th August 2023, and Wednesday 23rd August 2023. All comments, thoughts and correspondence should be sent to us by Friday 15th September 2023, when the consultation ends.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Eldnar Ltd have been instructed to prepare this consultation document on behalf of Grange Farm Partnership, who are both the owners of the land that forms this proposal, and the applicants that will be applying for permission for the proposed solar farm.

1.2. The proposed solar farm will comprise:

- 78.2 acres
- 51,090 panels
- 10 x 20ft power stations
- 1 x DNO
- Security fencing
- Access ways

1.3. The intention of this document is to serve as a complete summary of all of the relevant surveys, reports and considerations that have been had. This will support the consultation events that will take place as well as provide those interested in the proposal with key information. This does not contain all of the detail of the reports and is purely an overview and summary of the documents.

1.4. Copies of the full documents, surveys and reports will be available once the application is submitted. The intention of this document and the initial public consultation period is to introduce the proposed project to the public, and to obtain any feedback so that it can be incorporated into the proposed ahead of submission of the application as well as answer any queries raised as part of final submissions. We understand that a proposal and project of this nature is likely to raise queries on varying matters, but we want to assure you that all matters have been considered and approached in a positive manner.

1.5 An Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) screening assessment was submitted to the Council last year under reference WNS/2022/1399/SCR. The decision, made on 2nd September 2022, confirms that the Council considers that the development proposed is NOT EIA development and any planning application need not be accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

2.0. PROPOSED SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

2.1. Firstly, where? The proposed site is located along the south of the Green road, which is to the south of Brackmills Industrial Estate, and to the North East of Preston Deanery. The Location Plan for the site is available in Appendix 1 and as a larger PDF upon request.

2.2. For further context, the site is located (entrance to field) at Grid Ref SP792573. The closest postcode is NN7 2DS and the existing entrance to the site is off a lane known as The Green, Great Houghton. The site is located approximately one mile north of Preston Deanery, 1.1 mile south of Great Houghton and 4.5 miles south east of Northampton. The M1 motorway is just 3.7 miles to the south west of the proposed site and provides key transport links to and from the site.

2.3. The site is currently a large agricultural field that totals 78.2 acres (31.65 Hectares). The field is one large block that is bounded by hedgerows and fencing. There are no trees within the field, but there is a small watercourse that runs to the southern boundary of the site and is lined with shrubbery and smaller trees. The field at present is classified on the Natural England Agricultural Land Classification maps as being a mixture of Grade 2 and Grade 3 land.

3.0. SITE LAYOUT AND PLANS

3.1. As noted above, the site layout is as per the plan in Appendix 2 (and as a larger PDF upon request) of this consultation document, and upon request can be sent as a PDF.

3.2. The key elements to note from the site layout is:

- There will be no alterations to the footpath across the site, this will be safely fenced from the surrounding solar farm site.
- The main access to the site will be re-aligned to the west of the existing access by to improve visibility splays and ensure highway safety requirements are met.
- There will be approximately 50,190 solar panels on the site laid out as per the plan.
- There will be 10 x power stations sited around the site, against the main access track to allow for ease of access for monitoring and maintenance when required.
- Security fencing will be placed around the perimeter of the site, this will be 1.8m high rural security fencing.
- CCTV will be placed at appropriate view points for security.
- The gas main that runs along the site will remain completely undisturbed in line with the easement which is in place.

Further to the site plan, we have detail surrounding the power stations, solar plans etc.

Firstly, the power stations:

- 2.90m height
- 6.06m width
- 2.44m depth
- Clad in neutral coloured material.

The solar panels:

- 2 in portrait piled twin post system
- 2.39m high (max)
- 4.58m width (max)
- 20° angle on the panel
- 3.7m gap between rows of panels

The plan (not to scale, for indicative purposes only) at Appendix 3 shows a plan of the panels.

3.3. Aside from this, there will be very little requirement for built form on site that will remain for the duration of the working life of the solar panels. During construction there will be welfare units on site, but this will be for an 18-24 month period. These are likely to be portacabin style units.

4.0. LANDSCAPING AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.1. Given the nature of this proposal, there is going to be some impact from the site in terms of visual impact on public users surrounding the area, and visual impact on the surrounding landscape.

4.2. In order to assess the potential impact, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken to address this matter. The report assessed 11 viewpoints, identified by the consultant who completed the report as key viewpoints, and assessed the impact on these as well as the impact cumulatively on the surroundings.

4.3. The conclusion of the report is that *'the landscape in the vicinity of the Site and the surrounding area has the capacity to accommodate the scale of the development proposed with borderline significant effects on public amenity, restricted to users of the PRow network where it crosses the Site (primarily in a north to south direction) or to the east.'*

4.4. A project of this scale and size is always going to have some visual impact. The impact is largely limited to the public rights of way within 1km of the site, including, most obviously, the footpath that passes through the proposed site. Beyond this, the impact lessens, and the overall setting of the site is deemed as having the capacity to accommodate such proposal.

4.5. There are existing hedgerows and vegetation on site that assists in providing some screening already – particularly to the west and the southwest of the site. There will be a landscaping plan also submitted as part of the application, that will be created as a lead into the final Biodiversity Net Gain calculations. This will ensure further screening is put in place where possible and will ensure that this screening provides overall biodiversity net gain.

5.0. NEIGHBOURING AMENITY

5.1. A consideration of most importance to those who will be living within proximity of the proposed site will be neighbouring amenity. As per 4.0. landscaping and visual impact have been fully considered in terms of the impact of the proposal on the surrounding public view points etc. As can be seen, there is minimal impact from the proposal, with the exception of the footpath through the site.

5.2. Aside from visual impact, we have also considered noise impact. An Environmental Noise Report has been undertaken to establish whether there will be any adverse impact from noise generation. There are recommendations for noise reduction kits to be fitted to the power station inverters that will be installed to assist with the power generated from the solar panels. This will be complied with as part of the application to ensure that the amenity of those in the houses in proximity to the site will be maintained. The noise levels arising from the proposal have been confirmed as being satisfactory by a noise consultant subject to compliance with recommendations made.

5.3. The impact upon users of the public right of way is discussed in Section 9 below, and thus will not be repeated here.

6.0. CONTAMINATION

6.1. The existing site has been surveyed via a Phase 1 Preliminary Risk Assessment for Contamination to establish whether there are any existing environmental or geotechnical contamination concerns.

6.2. The report confirms the following:

- There is very low risk of soil and groundwater contamination for future end users.
- There is very low risk to construction workers on the site.
- There is very low risk of impact on neighbouring residents.
- The risk of hazardous ground gasses affecting the site is very low.
- The risks to all water (ground, drinking and surface) is very low.
- The risk to plants and native grasses is very low.
- The risk from shallow coal mining is very low.

- The risk from brine extraction is very low.
- The risk from ground dissolution is considered to be very low to low.

6.3. Overall, the report concludes that no further action is required given the very low level risk of land contamination at this site at this stage.

6.4. A geophysical survey was recommended to ensure that the conclusions of the report were followed up. A geophysical survey has therefore been undertaken to identify any anomalies as required, both for contamination and for archaeological purposes.

6.5. Within this geophysical survey no concerns relating to contamination were identified and all findings were in relation to archaeology and historic matters. This is discussed further in Section 7 below. Therefore, there are no existing contamination issues on the site.

7.0. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

7.1. Following the contamination geophysical survey, it was recommended that further archaeological work is required to ensure that there is no impact upon the historic findings on site. This is an ongoing process and one that will take some time and physical effort due to trenching requirements which have been actively discussed with the Council's archaeology advisor and forms part of an on-going engagement.

7.2. The correct procedures and processes will be followed to ensure that the historic environment is fully considered and explored as part of the proposal. There will be the required plans, reports etc submitted as part of the overall application with a view that trenching works will be completed prior to the determination of any applications on the site.

8.0. FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE

8.1. The proposed site is wholly within flood zone 1 as per the Flood Maps for Planning GOV.UK. Therefore there is no risk of flooding within a 1 in 1000 annual probability of river or sea flooding for the site. However due to national planning policy requiring all applications above certain thresholds to include a flood risk assessment and mitigation in the form of a drainage strategy these have been undertaken.

8.2. The threshold is for proposals on sites over 2Ha in size. Obviously, this proposal will more than exceed this limit. As a result, a full Flood Risk Assessment and subsequent drainage strategy will be commissioned and fully included within the submission. At this stage, these have not been carried out, but will be imminently.

8.3. The drainage strategy, however, will be carefully considered due to the gradient of the site and the surface area of the impermeable panels.

9.0. PUBLIC ACCESS AND RIGHTS OF WAY

9.1. We are aware that the public right of way passing through the proposed site and this has been highlighted and included within the proposed design for the site, as can be seen on the proposed site layout plan.

9.2. The public right of way is footpath KV19 and passes from the middle of the northern boundary of the site to the middle of the southern boundary of the site. The length of the

footpath crossing through the site is circa 580 metres. The site has been designed to ensure that there is **no change or restriction** to the use of the public right of way. There will be robust security fencing to ensure that users of the public right of way will not interact with the site and safety and security will be paramount.

9.3. In terms of impact on the amenity of users of the public right of way this has been considered within the landscape and visual impact assessment. Please refer to Section 4 for further detail surrounding this. There will also likely be screening landscaping planting included within any landscaping plan. At this stage, the full landscaping scheme has not yet been completed, but will be submitted as part of the full application.

10.0. TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS

10.1. Highways and impact to the local road network is something that we are aware of that those interested in this proposal may also have concern over. As a result of this the local highways department at Northamptonshire County Council have already been consulted and a pre application dialogue has been held with them.

10.2. In assessing the suitability of a change of use to a solar farm in terms of highway and traffic, it has been necessary for the highways consultant to consider a variety of different aspects relating to highway capacity, access, traffic generations and highway safety.

10.3. Speed surveys have been undertaken as part of the pre application request to ensure firstly that visibility splays for the access to the site are adequate in terms of highway safety. The findings of these surveys confirm that the existing access would be near enough suitable in terms of visibility distances and splays for highways safety, however, as part of this proposal, the access is to be re-aligned to the west of the current field access to improve the visibility splays further and to make the most of the wider verges at the new proposed position.

10.4. In terms of traffic generation, the site will see the majority of traffic related to it during the construction period. This will be a temporary impact however given the scale of this proposal this will be a temporary impact spread across a period of months. Whilst there may be some inconvenience caused for users of the public highway, measures will be put in place to ensure that any impact is minimised during the installation period.

10.5. It is intended that the solar panels will be installed over an 18 month period, with the key figures for traffic impact being an average of 6 trips to site a day, with peak trips during the busiest construction period being 9 trips per day. In terms of highways impact, this is a modest increase in traffic levels for an 18 month period.

10.6. Once the solar farm is constructed, traffic will then only be associated with security and general maintenance. CCTV will be used predominantly which can be monitored remotely, but perimeter fence checks will be required also. Repairs and cleaning will also be required. It is expected that this will generate approx.. 2-6 trips per week during the 35-40 year lifespan of the panels. Again, this is a negligible number of trips in terms of highway impact.

10.7. Extensive work on the most appropriate routes to the site for construction traffic and maintenance traffic have already been thought about and it is these routes that the council have been consulted upon. As part of the application a routing agreement will be agreed to be adhered to by all traffic associated with the construction phases of the Solar Farm, and these will be included within the Construction Management Plan.

11.0. ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY

11.1. We understand that another topic that will be of high importance to those interested in this proposal will be ecology and biodiversity. Extensive work has been undertaken to ensure all surveys required have been completed and all possible protected species and similar have been considered.

11.2. Firstly, a Preliminary Ecological Survey has been undertaken to establish the starting point, in terms of ecology, of the site. This was undertaken in June 2022. The results of the initial survey stated that there could be a decrease in habitat within the site, but that the hedgerow network would not be affected under the proposals. As a result of the findings of the initial survey, several species specific surveys have been undertaken, a Habitats Risk Assessment, breeding birds surveys and a Biodiversity Net Gain assessment of the site at present has been undertaken.

11.3. The species specific surveys that have been undertaken are limited to breeding bird surveys, as no other protected species were identified during the initial ecological survey. The bird surveys undertaken include a summer and a winter breeding bird survey. It is important to emphasise that that will be no trees or hedgerow removed as part of this proposal, which form the main habitat for birds within the vicinity of this proposal.

11.4. The BNG calculations are also important to this proposal in establishing the start point for biodiversity for the site, and this therefore allows us to establish how this site can be improved in terms of biodiversity as part of this proposal. These are currently being finalised and will assist in feeding into the overall landscaping plan for the site.

11.5. We have also undertaken a habitats risk assessment to further establish how the habitats of the ecology around the site will be impacted by this proposal and how we can seek to mitigate against these impacts.

11.6. What must be emphasised is that once the modules come to the end of their design life the proposal can be removed from the site and offers the potential for land to be returned to agricultural use as the development is entirely reversible unlike, for example, traditional built form. This ultimately means that this proposal will not result in the permanent loss of agricultural land, as it will be turned back to agricultural land use in the future and indeed there is potential for it to continue in agricultural use, through grazing, during the lifetime of the development.

12.0. BEST AND MOST VERSITILE AGRICULTURAL LAND (BMV)

12.1. As a key consideration of proposals of this nature, we must address the current position of the field and how this proposal will be considered. An agricultural land statement is being produced and will assist in explaining this further. However, to summarise, the land is currently Grade 2 and Grade 3 land. This has been considered due to the fact that it will be classified as BMV land.

12.2. Land within the vicinity of the grid connection point, within proximity of the site, is all BMV land (i.e. none is grade 4 or 5 or Brownfield land). Due to the nature of the proposal, it does require it to be within certain distances of a grid connection and in that regard, locations are restricted to the proximity of such available connections. Sequentially there are limited locations for this type of proposal.

12.3. However, as this proposal is for solar panels which will, at the end of their life span, be removable, the land will be returned to agricultural use in the long term. It is not considered that the construction of the proposal would lead to the loss of soils as construction techniques can be adopted to minimise below ground works. Therefore the soil would not be physically affected as a result of the development and, therefore any loss or degradation is considered to be unlikely, so no significant effects are therefore anticipated.

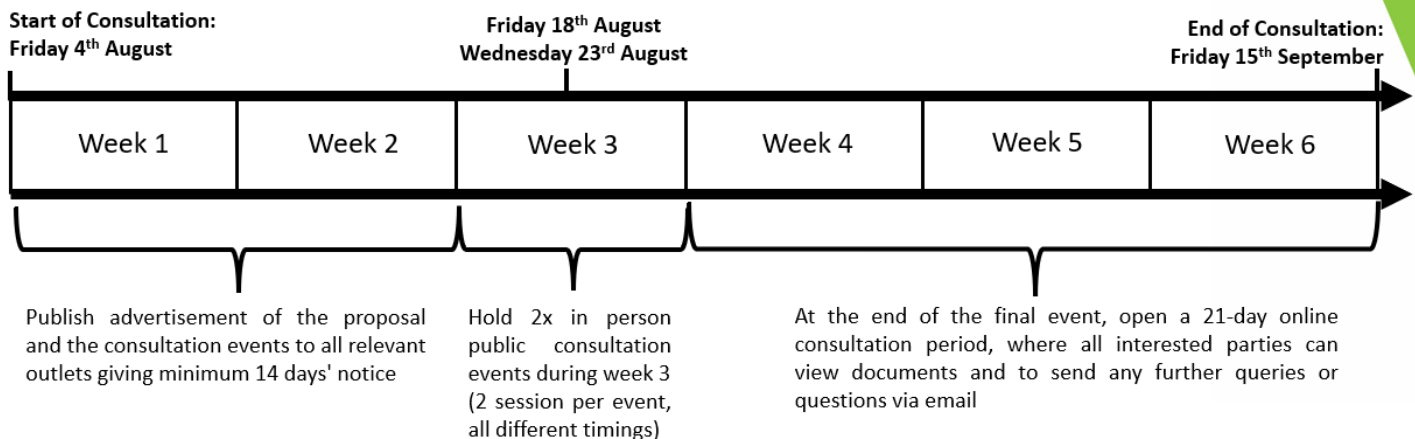
13.0. WHAT IS NEXT?

13.1. The public consultation event will run as per the below timetable (Figure 1). This will give, in total, a 6-week period for the initial public consultation were we can provide information on the proposal and gain the public view on the proposal.

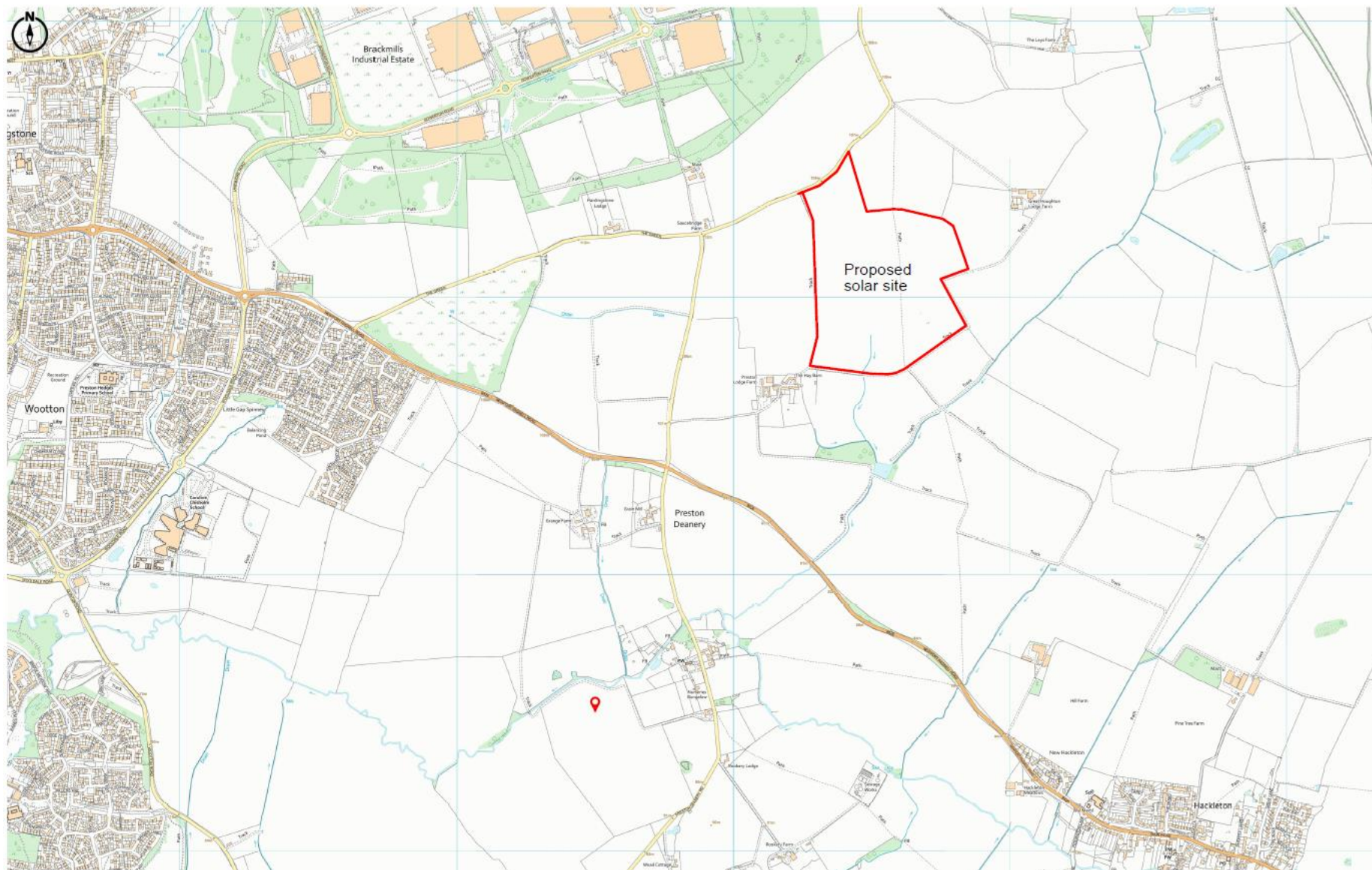
13.2. Following this, we will seek to finalise all of the remaining surveys, reports and other information needed ahead of submitting the information to the Council for determination.

13.3. We must flag, there will be further opportunity for public consultation during the application being live, so we do encourage you to keep an eye out for this in the future.

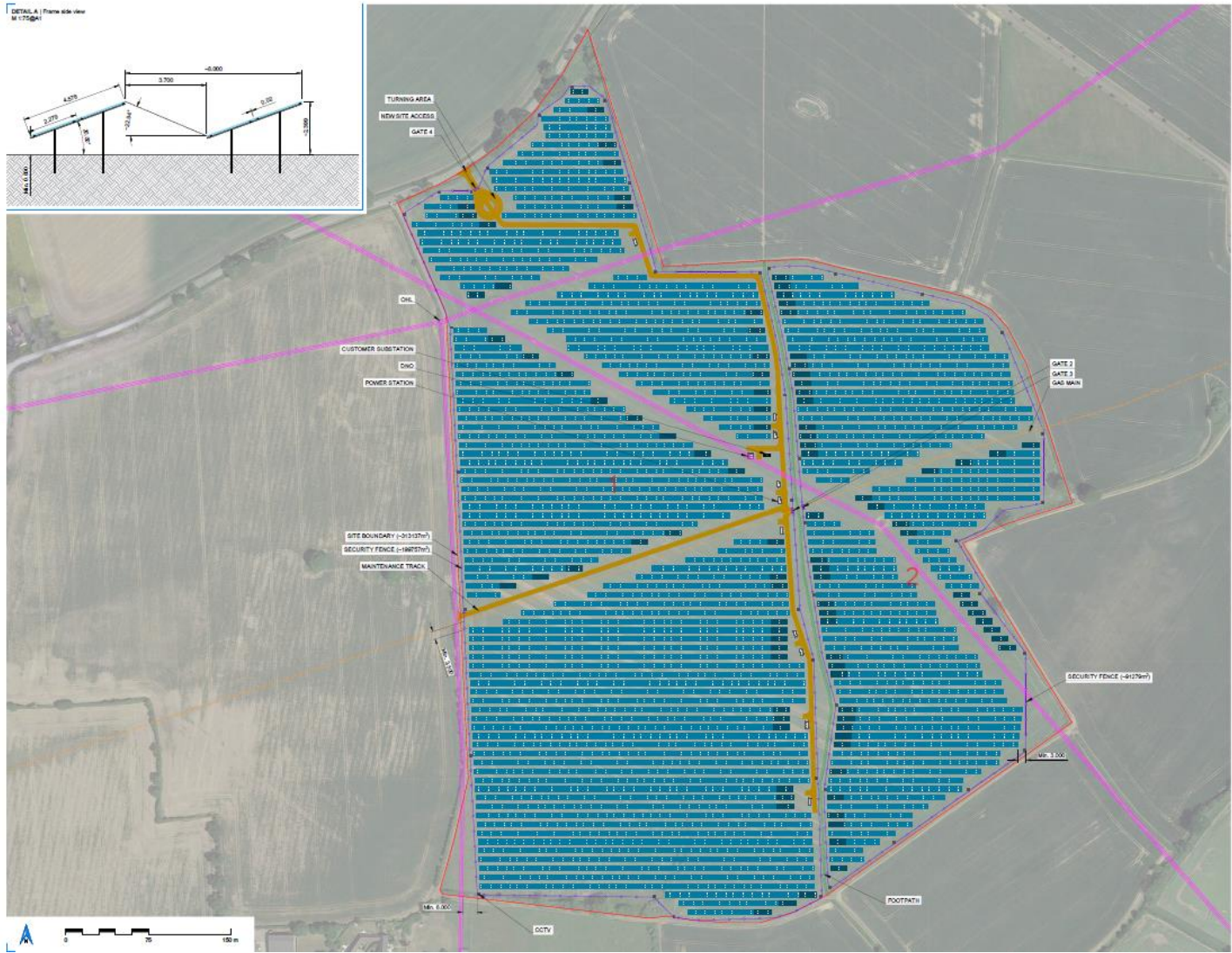
Preston Deanery Proposed Solar Farm Public Consultation Timeline



APPENDIX 1 – LOCATION PLAN



APPENDIX 2 – SITE LAYOUT PLAN



APPENDIX 3 – SOLAR PANEL SPECIFICATION

