

Land at Stoke Edith, Herefordshire

Proposed Solar Development

Design and Access Statement

May 2024





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1 Introduction

This Design & Access Statement (DAS) Statement has been prepared by Stantec UK Ltd (Stantec) on behalf of Anesco Ltd (the Applicant) in support of an application for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (the Electricity Act) for the installation of a solar farm scheme (up to 20MW) with associated development ('the proposed development') at land near Stoke Edith, Herefordshire (the Site).

The Need for Solar

As traditional coal and gas power stations are phased out from Britain's energy system, and the global challenge of climate change becomes ever more pressing, there is an increasing need for reliance on alternative renewable sources of power generation. Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Energy provides a renewable and sustainable source of energy that will facilitate the UK's transition to low carbon technology and help to achieve the goal of 'Net Zero' emissions by 2050.

Solar Photovoltaic has a key part to play in ensuring homes and businesses can be powered by low carbon energy and, by diversifying energy sources, can help to achieve greater security of supply and potentially reduce energy costs in the long term. Furthermore, unlike other renewable energy sources, PV energy production consumes little water and, after installation, requires minimal maintenance.

Scope of Document

As the proposed development is under the threshold to be considered as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, it must be considered under the remits of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Section 70 of the Act devolves decision making on planning applications to local planning authorities, requiring applications to be assessed against the provisions of the adopted development plan for the relevant authority.

A Design and Access Statement is required under Article 4 of the Development Management Procedure Order 2013 as the proposed development is considered to be major development.

This document draws together the conclusions of the consultant team to demonstrate the design response and justify the development proposal.

It provides a detailed description of the design of the proposed development and an overview of the assessment process that has informed our proposals. These are set out in a structured manner to ensure that the rationale for design decisions is clearly understood by decision makers, stakeholders and the community. The submission package includes the following supporting documentation:

- Completed application forms & certificates;
- Supporting Statement prepared by Stantec
- Planning Drawings (including Location & Block Plan, Site Layout, Component Elevations & Typical Fence Details) prepared by Anesco;
- Pre-Application Consultation ('PAC') Report prepared by Stantec;
- Site Selection Report prepared by Stantec;
- Design & Access Statement ('DAS') prepared by Stantec;
- Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA') prepared by Stantec;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal ('PEA') prepared by SLR;
- Transport Statement ('TS') prepared by Motion; and
- Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy Report ('FRA & DS') prepared by SLR.

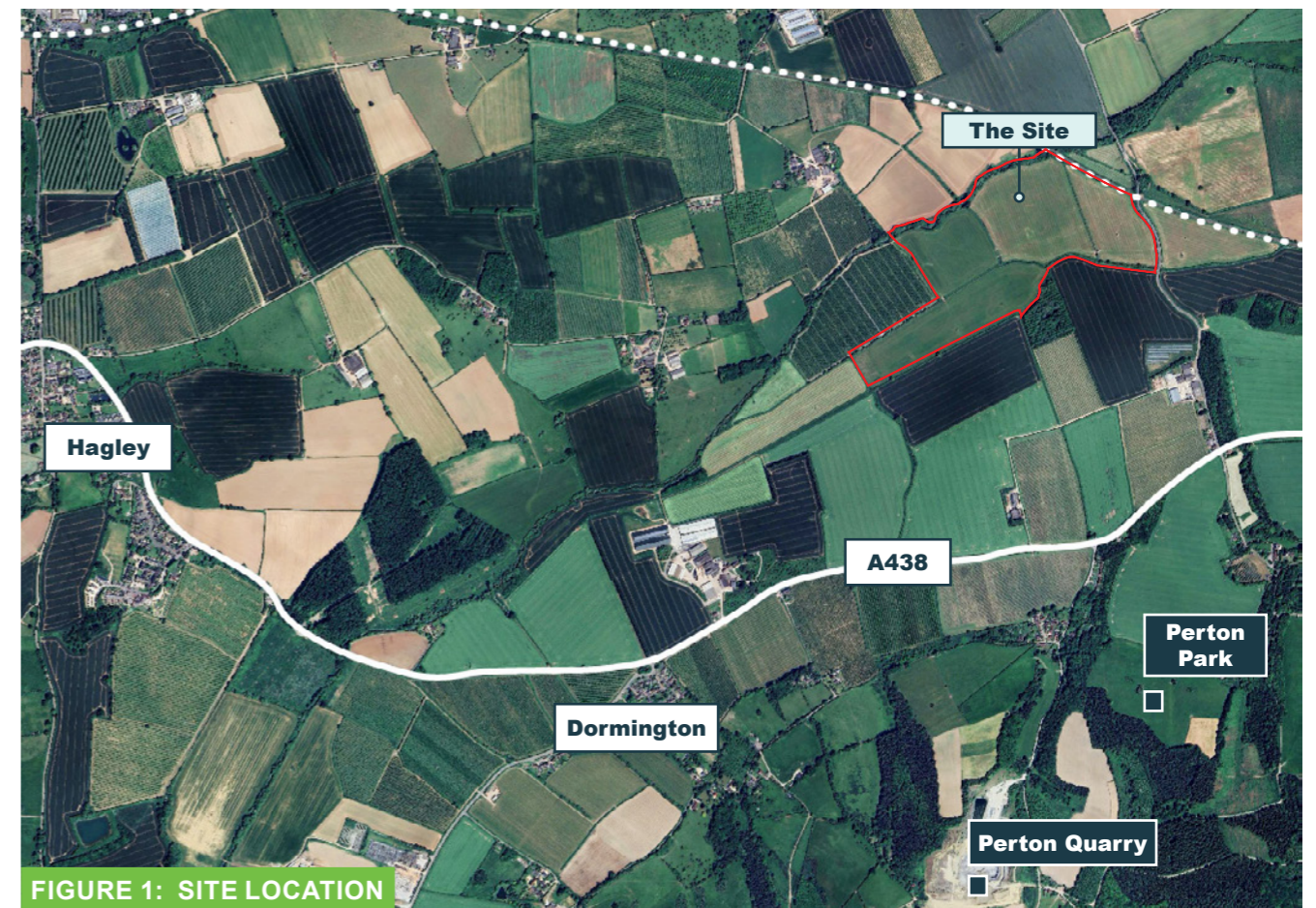


FIGURE 1: SITE LOCATION

Site Location

The Site is located c.5.9km to the east of Hereford and c.1.1km northeast of the village of Dormington and extends to an approximate area of 29.90ha.

Site Description

The Site comprises of an irregular shaped parcel of agricultural land split into four fields delineated by hedgerows, tree belts and woodland.

The site is not located within the Green Belt.

Site Features

The northern and north western boundary of the Site are strongly defined by the railway line and the River Frome, with a series of mature hedgerows and interspersed with occasional hedgerow trees lying adjacent to the River. The eastern boundary of the Site is defined by a two way country road. To the south and west the Site is bounded by arable farm land.

The immediate surroundings of the Site are rural in nature, comprising a mixture of agricultural fields and farms. To the north west lies Pigeon House Farm and Friars Court Farm, to the east Church House Farm and southwest Claston Farm. Glebe Farm lies to the south east.

There are no listed buildings or scheduled monuments located within or directly adjacent to the Site.

Site Suitability for Solar Development

The Site is considered suitable for a solar development for the following reasons:

- The Site is located within suitable proximity of a Substation with an active grid connection offer from a DNO;
- The Site size is considered suitable for solar development of the scale proposed;
- The Site is relatively well screened from the surrounding area, and falls within an area which is already characterised by electrical infrastructure, including a solar farm.
- The proposed development would not have any significant adverse impact on statutory protected built heritage Sites;
- The proposed development would not have any significant adverse impact on statutory protected natural heritage Sites;
- The Site benefits from suitable access for the construction and operational phases of the proposed development; and
- The proposed development meets national planning policy, as well as national energy policy and looks to contribute towards the UK Government and Herefordshire Council, which will in turn support the move to a low carbon economy.



FIGURE 2: SITE LOCATION

2 Policy

This section outlines the relevant national and local planning policy that supports the proposed development.

Legislative Framework & Renewable Energy Policy

There is an urgent need to generate electricity from renewable sources in order to meet national and local targets concerning carbon neutrality, and to contribute to addressing the global challenge of climate change. Solar energy is acknowledged by the Government as having a key role in achieving decarbonisation of the energy sector, and also in achieving greater security of supply.

The UK Government has declared a Climate Emergency and has a legally binding commitment through the Climate Change Act to achieving ‘Net Zero’ emissions by 2050. This commitment is reinforced through various recent White Papers and policy documents including:

- Energy White Paper (2020)
- Powering Up Britain (main report) (2023)
- Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan (2023)
- Powering Up Britain: The Net Zero Growth Plan (2023)

These clear Government policy statements are reinforced through National Policy Statements EN-1 and EN-3 which provide a framework for Nationally Significant scale projects but are also relevant to Town & Country Planning Act scale projects. Of note, EN-3 is clear that solar generation is a key part of the Government’s strategy for low cost decarbonisation of the energy sector, and that it also has an important role in delivering goals for greater energy independence.

At the local level, Herefordshire Council has declared a climate emergency and has recognised the need to significantly increase renewable energy generation.

National Planning Policy

At a national level, relevant planning policy and guidance for the proposed development is provided by National Planning Policy Framework (2023), as well as Planning Practice Guidance.

The NPPF is clear at paragraph 157 that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate.

NPPF Paragraph 163(a) explains that applicants should not be required to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy. Paragraph 163(b) then sets out that local planning authorities should approve applications for renewable energy proposals if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

Local Planning Policy

Herefordshire Council Local Plan

The Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy (2015) provides a number of strategic principles and planning policies for the District up to 2031. In November 2020, a review was undertaken of the Core Strategy whereby it was concluded that a comprehensive revision of the Core Strategy was required in the form of a new Local Plan.

The adopted Core Strategy remains to be the relevant basis for decision making for development proposals within the District. In this case, the policies of greatest relevance to the Proposed Development are considered to be:

- Policy SS7 – Addressing climate change
- Policy SD2 – Renewable and low carbon energy

Policy SS7 seeks to support development proposals which seek to mitigate the impact on climate change, this is aimed to be achieved through ‘promoting the use of decentralised and renewable or low carbon energy where appropriate’ whilst prioritising the protection of the best agricultural land ‘where possible’.

Policy SD2 is a specific renewable and low carbon energy generation policy which supports such development where:

1. The proposal does not adversely impact upon international or national designated natural and heritage assets;
2. The proposal does not adversely effect residential amenity;
3. The proposal does not result in any significant detrimental impact upon the character of the landscape and the built or historic environment and;
4. The proposal can be connected efficiently to existing national grid infrastructure unless it can be demonstrated that energy generation would be used on-site to meet the needs of a specific end user.

A number of other policies within the Core Strategy are of relevance.

- SS1 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- SS6 – Environmental quality and local distinctiveness
- MT1 – Traffic management, highway safety and promoting active travel
- LD1 – Landscape and townscape
- LS2 – Biodiversity and geodiversity

- LD4 – Historic environment and heritage assets
- SD1 – Sustainable design and energy efficiency
- SD3 – Sustainable water management and water resources

Neighbourhood Plans

The site is also within the Parishes of Weston Beggard and Yarkhill, both of which have adopted Neighbourhood Plans.

The Weston Beggard Neighbourhood Plan (2016) included policy WB5 which supports low carbon renewable energy, including ‘commercially led renewable energy schemes’ where detrimental impact can be mitigated on matters such as:

- Landscape appearance and character
- Traffic and transport
- Wildlife and ecology
- Residential amenity
- Flood risk.

The Yarkhill Neighbourhood Plan (2018) includes Policy Y13 (Local Energy Schemes) which supports renewable energy schemes which are of an appropriate scale and design sensitive to the rural area and landscape.

3 Site Assessment

A range of technical assessments have already been undertaken to allow our team to understand, and respond positively, to the opportunities and constraints of the Site. The conclusion of these suggests that there are no significant constraints to development that cannot be appropriately mitigated.

Transport & Access

The proposed development will utilise the existing field access, located along an unnamed road to the east of the site.

During the construction phase of the proposed development, HGVs measuring up to 16.5 metres will access the site over a 48-50 week period. Construction vehicles will access the site from the unnamed road, travelling northwards from the A438. Egress from the site will use the same route.

To achieve suitable access and visibility splays for construction and operational maintenance vehicles, a stretch of hedgerow will need to be removed with the remaining hedgerow along this boundary being limited to 0.6 metres.

A Transport Statement, undertaken by Motion, concludes that there will be no detrimental impact on the local highway network.

Further details can be found in the Transport Statement.

Flooding & Drainage

A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy Report ('FRA & DS') has been prepared by SLR. The FRA and DS findings have been summarised below.

A flood risk assessment has been carried out which confirms that the Site is located within flood risk zones 2 and 3.

Further information can be found within the FRA and DS.

Landscape Features, Designations & Impact

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA') has been prepared by Stantec.

The report concludes that the existing green infrastructure network and landscape has the capacity to accommodate the proposed development with appropriate mitigation measures. Overall, given the small scale of development and the current level of enclosure to the Site, the proposed development will have a minor beneficial effect on the local and wider landscape character.

Further information can be found within the LVIA.

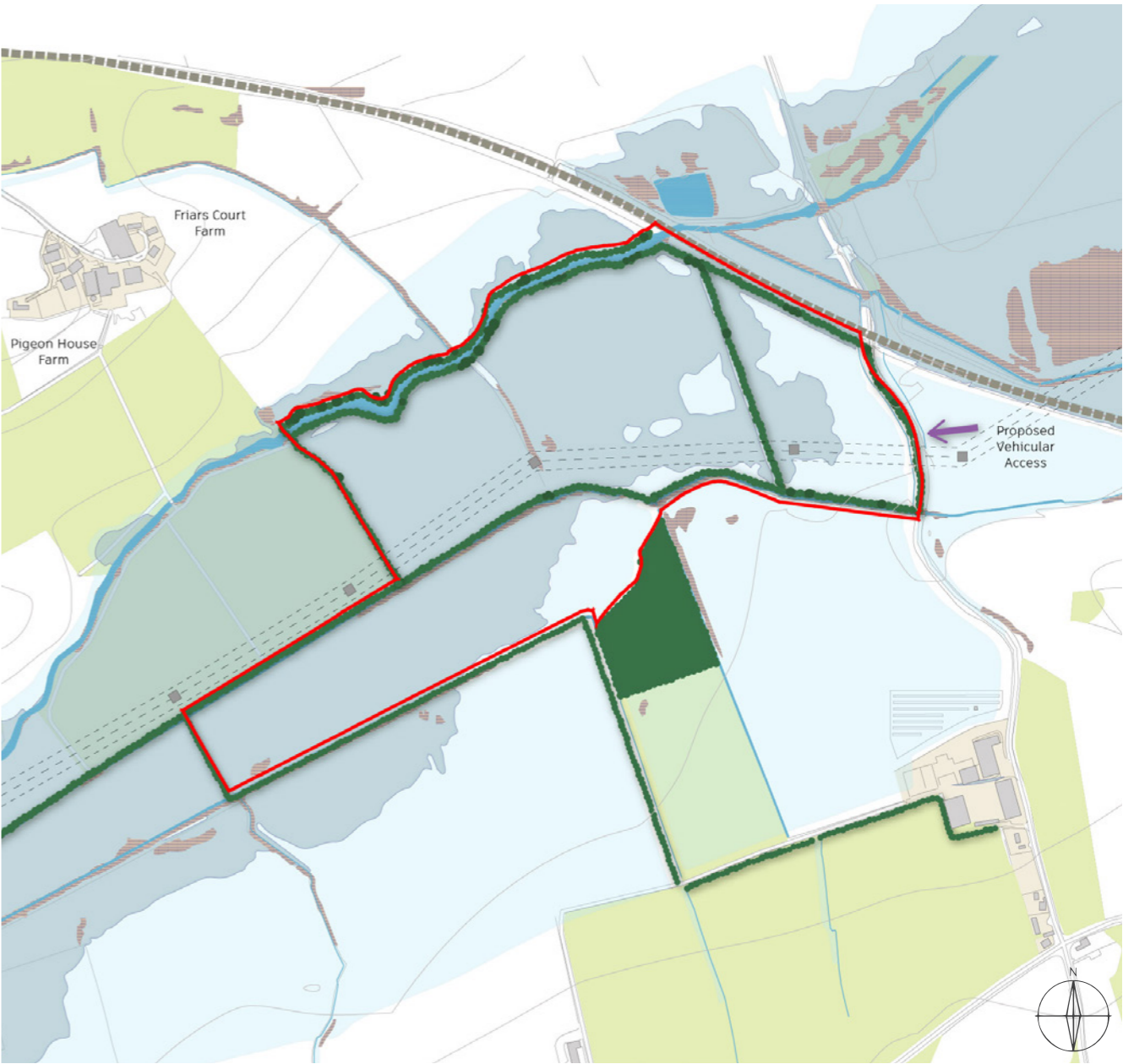
Ecology

An Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA), undertaken by SLR, concludes that the proposed development will result in no net change to a positive impact on identified ecological features on the site.

Further details can be found within the EcIA.

Heritage

There are no listed buildings or scheduled monuments within or in close proximity to the Site.



Key			
	Site boundary		Flood zone 3
	Watercourses		Flood zone 2
	Railway		Approx. location of trees & hedgerows
	Proposed vehicular access		Surface water flooding
	Electricity Pylons		

FIGURE 3: SITE ASSESSMENT PLAN

4 Community Engagement

This section provides a summary of the engagement process undertaken. Full details of the consultation processes, the level and nature of the feedback received and how it informed the design process is provided in the PAC Report which has been submitted with the S36 application.

Requirements for Consultation

Paragraph 39 of the National Planning Policy Framework encourages good quality pre-application discussion on development proposals between the applicant, the council, and the local community. Herefordshire Council reinforce this through encouragement of community involvement in the preparation of planning applications for major development.

Public consultation strategy

Prior to the submission of this application a community consultation event was undertaken, this was done via a leaflet drop to local residents.

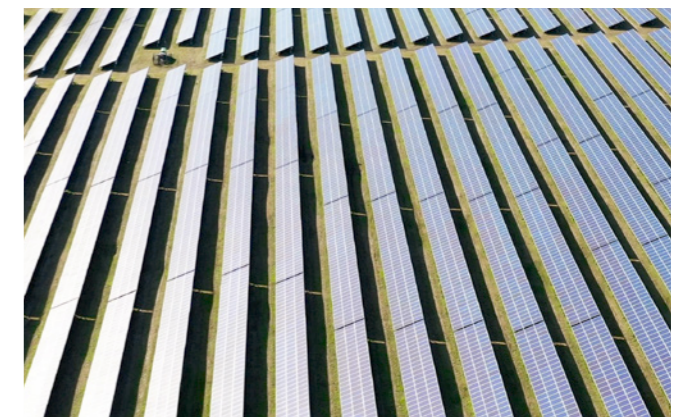
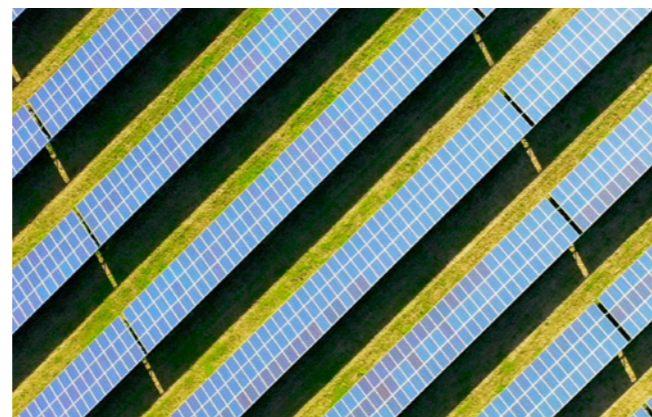
In total, 8 responses were received relating to matters on landscape impact, use of agricultural land, pollution, flooding, and design.

Feedback

A detailed response to the comments received on the public consultation can be found within the Statement of Community Involvement section of the Planning Statement. However, a summary of each of these responses can be found below.

- **Landscape impacts of the proposed development** – concerns were raised about the landscape impact of the proposed development. In response to this, a Landscape Strategy Plan (LSP) has been prepared which proposes new landscape planting in the form of hedgerow enhancement, tree planting and scrub planting. This will ensure that landscape impacts are reduced where possible.

- **Use of agricultural land** – concerns were raised in relation to the use of high-quality agricultural land. In response to this, detailed soil sampling and an Agricultural Classification Survey have been carried out which found that the Site is entirely Grade 3b (moderate quality) agricultural land. This is not considered to be the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land.
- **Pollution** – concerns were raised in relation to noise, electromagnetic and light pollution as a result of the proposed development. In response to this it is assured that the proposed development will not result in any increased pollution of any form with no significant producers of sound or light proposed on site.
- **Flooding** – respondents noted that the site is within an area at risk of flooding. In response to this, a Sequential Test Assessment has been provided which evidence that there are no sequentially preferable sites within proximity of the allocated point of connection. The proposed development will also provide substantial environmental, economic, and social benefits that outweigh its position within an area of flood risk. The proposed development will also result in no increased risk of flooding both within, and outside of, the site.
- **Design** – clarification was sought that there will be no new pylons added to the site. In response to this, it was assured that no new pylons are proposed on site. Connection into the National Grid will be made through a new pole and tee-off connection to be provided within the site.



5 The Proposal

This chapter outlines details of the proposed development, design principles and strategies.

The proposed development is for a solar farm with total installed capacity of 20.6MW with associated development.

The proposed layout is shown opposite. The key components of the proposed development are as follows;

- Photovoltaic (PV) Modules with indicative height of 2.8m;
- DNO Substation and control room;
- Customer Substation enclosed in steel and with an indicative footprint of 4.5m x 6.5m and indicative height of 3.1m;
- LV Substations, which consist of a transformer and feeder pillar with indicative height of 2.6m and footprint of 2.8m x 3.5m;
- Fencing around the site boundary, which will be 2m high deer fencing and a small section of V mesh security fencing within the compound;
- Security beam posts with indicative height of 1.2m located within the fence perimeter or CCTV columns with indicative height of 4m; and
- Associated infrastructure (access, drainage, landscaping etc.)

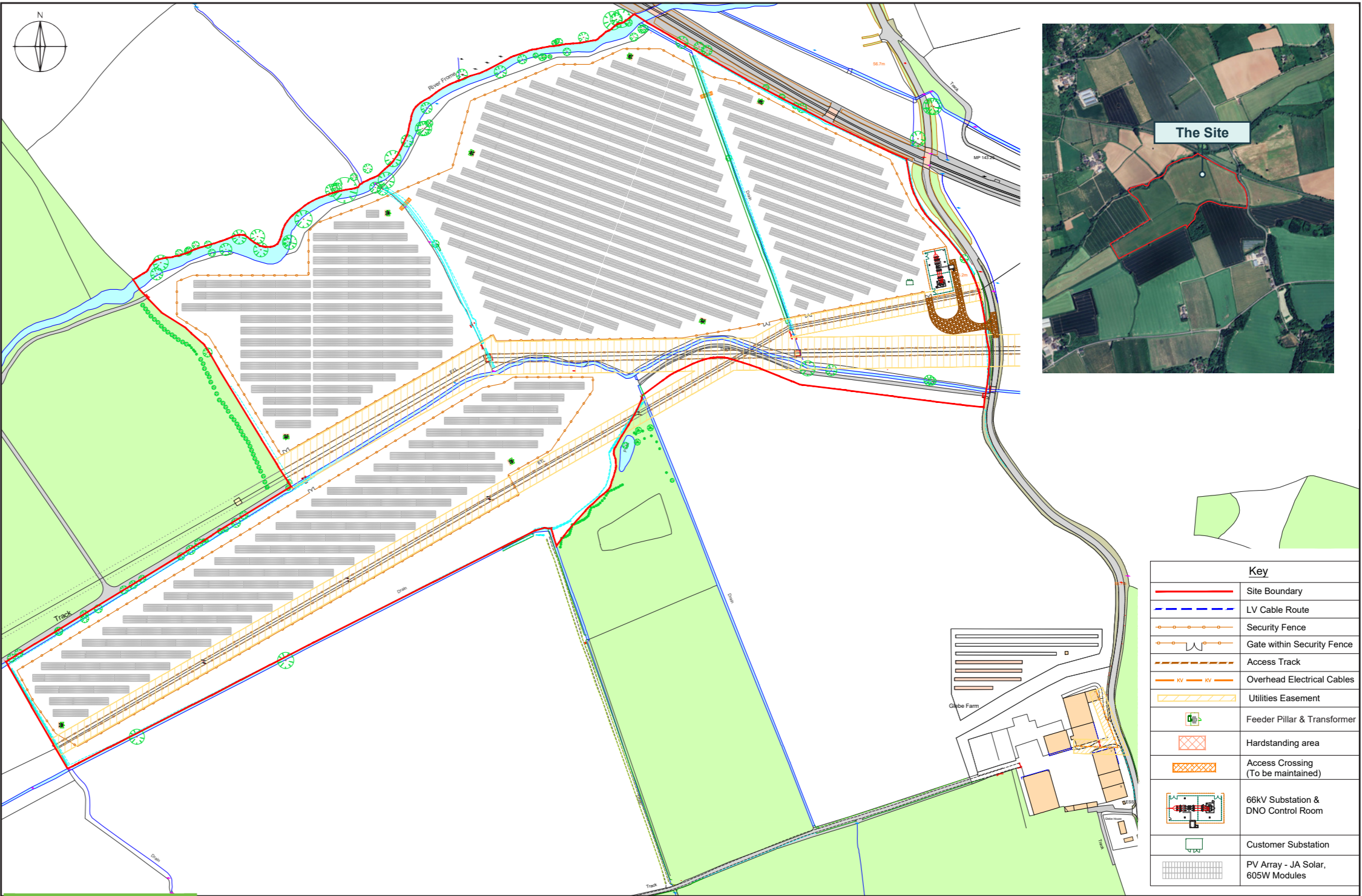


FIGURE 4: SITE PLAN

Elevations

Elevations of the proposed development are included below.

Materiality

The buildings and fencing within the proposed development will make use of the colour green to help blend in with the surroundings and the existing site infrastructure.

Amount & Scale

The proposed development is contained within a 2m security fencing. The Site will contain all the components of the proposed development.

The scale and massing of the proposed development is relatively small. Most of the proposed infrastructure is lower than 4m high and comprises numerous small elements.

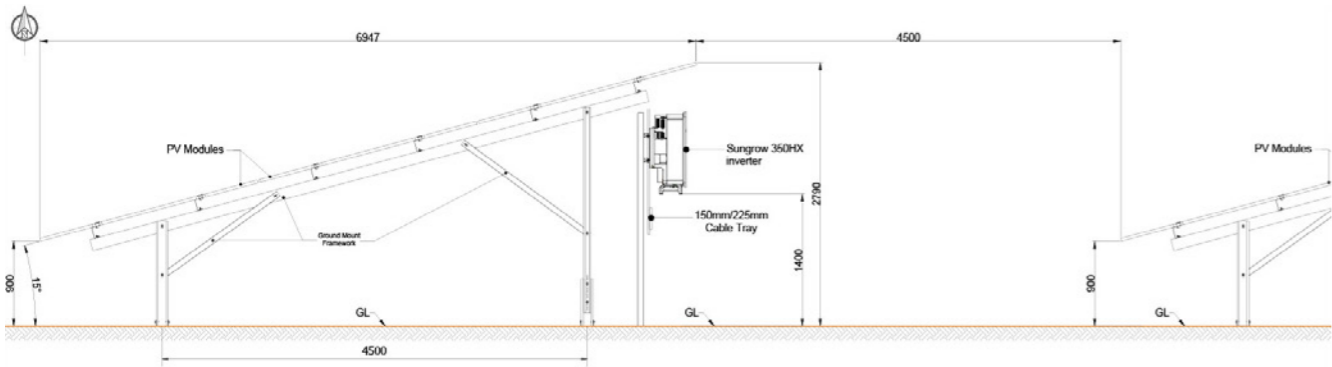


FIGURE 5: SIDE ELEVATION - GROUND MOUNTED

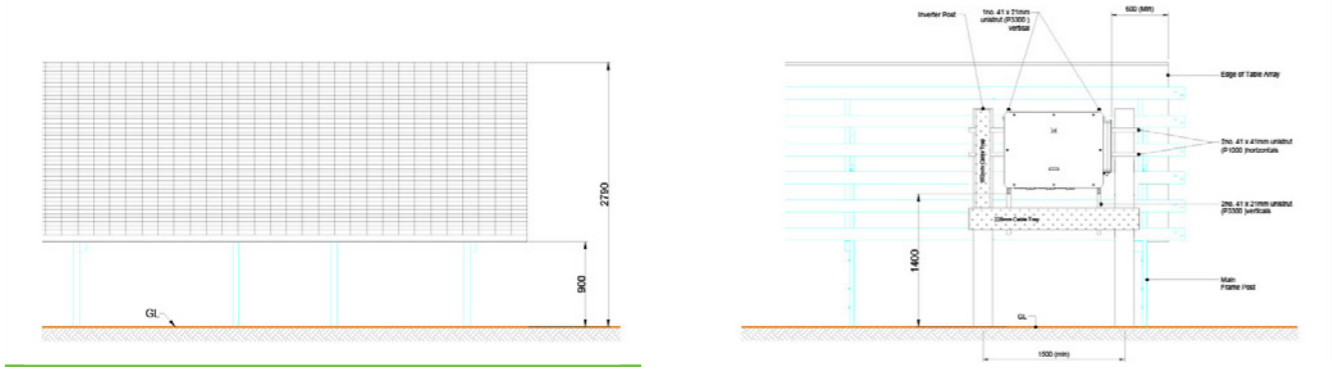


FIGURE 6: TYPICAL FRONT ELEVATION

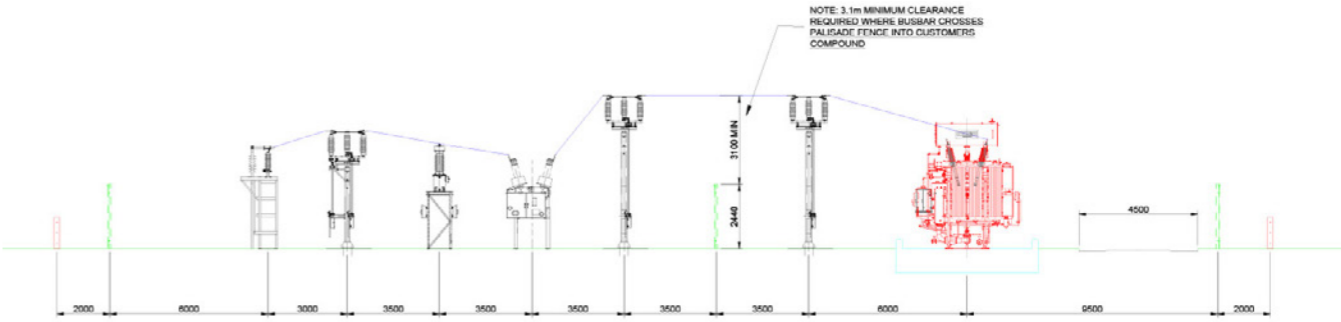


FIGURE 7: DNO SUBSTATION & CONTROL ROOM ELEVATION

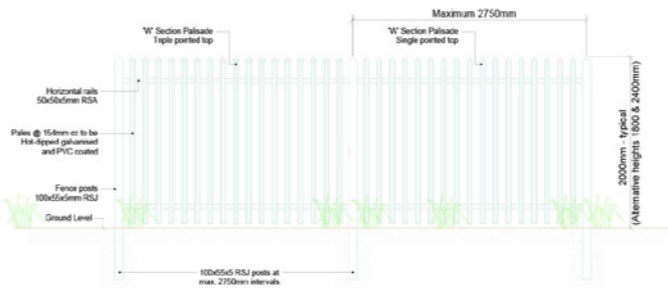


FIGURE 8: PALASADE FENCING ELEVATION

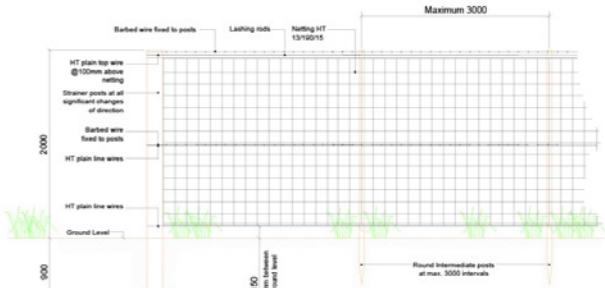


FIGURE 9: TYPICAL FENCE DETAILING



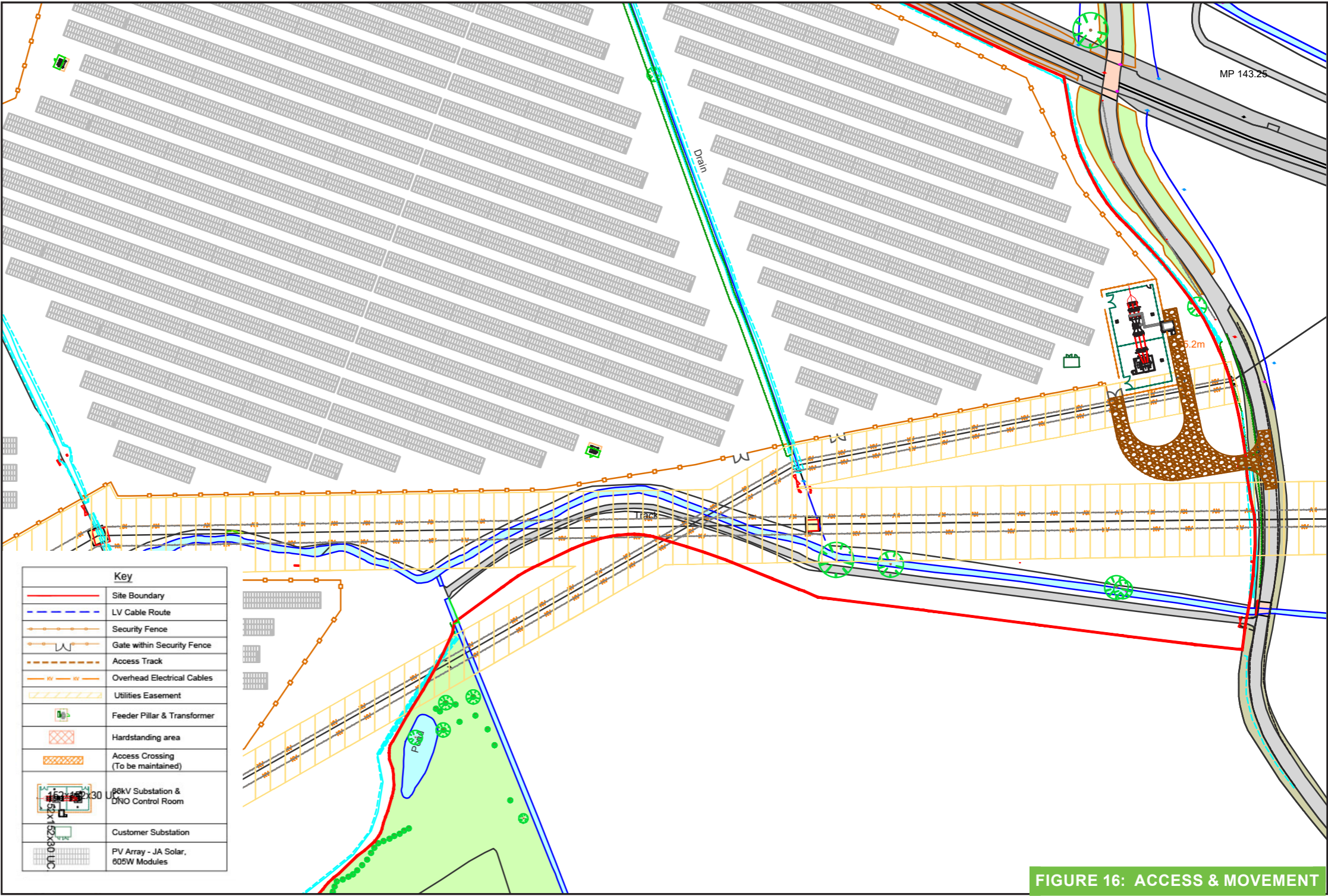
FIGURE 10: WLV TRANSFORMER AND FEEDER PILLAR ELEVATIONS



FIGURE 11: CUSTOMER SUBSTATION ELEVATIONS

Access and Movement

Access to the Site will be provided to the east via a newly formed private road off an unnamed country road.



6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

This section provides a summary of the landscape and visual considerations of the Site and its context.

Viewpoints

A number of viewpoints have been identified to form part of the LVIA, identified on the map below. These correlate with the panoramic views opposite.

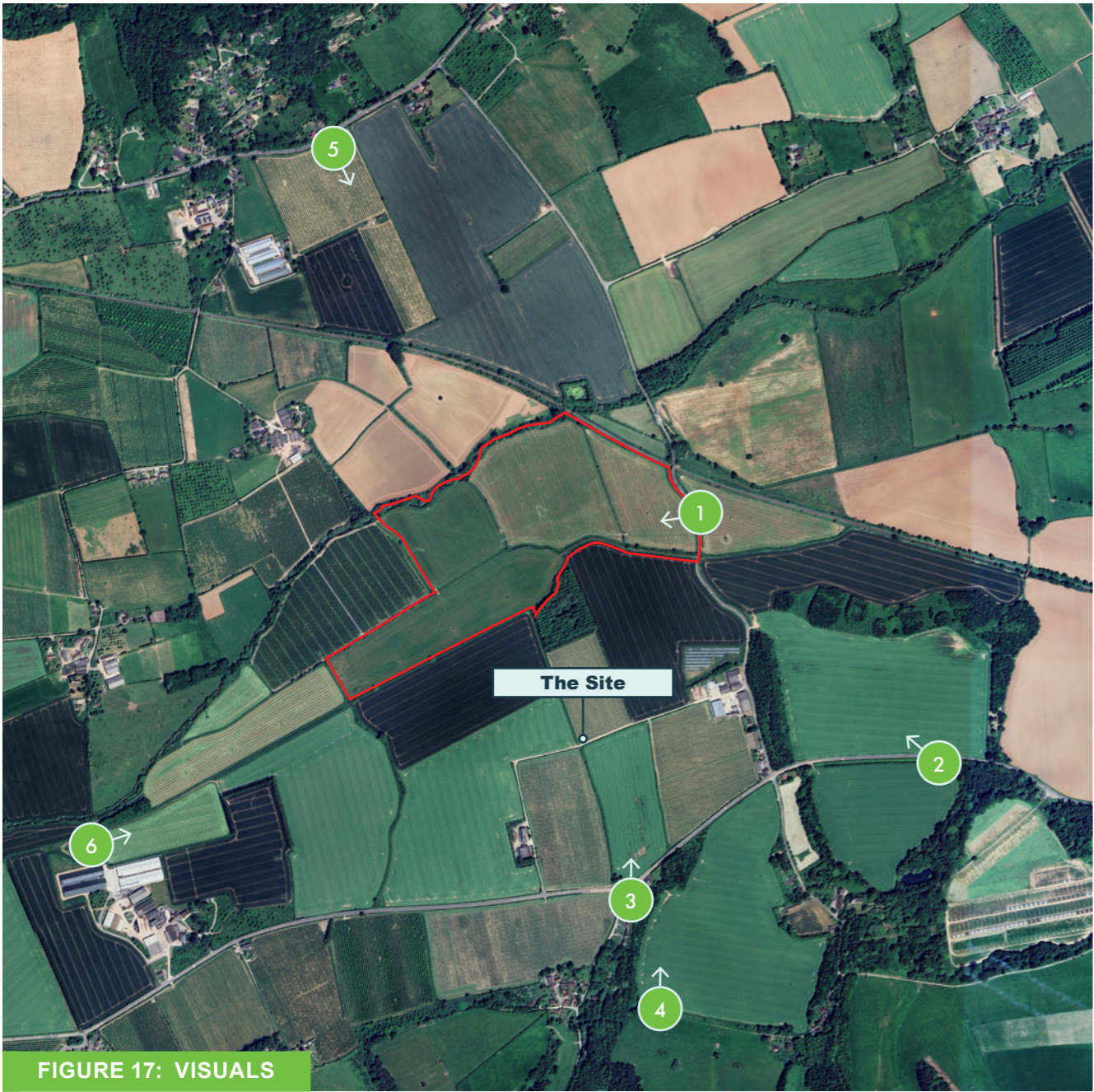


FIGURE 17: VISUALS

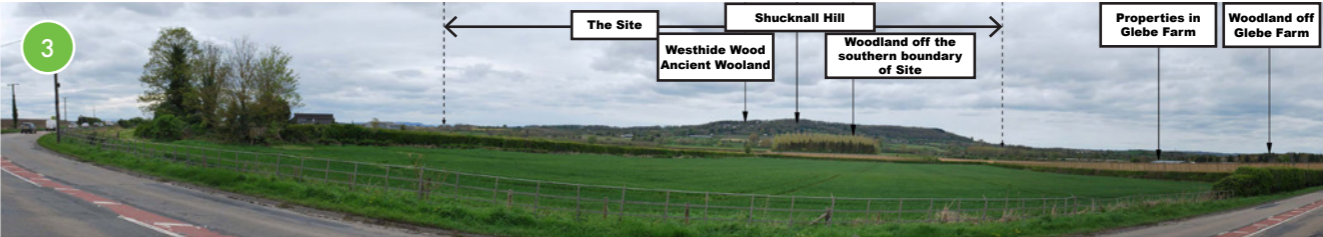
VIEW LOOKING WEST FROM AN UNNAMED ROAD OFF THE EASTERN BOUNDARY OF THE SITE



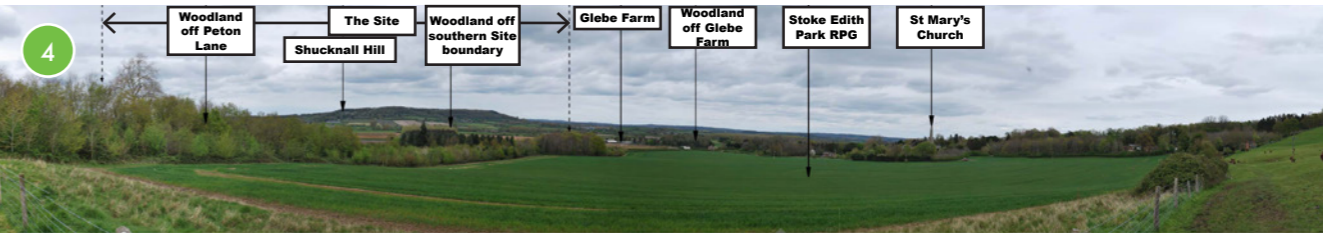
VIEW LOOKING NORTH-WEST FROM A438/ HEREFORD ROAD



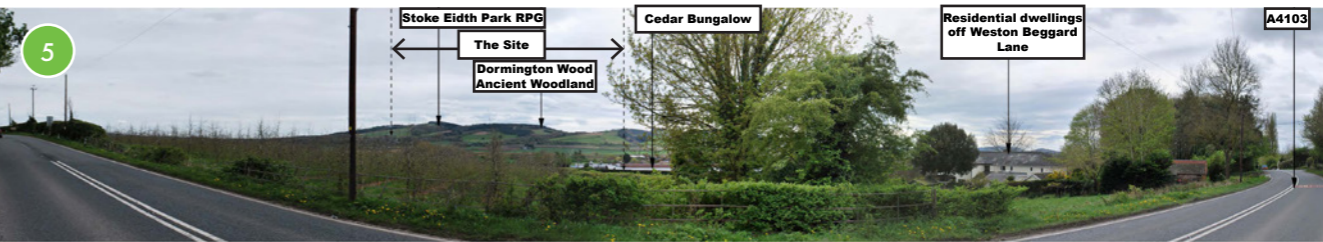
VIEW LOOKING NORTH FROM A438/ HEREFORD ROAD



LOOKING NORTH FROM PUBLIC FOOTPATH - STOKE EDITH FOOTPATH



VIEW LOOKING SOUTH-EAST FROM A4103



VIEW LOOKING EAST FROM PUBLIC FOOTPATH - DORMINGTON FOOTPATH

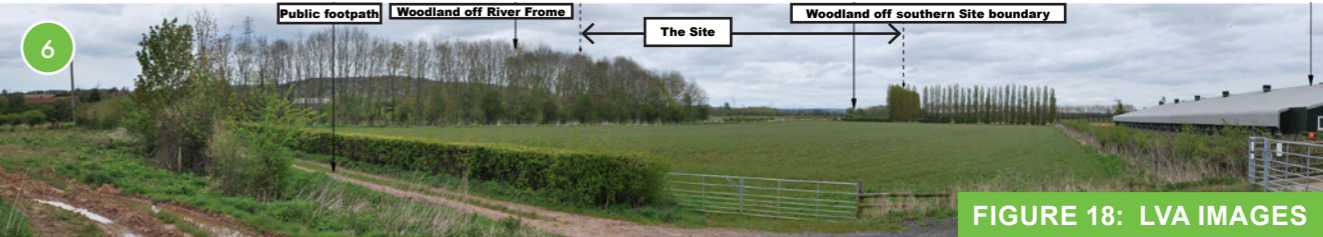


FIGURE 18: LVA IMAGES

Landscape Character and Visual Appraisal

An LVIA has been undertaken for the proposed development, which should be referred to for full consideration of the visual impact of the proposed development on the surrounding landscape.

The majority of the site falls within the River Floodplain character area, which is characterised by meandering river channels, both wide and narrow floodplains, pastoral land uses and is a highly tranquil and naturalistic landscape. The Site mainly consists of irregular arable historic field parcels, which are bounded by hedgerows and hedgerow trees. A small woodland block lies adjacent to the southern Site boundary and commercial orchards are located to the north west. Within the immediate setting to the south east of the Site lies a small complex of agricultural buildings and small solar farm. There is a degree of containment and enclosure to the Site provided by the existing mature vegetation and landform, with proximity to existing solar farms and overhead powerlines associated with large pylons resulting in the Site being situated within a landscape that contains detracting features and reduces the Sites tranquillity and remoteness.

The proposed development will have a limited impacted on the landscape character areas. There will be a limited change in views and existing views of surrounding wooded hills will be retained. Furthermore, as the proposed landscaping matures, the proposed development will enhance the green infrastructure on the Site, strengthening the existing character area and providing further screening and enclosure. Therefore, the nature of change to the landscape will be small.

For further information, including suggested mitigation measures, please refer to the submitted LVIA.

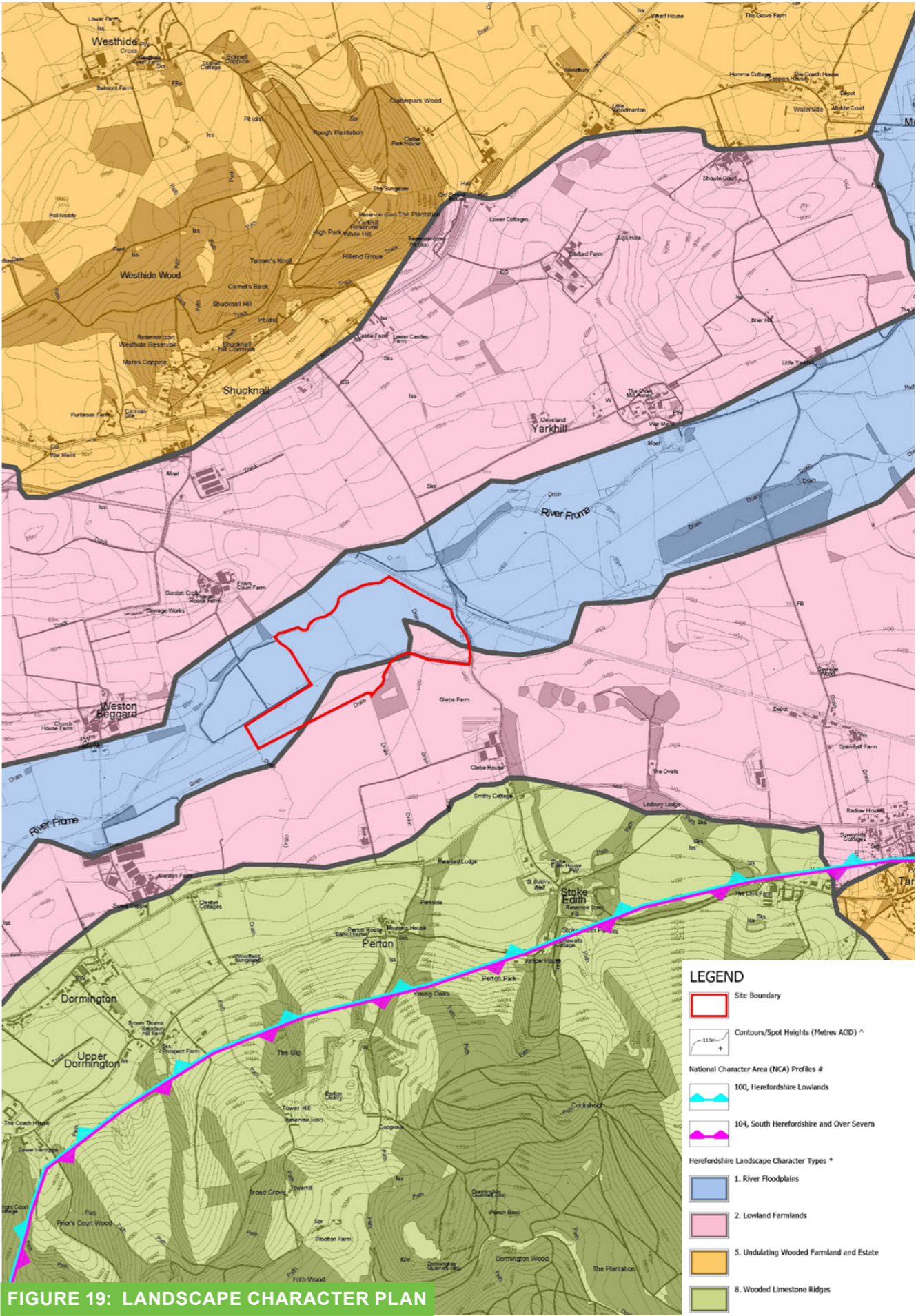


FIGURE 19: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PLAN

Landscape Strategy

The proposed landscape strategy comprises the following four key principles:

- 1. Retain the existing landscape framework;
- 2. Repair and enhance the existing hedgerow and hedgerow tree network;
- 3. Provide a green corridor through the Site; and
- 4. Provide green buffers.



7 Conclusion

The Site extends to c. 29.90 ha and lies c.5.9km to the east of Hereford. The area is not subject to any landscape designation and there are no heritage features within the site or its immediate vicinity.

Through the supporting information submitted with the application, it has been established that there is sufficient infrastructure to support the proposed development, there will be no unacceptable adverse impacts with regards to landscape and visual, traffic & transport, flooding or biodiversity.

The proposed development will contribute towards increasing dependency on low carbon technology in the UK’s energy generation mix and facilitate the stability of the network as balancing supply and demand becomes more challenging. This will ultimately contribute towards the UK’s goal for net zero carbon emissions.



