

Application: F/YR15/0429/F

Major

Parish/Ward: Chatteris Town Council – Slade Lode Ward

Applicant: Honeysome Road Solar Limited

Agent: Mr D Mead: Partners In Planning Ltd

Proposal: Construction of a 4.34MW solar energy farm, to include the installation of solar panels, ancillary plant, 2.0m high security fencing, 24 x pole mounted 2.4m high CCTV cameras and associated works including underground cables

**Location: Land East Of Honeysome Farm Bungalow, Honeysome Road,
Chatteris, Cambridgeshire**

Site area/Density: approx. 8.5Ha

Reason before Committee: This application has been called in to planning committee by Cllr Newell in view of the proximity of residential dwellings, the development being on grade 1 agricultural land and the overall scale of the development.

This application seeks full planning permission for the Construction of a 4.34MW solar energy farm involving the construction of associated structures and infrastructure.

The development would lead to the introduction of a sustainable energy source and therefore assist in tackling the effects of climate change. Whilst the development would result in a temporary loss of high grade agricultural land, the sustainability benefits of the development are considered to outweigh this temporary loss. Notwithstanding this, the land would be reverted back to its current use following the expiry of the development. The development could be accommodated within the site without significant harm to the landscape character of the surrounding area, local highways infrastructure, the natural environment or to the residential amenity of nearby properties. Additionally, the development can be delivered incorporating the necessary flood resilience and can therefore mitigate against the possible effects of flooding.

Therefore and subject to the successful completion of an archaeological evaluation concluding that the development can be delivered without compromising material of archaeological importance, the development is considered to accord with the requirements of national and local policy.

The recommendation is to approve the application.

2.0 HISTORY

Of relevance to this proposal is (see also para 7.0 'Background'):

2.1	F/YR15/0096/SC	Screening opinion: 5MW Solar Farm and associated works (south of Honeysome Farm Bungalow)	Confirmed by Secretary of State as NOT EIA development. 27.03.2015
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3.0 PLANNING POLICIES

3.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

Paragraph 2:	Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan.
Paragraph 7:	The 3 dimensions of sustainable development
Paragraph 14:	Presumption in favour of sustainable development.
Paragraph 17:	Core Planning Principles.
Paragraph 32:	Transport Assessment
Section 7:	Requiring Good Design
Section 10:	Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change...
Section 11:	Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment
Section 12:	Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

3.2 National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG):

Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment
Natural Environment

3.3 Fenland Local Plan 2014:

LP2:	Health & Wellbeing
LP3:	Fenland Settlement Hierarchy
LP14:	Responding to Climate Change
S1 to S6:	Resource & Renewable Energy SPD
LP15:	Transport & Highways
LP16:	Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments
DM2, DM3, DM6:	Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments SPD
LP18:	The Historic Environment
LP19:	The Natural Environment

4.0 CONSULTATIONS

4.1 *Town Council*

Raise No Objections. Enquired as to feasibility of creating a footpath around the site to encourage access to the countryside.

4.2 *CCC Highways(LHA)*

No objections subject to conditions controlling the following;

1. The formation of a temporary passing bay during construction,
2. Temporary vehicular access,
3. Permanent vehicular access including surfacing ,
4. The vehicular crossing over the watercourse along the site frontage

In addition, a construction management plan and a scheme to secure repairs to the proposed access route as a consequence of the development is required to be agreed prior to development commencing.

4.3 *FDC Environmental Health*

No objections to the proposed development, as it is unlikely to have a detrimental effect on local air quality or the noise climate. From the information

provided contaminated land is not considered an issue.

4.4 CCC (Lead Local Flood Authority)

No comments to make. The local IDB should be consulted

4.5 Middle Level Commissioners (IDB)

Advised will be commenting – no comment yet received

4.6 CCC Historic Environment Team

Possibility of Iron Age, Medieval, Post Medieval and Roman remains recommend that the site is subject to an archaeological evaluation, to be commissioned and undertaken at the expense of the developer, and carried out prior to the granting of planning permission.

4.7 Ecological Officer (on behalf of FDC)

No objection to the granting of planning permission subject to all relevant ecological avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures, including monitoring, as set out in the Biodiversity Management Plan, including Appendix 3 re; Badgers and the Landscape Plan, being adhered to via a suitably worded planning condition.

4.8 Environment Agency

No objections in considering the proposal and supporting FRA. The local IDB should be consulted

4.9 Police Architectural Liaison Officer

No comments yet received

4.10 Local Residents/Interested Parties

3 letters of objection received local residents citing the following reasons;

- Impact on views, privacy and horses [from Honeysome Farm Bungalow adjacent].
- Concerns over proximity of development to dwelling (less than 300m). Requests mature hedgerow is planted along the boundary of the site. Does not intend to object to application if reasonable screening is put in place.
- Alleged contained within the application submission (not specified)
- Negative impact upon property

Other

1 letter of representation querying the anticipated amount of traffic predicted during construction/ operation.

5.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

5.1 The site lies approximately 400m from the western fringes of Chatteris Town and comprises approximately 8.5Ha of Grade 1/ Grade 2 agricultural land currently used for arable farming. The site is considered therefore to lie in the open countryside.

The site is accessed via Honeysome Road, an adopted highway which leads off the A141 (Fenland Way) and serves a group of industrial/ commercial buildings at the entrance to Honeysome Road (east of the site). This road leads west

providing access to a parcel of land used for allotments and then to agricultural fields and a dwelling (Honeysome Farm Bungalow).

The surrounding area is predominantly rural and agricultural in character, and appearance particularly to the north, south and west of the site. The east becomes urban with the presence of the industrial buildings at Honeysome Road and the established settlement of Chatteris beyond. The newly built, unoccupied supermarket is visible to the north east of the site. Approximately 600m south of the site is 'Alan Bartlett & Sons Limited' factory and associated land which is linked to the development.

There are few residential dwellings in the immediate vicinity with the exception of Honeysome Farm Bungalow directly adjacent to the west and 2 dwellings approximately 300m east ('Orchard House' and 'Bromsgrove').

The site lies within Flood Zone 3.

6.0 PROPOSAL

6.1 The proposal is for a solar farm which is capable of generating up to 4.34MW of renewable electricity. Planning permission is sought for the development for a temporary period of 30 years, the expected usable life of the plant. Following this period, the site would be decommissioned and the land returned to its previous condition for full agricultural use.

The proposal consists of:

- 14,460 solar panels – each measuring 4m wide x 2m deep. These are to be pole mounted such that the top of the panel is 2.5m at its highest point;
- 3 inverter buildings including transformers measuring 15.4m wide (total) x 2.0m deep x 2.3m high;
- One customer sub-station building measuring 2.4m wide x 6.0m deep x 2.9m high;
- One DNO sub-station building measuring 5.3m wide x 4.8m deep x 3.5m high; this is the point at which the connection to the electricity grid occurs;
- 2m high boundary fencing; this would be situated to the perimeter of the site and would be screened from view via landscaping;
- 24 no. 2.4m high CCTV cameras to enable security at the site;
- Access tracks from Honeysome Road and within the site for construction and maintenance purposes;
- Provision for an underground electricity cable linking the site to the Alan Bartlett & Sons site to the south (denoted as a narrow channel leading south and edged red on the location plan).
- A temporary passing bay to be installed during construction of the site which has been agreed with the LHA.

The site is divided into 2 parts, divided by an existing drain which runs north east to south west. Each part will have ground mounted solar PV panels arranged in uniform rows running east to west and the panels will be angled and will face south for optimum solar absorption. The sites will be enclosed with 2.0m high mesh deer fencing which will incorporate badger/ small mammal gates at intervals to enable small animals to freely access and egress the site. Native hedge and trees will be planted along the perimeter of the site to provide

screening once mature. An access track will lead from Honeysome Road into and around the site for construction and maintenance at 2 points along the southern boundary.

A Distribution Network Operator (DNO) Sub-Station is proposed to be located at the far south-east corner of the site and other structures (inverters, transformers and a client substation) will be located along the internal boundaries of the sites.

Access will be gained from the existing Honeysome Road with a proposal to create a passing bay during the construction phase.

An underground cable will be laid leading south to supply power to the Alan Bartlett & Sons Ltd site. It is anticipated that most of the power generated will go to the site and any residual power is to be fed into the grid.

7.0 BACKGROUND

7.1 In March 2015 the applicant sought the opinion of the Secretary of State as to whether proposed development of a 12Ha area of agricultural land immediately south of the site for a solar farm would have significant impacts on the environment (thereby constituting EIA development) and as such whether the application should be accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

The Secretary of State concluded that although the proposed development would result in the loss of approximately 12.4Ha of grade 1 agricultural land, Natural England's plans denote this to be a relatively small loss of agricultural land in this area. Additionally visual impact on nearby residences and adjacent roads and footpaths was not considered to be significant.

8.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

8.1 Key Issues

- Principle of Development
- Scale, Layout and Appearance
- Access and Highways
- Use of Agricultural land
- The Natural Environment
- The Historic Environment
- Flood Risk
- Other Matters –
- Impact on amenity and views,
- Creation of footpath,
- Resident comments – Comments regarding the application submission.

8.2 Principle of Development

Policy LP3 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014 outlines the settlement hierarchy for the District. The site lies approximately 400m from the edge of Chatteris and it is

concluded that the site lies in the open countryside and is considered as 'Elsewhere' development as identified under policy LP3. For development to be acceptable in 'Elsewhere' locations, the proposal must clearly demonstrate that is essential for the effective operation of local agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation, transport or utility services.

The development is proposed in the first instance to provide a renewable energy source to the Alan Bartlett & Sons vegetable processing factory to the south. This is not an agricultural (or other as defined in LP3) operation and therefore falls outside the scope of policy LP3.

However, it is clear that there is a national drive to meet the challenge of climate change by utilizing greener energy in order to achieve a more sustainable means of existence. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF advises that to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to renewable/ low carbon energy generation. Policy LP14 (A) echoes this in supporting the principle of renewable energy proposals. Policy LP14 supporting Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out the criteria under S1 to S6 under which ground mounted solar installations will be assessed against and include consideration of landscape, amenity, highways, biodiversity and agricultural land impacts.

Therefore, in view of the clear overarching drive towards sustainable development, the principle of the proposal is supported by the NPPF and Policy LP14 of the Fenland Local Plan subject to the development conforming to considerations as set out in the SPDs and other relevant policies of the Local Plan.

8.3 Scale, Layout and Appearance

Policy LP16 and its supporting SPD (DM2, DM3) along with LP14 and its associated SPD (S1) seek to ensure that development does not harm the landscape character of the surrounding area. S1 provides further guidance in this respect advising that development of this nature should be sited so that they are not readily seen from public highways or residential properties and where necessary, native vegetation for screening should be incorporated. Where fencing is needed, the height should be kept to a minimum and recommendation is given to a mesh fence rather than solid wood fencing. In addition, installations should be uniformly arranged and where security lighting is required, this should be minimized and discreet so as to minimize light pollution.

It is acknowledged that some views of the development will be gained from some areas of public highway, most notably from the approaching Honeysome Road and a stretch of the A141 (Fenland Way) to the east. In addition, some views of the development will be gained from rear first floor windows of dwellings to the east (primarily Orchard House and Bromsgrove) which are approximately 300m east of the site. Additionally views from 1st floor rear windows of dwellings to the east of Fenland Way (approximately 400m away) will be achievable, albeit some will be interrupted by the existing supermarket and these views will be of the rear of the panels given their south facing arrangement. Directly adjacent to the site is Honeysome Farm Bungalow, a residential dwelling with horse paddock to the rear sited approximately 20m from the nearest edge of the solar farm. This site is relatively well screened

along its eastern perimeter from the application site by a row of mature hedge and trees and to the north by existing buildings.

The applicant proposes to mitigate against the impact of the development by screening the perimeter of the site with 2.0m high mesh fencing and then native hedgerow and trees which when established should screen the sides of the development. The panels will be arranged in uniform rows and no security lighting is proposed. The cable which will run southwards and will provide power to the 'Alan Bartlett & Sons Ltd' site will be underground and therefore will not impact upon the landscape of the area.

The development will occupy an 8.5Ha area of agricultural land set in the open countryside and it is recognized therefore that the development will be visible given the flat low-lying landscape character of the area. The applicant has therefore provided an 'Appraisal of Landscape and Visual Effects' (ALVE) which considers the existing landscape and the impacts of the development when viewed from 14 locations around the site at distances between 195m and 3.5Km away. The applicant's appraisal concludes that the scale of the development, combined with the mitigation measures which include 2.0m high mesh fencing screened with native hedgerow and trees will not result in any unacceptable landscape or visual impacts and the development could therefore be successfully assimilated into the surrounding landscape.

The Council has employed the services of a landscape consultant, 'The Landscape Partnership' who are registered with the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. The consultant has been requested to consider the impact of the development on the landscape and to carry out a review of the applicant's ALVE.

The consultant has concluded that there would not be any significant loss of landscape elements or features on the site e.g. trees or hedges and that the development respects the existing field patterns and drainage channels. Additionally, given the low-lying nature of the development, there will be no effect on skylines. In summary, the consultant working on behalf of the Council considers that overall and subject to the imposition of conditions controlling the management of site in respect of soft landscaping, the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development are not significant and that the scheme could be successfully located within the landscape without any unacceptable long-term harm, visual amenity issues or impact upon existing landscape attributes.

In conclusion and in consideration of the comments from the Council's consultant and in view of the proposed mitigation measures it is considered that whilst the development will be partially visible from some areas of public highway and from some residences, it will not adversely impact upon the landscape character of the surrounding area and therefore will not be visually harmful.

The development is considered therefore to accord with the requirements of policies LP14 and LP16 and the associated guidance in respect of the scale, layout and appearance.

8.4 Access and Highways

Policy LP2, together with LP15 seeks to ensure that well designed and safe access is provided with new development.

1 letter of representation has been received querying the amount of traffic anticipated as a result of the development. The representation does not provide support or objection to the development.

The applicant has provided a transport statement and the LHA have been fully consulted. The Transport Statement provides information on anticipated vehicle movements, vehicle types and indicates that the main delivery route for the solar equipment will be via the A14, then via the A142, A10 and A141 into Honeysome Road. During the construction phase, materials will be brought onto site via HGVs and vans with no requirement for abnormal loads. The construction of the site is anticipated to take around 8 weeks to complete and will be split into 4 phases;

1. Site preparation
2. Construction (including site preparation expected to be 8 weeks)
3. Operational Phase
4. Decommissioning (after up to 30 years)

The development will be accessed directly off Honeysome Road, off the A141, with 2 access points then feeding into the site. The LHA have requested that, due to the narrowness of Honeysome Road beyond the existing industrial units, that a temporary passing bay be constructed to enable the free-flow of traffic during the construction phase. The applicant has agreed to this.

Following proactive negotiations between the applicant and the LHA, the LHA have confirmed they have no objections to the proposal subject to conditions ensuring that a construction management plan and a scheme to secure repairs to the proposed access route as a consequence of the development is agreed prior to development commencing. In addition, details of access and surfacing both temporary and permanent have been requested prior to the commencement of development. These can be secured through suitably worded conditions and would be required in order to make the development acceptable in highway terms thereby satisfying policies LP2 and LP15 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

8.5 Use of Agricultural land

The site is an area of high grade agricultural land (Grade 1). Grades 1, 2 and 3a is land which is most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver food and non food crops for future generations. Paragraph 112 of the NPPF states that 'where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.'

The site lies in relative close proximity to its intended recipient; Alan Bartlett & Sons Ltd. A review of Natural England's Agricultural Land Classification indicates that the site and that of the recipient site lies amongst an area of high grade agricultural land (1, 2 and 3a) which extends for miles in all directions with the exception of the main settlement of Chatteris to the east. It is considered that to locate the solar farm in areas of low grade agricultural land could be logistically challenging. Notwithstanding this, the landscape impact issues that

may arise in an alternative area of low grade agricultural land, which would likely lead to the development being in closer proximity to the main settlement of Chatteris and therefore nearer to residences has been considered. It is concluded therefore that to locate the development in areas of lower agricultural land to the scale required could generate unacceptable impacts in landscape and visual terms.

Notwithstanding this, the development is proposed for a period of 30 years and therefore considered temporary in development terms. Following this period the land could be reinstated to its former agricultural use. The development would therefore not result in the irreversible loss of high grade agricultural land.

It is also noted that it is not uncommon for land occupied by solar arrays to be used for grazing animals e.g. sheep. Whilst sheep farming is not a prevalent agriculture operation in Fenland, with most land used for arable farming, the site would still have potential for this use where required. In addition, consideration must also be given to the previous EIA determination whereby the secretary of State confirmed that the loss of an area of 12Ha of Grade 1 agricultural land for the solar farm would be a relatively small loss.

In view of the above considerations, it is concluded that whilst the development would likely result in the temporary loss of high grade agricultural land, there is little scope to provide this in lower grade areas without the potential for unacceptable impacts and logistical problems. This balanced with the sustainability benefits the development would bring the temporary loss of high grade agricultural land is acceptable in this instance.

8.6 The Natural Environment

Policy LP16 together with LP19 seek to protect and enhance biodiversity.

The site is not in or within close proximity to any international, national or local nature conservation. The applicant has provided a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Biodiversity Management Plan which considers the impact of the development on protected species and provides biodiversity enhancement proposals such as grassland habitats and pollen and nectar flower-rich mix at the perimeter of the site. The Council's Ecology Officer has reviewed the submission and has raised no objections to the proposal subject to a condition ensuring the monitoring as proposed in the Biodiversity Management Plan is adhered to. In addition the Ecology Officer has requested that a detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is submitted by the applicant prior to the commencement of development. Subject to this, the Officer concludes that the development would result in a net gain in biodiversity.

It is considered therefore that, subject to suitably worded conditions, the development would protect and enhance biodiversity in accordance with LP16 and LP19 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

8.7 The Historic Environment

Policy LP16 and LP18 seek to protect and where possible enhance the historic environment.

Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeology team has identified the site as having potential to hold Iron Age, Medieval, Post Medieval and Roman remains. As such they have recommended that the site is subject to an archaeological evaluation, to be commissioned and undertaken at the expense of the developer, and carried out prior to the granting of planning permission.

This is not an uncommon or unreasonable request but cannot be controlled through a pre-commencement condition as the findings could potentially result in the proposed scheme being undeliverable. Therefore the investigation work would be required to be undertaken prior to the granting of any permission. Whilst the applicant is agreeable to undertake the investigation, the works are understood to be costly and therefore the applicant would seek to undertake the investigation prior to the issuing of any planning permission but following an in-principle, approval from the Planning Committee. The results of the investigation would be provided to CCC Archaeology Team who would then provide further comments in respect of issuing any planning permission.

Given that the development could not be granted permission until such time that results of an initial investigation have been carried out and referred to the Archaeology Team, any items of historic merit would be protected in accordance with LP16 and LP18.

8.8 Flood Risk

Paragraphs 100-104 of the NPPF set out the Government's approach to assessing flood risk when determining planning applications. This is reflected in policy LP14 (Part B) of the Fenland Local Plan. The wider site is located in flood Zone 3. In accordance with LP14 and the NPPF therefore a sequential test is required to ascertain as to whether or not the development could be delivered elsewhere in lower areas of flood risk.

Sequential Test

Whilst the applicant has provided a site specific flood risk assessment (FRA), they have not undertaken a sequential test and therefore has failed to comply with the requirements of the Local Plan and the NPPF in this regard. Notwithstanding this, as previously identified under paragraph 8.5 above, it is noted that the scale of the development requires a large area of land and is required to be located near to the recipient site. A review of the EA's Flood mapping identifies that the only areas of lower flood risk that lie relatively near to the recipient site lie directly adjacent to the A141 Fenland Way and closer to the established settlement of Chatteris. As previously considered, by siting the development closer to the settlement, this could create unacceptable impacts in terms of landscape and visual harm. It is considered therefore that the area proposed and those areas of lower lying land and at higher risk of flooding are the only suitable locations for the development. Sequentially therefore, it is considered that there are no areas of lower flood risk that could reasonably accommodate the development.

Exception Test

Solar Farms are not listed in the vulnerability classification of the NPPG (Paragraph 066) but wind farms are. Given that both are for renewable energy production it is considered reasonable to treat this application as 'Essential

infrastructure' for the purposes of assessing flood risk. Having regard to Table 3: *Flood Risk Vulnerability and flood zone 'compatibility'* of the NPPF Technical Guidance, it is identified that essential infrastructure must meet the exception test which comprises 2 parts. Firstly, the development must be able to demonstrate that it provides a wider sustainability benefit to the community that outweigh flood risk. Secondly the development must be able to demonstrate that development will be safe for its lifetime taking into account vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere and where possible will reduce flood risk overall.

1-Wider sustainability benefit

The applicant considers that as the development comprises a renewable energy electricity generation it offers significant sustainability benefits to the wider community. This is generally agreed in that the production of renewable energy would contribute to national and international targets to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate against the effects of climate change. A recent appeal decision to grant planning permission for an 18Ha area of solar farm observed that such production of renewable energy would be an environmental benefit of considerable weight¹. This environmental benefit is naturally passed onto the community who will benefit from the cleaner environment in the longer term. The Council recognise that the increased use of renewable energy sources is a sustainability benefit². In addition, the development would directly benefit a local established business and therefore the local economy.

It is considered therefore that the development would ultimately provide a wider sustainability benefit to the community.

2-Flood Resilience/ management

The Environment Agency (EA) has raised no objection to the proposal in considering flood risk from main river flood risk sources, observing that the solar panels will be raised off the ground, allowing any flood water to flow underneath and that the base of the transformers will be raised a minimum of 250mm above ground level with the inverters 600mm above ground level.

No comments have yet been received from the Internal Drainage Board, Middle Level Commissioners in respect of surface water flooding further to confirmation received 16 June 2015 advising that they intend to make comment. However, it is anticipated that the same approach would be taken as the EA, in that the main plant will be raised off the ground and will thereby avoid flood water impacts. Notwithstanding this, the applicant advises in their FRA that they have commenced enquiries with the IDB, seeking any further information available on water level management in the area. In addition, advice from the Building Research Establishment (BRE) identifies that '*As solar panels will drain to the existing ground, the impact (upon site drainage) will not in general be significant*'³

The submitted FRA considers the impact of flooding on the development and provides flood management measures in extreme events e.g. signing up to the EA's floodline, site management plan to be prepared in the event of flooding shutting down of power plant and post flooding checks and access routes to areas of higher land such as the main settlement of Chatteris. It is recognised that the site will be infrequently manned which would reduce the risk of human harm in the event of flooding.

In conclusion the development is considered to provide wider sustainability benefits to the community and subject to the development adhering to the recommendations within the submitted FRA, the development is considered to demonstrate that the development will be safe for its lifetime. The development therefore meets the sequential and exceptions test and therefore accords with the requirements of LP14 (Part B) of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

8.8 Other Matters

Impact on amenity & views – representations received

Policies LP2 and LP16 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014 seek to ensure that development does not adversely impact upon the amenity of neighbouring users such as noise, light pollution, loss of privacy and loss of light.

Comments received from the immediate neighbour to the west (Honeysome Farm Bungalow) have been considered. The development is not anticipated to affect the privacy of the neighbouring property given that the development will be no higher than 3.5m (DNO sub-station height). It is not anticipated that the development will affect horses given that the development is low level and static. It is accepted that views north through to east will be disrupted with the presence of the solar farm. However the neighbouring site is already relatively well screened with a mixture of mature trees and shrubs and therefore it is considered that views north through east are already limited at present. Notwithstanding this, the right to a view is not a material planning consideration.

Likewise, the residents located to the east of the site are unlikely to experience visual harm as a result of the development. Indeed one resident has commented that providing the perimeter of the site is adequately screened, they would not wish to object to the proposal. The landscape plan denotes a belt of 2 hedgerow and trees along the full extent eastern perimeter to screen the development and the boundary fence. As previously identified in para 8.3, the impact of the development taking into consideration the proposed landscaping is not considered to be visually harmful.

Glare and Glint

Although not raised as a concern, the potential for glare and glint can cause concern with such development.

The general reflection of the sky (Glare), is unlikely to be a problem, because of the high level of absorbency of the solar panels, necessary for conversion of solar energy. In respect of Glint, the direct reflection of the sun, is also unlikely to be experienced because of the probable direction of reflection back to the sky, and the shielding effect of foliage. In addition, there are no residential or even commercial premises (other than the recipient site) directly south of the development that could otherwise experience glint.

In conclusion, the development by reason of its location and orientation, scale and nature would not give rise to amenity harm through noise, loss of light, light pollution or nuisance and loss of privacy. The development therefore accords with policies LP2 and LP16 in respect of amenity protection.

Creation of a footway

The Town Council have requested that the feasibility of creating a footpath around the site is considered, in order to encourage access into the countryside.

Whilst this has been conveyed to the applicant, the Council's mapping layers indicate a number of public footpaths and permitted accesses already exist in proximity to the site. It is therefore concluded, in considering the CIL tests (necessary, related and reasonable), that it would be unreasonable to insist that this is provided.

Resident comments - alleged errors in the application submission

The resident's comments have been considered. However as there are no specific details in respect of how that the applicant's planning application submission is incorrect or what errors have been identified, little weight can be given to this. The application has been validated and the details contained within have informed the determination of the proposal and would form part of any approved plan schedule.

8.10 Health and Wellbeing

The development would provide a renewable energy source which would assist in reducing climate change and the pursuant effects of this which would aid in the overall health and wellbeing of the community.

8.11 Economic Growth

The development would provide a renewable energy source to an existing business which is ultimately cheaper than the use of fossil fuels from a third party provider. This should provide a direct economic benefit to the business. In addition, the installation and future management of the site would create employment.

9.0 CONCLUSION

9.1 The application has been considered in-line with core planning principles of the NPPF and its associated practice guidance (NPPG) and with policies LP2, LP3, LP14 (including the SPD), LP15, LP16 (including the SPD), LP18 and LP19 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

The development would lead to the introduction of a sustainable energy source and therefore assist in tackling the effects of climate change. Whilst the development would result in a temporary loss of high grade agricultural land, the sustainability benefits of the development outweigh this temporary loss. Notwithstanding this, the land would be reverted back to its current use following the expiry of the development. The development could be accommodated within the site without significant harm to the landscape character of the surrounding area, local highways infrastructure, the natural environment or to the residential amenity of nearby properties. Additionally, the development can be delivered incorporating the necessary flood resilience and can therefore mitigate against the possible effects of flooding.

Therefore and subject to the successful completion of an archaeological evaluation concluding that the development can be delivered without compromising material of archaeological importance, the development is considered to accord with the requirements of national and local policy.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

10.1 GRANT subject to:

- i) an archaeological investigation being submitted within 3 months of the date of this committee with no significant findings resulting in the development being unable to proceed;
- ii) conditions listed below and any additional conditions which may be required by the CCC Historic Environment Team

The Head of Planning be authorised to determine the application after consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee, the a ward councillor for Slade Lode Ward following the completion of the archaeological investigation and no new issues arising.

or

REFUSE in the event that the applicant is unwilling to carry out the archaeology investigation necessary ahead of planning permission being granted.

1. The development permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.

Reason - To ensure compliance with Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The permission hereby granted shall expire no later than 30 years from the date when electrical power is first exported from any of the solar panels to the electricity grid. Written confirmation of the first export date shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than 1 calendar month after the event.

Reason: To limit the long term effects of the development and in recognition of the temporary lifespan of the structures in accordance with policy LP16 of the fenland Local Plan and advice within section 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

3. On expiration of the planning permission or cessation of the use of the land (or any part of the land) as a solar farm for exporting electricity, whichever is the sooner, all buildings, structures, fences, gates, posts, solar panels, fixings, cable and access roads shall be removed from the site (or the relevant part of the solar farm that has ceased operation) within 6 months of the cessation of the use and the land shall revert back to agriculture.

Reason: The site is located in an area of the countryside on an area of high grade agricultural land where development other than agriculture would not normally be permitted. The condition is therefore imposed in accordance with LP3 of the Fenland Local Plan and section 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

4. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (or any Order revoking or re-enacting that order with or without modification) no buildings, structures, fences, gates, posts, solar panels, hardstanding, footings, platforms, pavements, bunding, berms, earthworks or other engineering operations shall be constructed, installed or carried out on the site other than in accordance with the approved details of this planning permission. Reason - To protect the character of the countryside and the visual amenities of the locality and also to retain the value of the land for agriculture and wildlife in accordance with LP16 and LP19 of the Fenland Local Plan and section 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

5. No development shall commence until full details of the design and materials (including colour) to be used for the solar panels and fixings, sub-station buildings, inverter and transformer buildings has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason -To protect the character of the countryside and the visual amenities of the locality in accordance with LP16 and LP19 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

6. Notwithstanding the information submitted, no development shall commence until, a detailed Landscape Management Plan and scheme for the hedge and tree planting and boundary treatments (including the location, design and height of any access gates, fences, fence opening details for wildlife movement and measures for their protection) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall specify species, density, planting size, height and layout. The approved details shall then be implemented prior to the first exportation of solar derived energy from the site and the management plan adhered to throughout the life of the development.

Reason - To ensure effective screening of the development in the interests of landscape character and amenities and to protect and enhance biodiversity interests in accordance with policy LP16 and LP19 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

7. No development shall commence until details of the method and precise route of installing all cabling has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All cabling works shall then be carried out fully in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To protect the character of the countryside, the visual amenities of the locality and also to ensure that drainage courses are protected in accordance with policies LP14, LP16 and LP19 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

8. Prior to the commencement of construction of the solar farm, the site highway improvement works comprising of a passing bay detailed on plan A091287_003 revision A dated 03.09 2015 shall be laid out and constructed in accordance with the Cambridgeshire County Council construction specification and completed to the written satisfaction of the LPA.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety in accordance with policy LP15 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

9. No development shall commence until fully dimensioned construction, surfacing and drainage details of all temporary and permanent accesses into the site, including where the access crosses over the watercourse, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The accesses shall be constructed fully in accordance with these agreed details and thereafter retained and maintained during the lifetime of the development.

Reason: In the interests of Highway safety in accordance with policy LP15 of the Fenland Local Plan 2015.

10. No development shall commence until a construction management plan has been submitted to and been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved plan/statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The statement shall provide for:
 - Parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors
 - routes for construction traffic
 - hours of operation
 - method of prevention of mud being carried onto highway
 - pedestrian and cyclist protection
 - any proposed temporary traffic restrictions and proposals for associated safety
 - Traffic management and associated signage

Reason: In the interests of safe operation of the highway on accordance with LP15 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

11. No development shall commence until a scheme to secure any repairs to the proposed access route required as a consequence of the development have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include proposals for a condition survey of the length of road shown as the access route and a

programme and methodology for any necessary repairs following the completion of construction. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety in accordance with policy LP15 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

12. The development shall be carried out fully in accordance with the submitted Biodiversity Management Plan dated 20 May 2015 including Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4 all dated 20 May 2015 and the Environmental Management Plan dated 20 May 2015. If the development has not commenced by 20 May 2016 then a new Ecological Appraisal and Biodiversity and Environmental Management Plans shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to the commencement of any development.

Reason: In the interests of protecting and enhancing biodiversity in and around the site in accordance with LP16 and LP19 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

13. The development hereby approved shall be carried out fully in accordance with the submitted Flood Risk Assessment reference AMA460 dated 20.05.2015.

Reason - To ensure the development responds to flood risk in accordance with policies LP2 and LP14 of the Fenland Local Plan 2014.

14. Prior to the first exportation of solar derived electricity from the site, a site management plan detailing management of the site in response to potential flooding shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Management plan shall then be adhered to throughout the lifetime of the development.

Reason - To protect people and property from the effects of flooding in accordance with policies LP2 and LP14 of the Fenland Local Plan.

15. Approved Plans

¹ Appeal ref: APP/Z3825/A/14/2219843, page 13, paragraph 60.

² Sustainability Appraisal of the Fenland Local Plan (May 2014), Page 6, Figure 3.

³ BRE: *Planning guidance for the development of large scale ground mounted solar PV systems*: October 2013. Page 17.

Proposed site layout

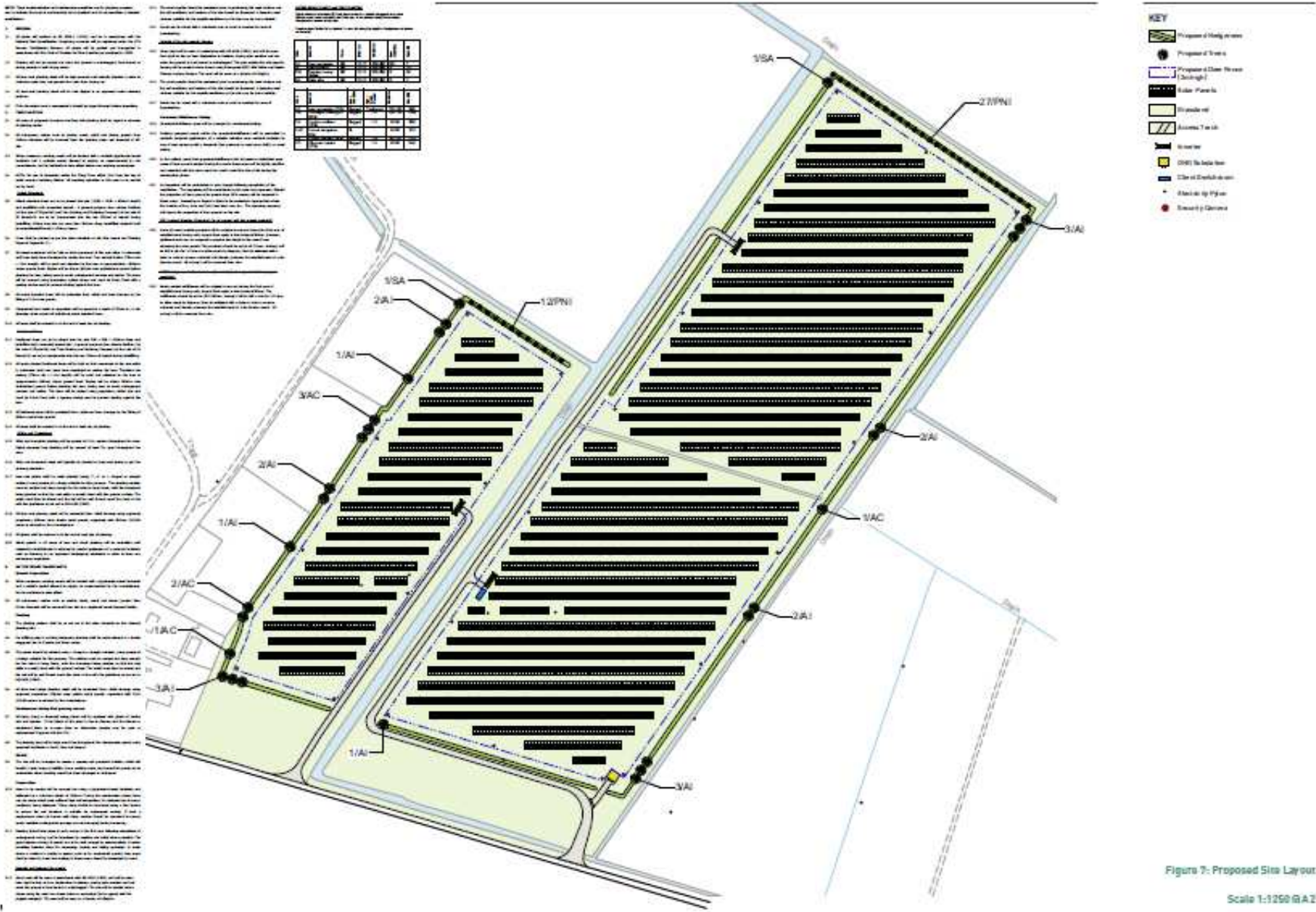
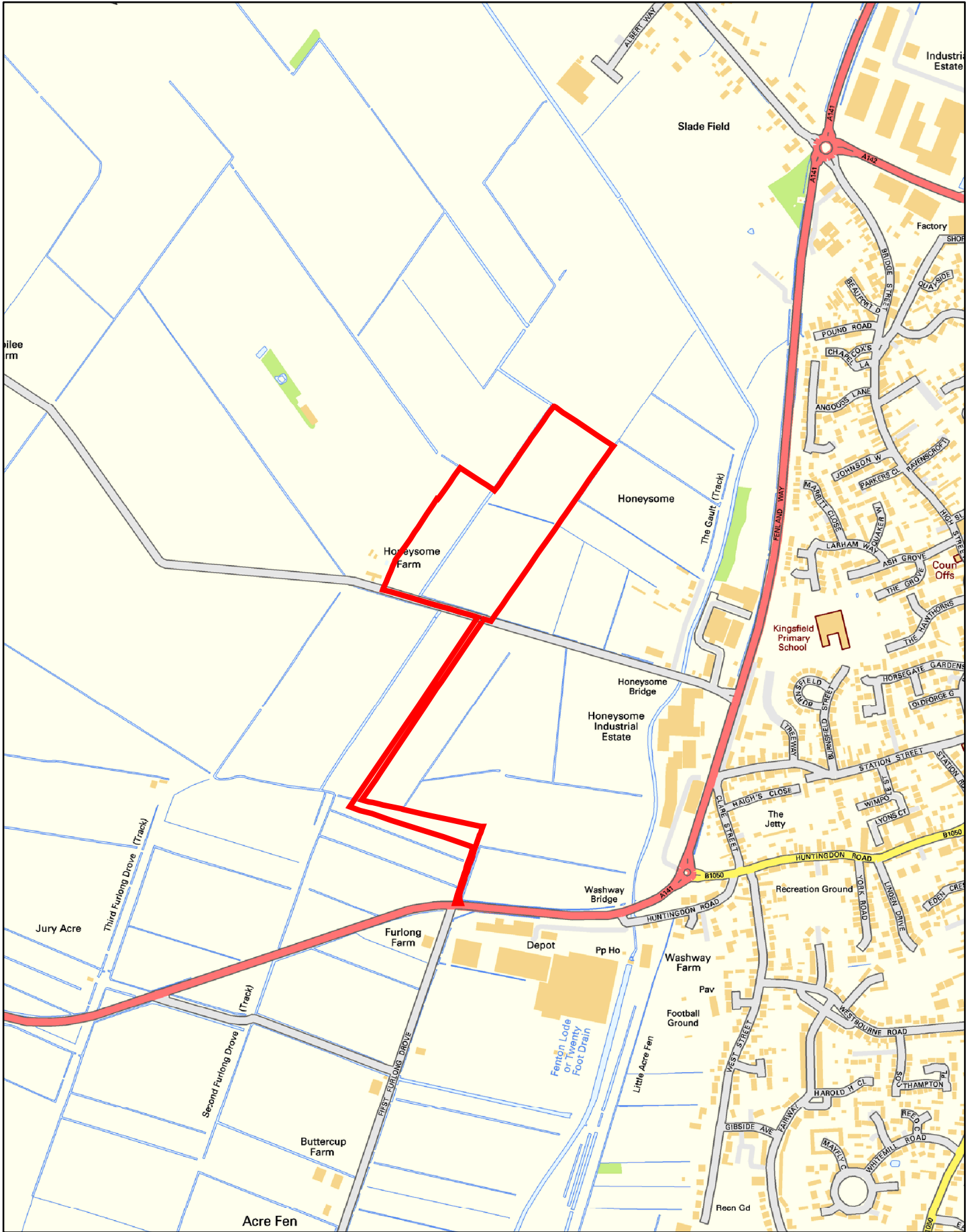


Figure 7: Proposed Site Layout

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