

PHOENIX SOLAR PARK



Agricultural Assessment
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List of Abbreviations

AC	Alternating Current
ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
DC	Direct Current
DNS	Development of National Significance
ha	hectares
km	kilometres
kV	kilovolts
LDP	Local Development Plan
mm	millimetres
MW	megawatts
OS	Ordnance Survey
PV	PhotoVoltaic
SUDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems
TAN	Technical Advice Notes
UK	United Kingdom

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1 This document presents an Agricultural Assessment in support of a planning application for a Solar Park capable of generating up to 9.99 megawatts (MW) alternating current (AC), to be located on land approximately 0.7 kilometres (km) south east of Cosheston, and approximately 2.5 km north east of Pembroke.
- 2 The proposal is classed as 'major development' under The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012 and the application will be submitted to Pembrokeshire County Council for determination.
- 3 The location of the proposed Solar Park site is shown in ES Volume 3 Figure 1.1.
- 4 This Agricultural Assessment considers the impact of the proposed development on the agricultural land which it will occupy and on the existing agricultural businesses.

2 Planning Policy Background

2.1 Planning Policy Wales Edition (PPW11)

- 5 At paragraph 3.58 PPW11 specifies that:

“Agricultural land of grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification system (ALC) is the best and most versatile, and should be conserved as a finite resource for the future.”

- 6 It goes on to say that;

“When considering the search sequence and in development plan policies and development management decisions considerable weight should be given to protecting such land from development, because of its special importance. Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a should only be developed if there is an overriding need for the development, and either previously developed land or land in lower agricultural grades is unavailable, or available lower grade land has an environmental value recognised by a landscape, wildlife, historic or archaeological designation which outweighs the agricultural considerations. If land in grades 1, 2 or 3a does need to be developed, and there is a choice between sites of different grades, development should be directed to land of the lowest grade.”

- 7 Details relating to site selection are provided in Chapter 5 of Environmental Statement Volume 1.

- 8 PPW11 also identifies the importance of a strong rural economy and rural diversification:

Paragraph 5.6.1 The rural economy must develop a wide base if it is to be adaptable and resilient to the challenges it faces now and in the future. Events such as the climate emergency, the coronavirus pandemic and exiting the European Union all bring economic and societal uncertainty, and the ability to respond flexibly to these issues will be key to the future success of rural areas.

Paragraph 5.6.10 Planning authorities should adopt a positive approach to diversification projects in rural areas. Additional small business activities can often be sustainably located on farms and provide additional income streams. Diversification can strengthen the rural economy and bring additional employment and prosperity to communities.

Paragraph 5.6.13 Diversification activities come in many forms and include both agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Activities could include, for example, livestock and crop processing, non traditional livestock and crop farming, tourism projects, farm shops, and making and selling non agricultural products. Diversification can also include renewable energy proposals such as anaerobic digestion facilities or solar and wind

installations, which will help to increase the viability of rural enterprises by reducing their operating costs. These schemes should be supported where there is no detrimental impact on the environment and local amenity.

- 9 Technical Advice Note 6, Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities, Welsh Assembly Government, 2010, acknowledges the potential role of renewable energy within farm diversification proposals;

Paragraph 3.7.2 Many economic activities can be sustainably located on farms. Small on-farm operations such as food and timber processing and food packing, together with services (e.g. offices, workshop facilities, equipment hire and maintenance), sports and recreation services, and the production of non-food crops and renewable energy, are likely to be appropriate uses.

2.2 Local Planning Policy

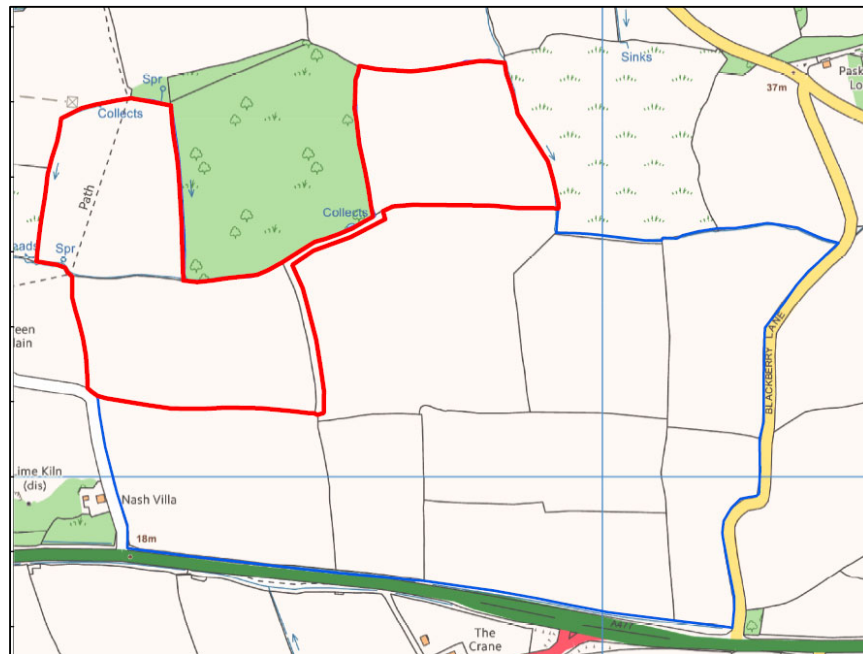
- 10 Relevant local planning policy is set out in the Pembrokeshire County Council Local Development Plan (LDP) which was adopted in February 2013.
- 11 Policy GN.10 relates to farm diversification and states that:
- ‘Diversifying the range of economic activities on a farm will be permitted where the following criteria are met:*
- 1. The proposed use helps to support the continued agricultural operation of the farm;*
 - 2. If a new building is justified it should be sited in or adjacent to an existing group of buildings; and*
 - 3. If a retail use is proposed the scale and scope will not harm the vitality and viability of retail facilities in any nearby settlements, or undermine the retail hierarchy.’*
- 12 As demonstrated within his report, the proposed solar park development would support this policy, supporting the continued agricultural operation of the farm by providing an alternative source of guaranteed income.

3 Agricultural Context

3.1 The Site

- 13 The site occupies agricultural land which falls within the ownership of one agricultural business.

Insert 1: Development Site in Context of Wider Agricultural Holding



3.2 Agricultural Use

- 14 The total farm holding is approximately 210 acres (85 hectares) comprising:

- 7 acres woodland
- 203 acres arable

- 15 Activity across the farm is largely silage and cereal production.

3.3 Agricultural Land Quality

- 16 As detailed above the land is currently used for the production of arable crops and silage.
- 17 An Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey has been undertaken across the site to determine the site-specific agricultural quality. This survey is included in ES Vol 2: Appendix A5.1.

- 18 The survey has identified the proposed fields as comprising a mix of Grade 2, 3a and 3b agricultural land in the following proportions.

Table 3-1: ALC Make-up of Development Site including Link Road Footprint

Grade	Hectares	Proportion
2	5.78	41.1%
3a	1.77	12.6%
3b	6.5	46.3%
Total	14.05	100%

4 Impact Assessment

4.1 Agricultural Land

- 19 The proposal relates to the temporary non-agricultural development of agricultural land, but does not involve the irreversible loss of that from agriculture.
- 20 The installation of the proposed solar park requires limited ground works in the form of pile driven supports for the panels and shallow foundations for the inverter/transformer cabins.
- 21 As part of the decommissioning process the equipment on-site will be dismantled and removed from site. The foundations would be removed to a depth of 1 m below grade or else entirely removed and the soil surface would be restored to its original condition. Disturbed areas would be re-vegetated as appropriate.
- 22 During, the operation of the solar park, the land will be effectively regeneratively farmed. It will be sown as pasture for grazing by sheep, with appropriate native wildflowers also included within the seeding mix. This is a preferred method of management for biodiversity improvements employed, by among others, the National Trust. The anticipated 40 year life of the Phoenix Solar Park fits with the period recommended by Isabella Tree to restore arable land in her book “Re-Wilding of a British Farm” published in 2019.
- 23 The solar park does not represent a permanent non-agricultural use in the same way as housing and, once decommissioned, the site will be available for continued agricultural use, including arable or pasture.
- 24 The soil and land quality will be largely unaffected, and the proposed additional drainage and restorative farming practices may even improve the longer term quality of the land resulting in higher crop yields once the Development is decommissioned. The Development does not therefore compromise the ongoing conservation of best and most versatile agricultural land as a finite resource for the future. Applying the principles of regenerative farming there is also a case to be made that the temporary cessation of intensive farming practices will contribute to the conservation of the land as a future resource.

4.2 Ongoing Farm Business

- 25 The total area of fields within the proposed development boundary of the solar park is equivalent to approximately 18.6% of the land within the wider farm landholding.
- 26 The temporary removal of the moderate yielding arable land from the landholding will not affect the continued viability of the farm business.
- 27 In addition, the solar park will contribute to the diversification of the farm business making it more resilient to changes within the agricultural market (compliance with LDP Policy GN.10 and 5.6.1-5.6.13 of PPW11). The guaranteed financial contribution from the solar park will provide long term, predictable support for the business throughout the operational lifetime of the proposed development.

5 Conclusions

- 28 The proposed development involves the installation of a solar park across approximately 13.84 hectares of agricultural land. The proposal does not involve the irreversible development or damage of that agricultural land and it will therefore be conserved as a finite resource for the future. In policy terms, the proposed development will contribute to the resilience, diversification and future viability of the farming business and therefore complies with LDP Policy GN.10 and PPW10.
- 29 The site will remain in agricultural use (sheep grazing) throughout the operational phase and will be farmed using less intensive farming practices. The Development will not affect the ability of adjoining land to be used for continued agricultural production.