

CHAPTER 11 - LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

INTRODUCTION	209	Landscape Character	215
METHOD OF ASSESSMENT	209	Landscape Designations	227
Assessment Approach	209	Visual Receptors	227
Good Practice Guidance and Data	209	VISUAL ANALYSIS	228
Assessment Process	209	Theoretical Visibility Analysis	228
Prediction Methodologies	210	Viewpoint Analysis	229
PREDICTED EFFECTS AND MITIGATION	210	LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT	236
Construction Phase	211	Effects on Landscape Fabric	236
Operational Phase	212	Effects on Landscape Character	237
Decommissioning Phase	213	Effects on Landscape Designations	243
LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONTEXT	214	VISUAL ASSESSMENT	245
General Description	214	Prediction Methodology	245
Landscape Fabric	215	Settlements	245

Individual Residential Properties	257
Long Distance Recreational Routes	262
Local Public Rights of Way	263
CONCLUSIONS	266
REFERENCES	268



INTRODUCTION

- 11.1 This chapter presents the findings of a landscape and visual impact assessment that has been undertaken to identify the likely effects of the proposed East Stour Solar Farm on the landscape character and visual amenity of the locality.
- 11.2 Following consultation with Ashford Borough Council (the “Council”), the assessment has concentrated on a

5.0km radius study area (from the site centre) which is considered sufficient to identify all likely significant effects on landscape and visual amenity (see **Figures 11.1 – 11.6 of ES Volume 3**). However, some viewpoints were requested by consultees beyond the study area and these have been included within the assessment.

- 11.3 The assessment is illustrated by **Figures 11.1 – 11.9** and by **Viewpoints 1 - 12 (ES Volume 4)** and supporting information is provided in **Appendices 11.1 – 11.3 (ES Volume 2b)**. All references are listed at the end of this chapter.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment Approach

- 11.4 The assessment has examined the effects of the proposed solar farm in the context of the existing landscape and visual baseline which currently contains one operational solar farm within a 5.0km radius, Sellindge Solar Farm. The location of this operational development is shown on **Figure 11.8** for reference and has been considered within the baseline of the assessment.

No consented or proposed solar developments within the planning process are located within the study area.

Good Practice Guidance and Data

- 11.5 The assessment process has been based on the current published good practice Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LI/ IEMA, 2013) and technical guidance for the Visual Representation of Development Proposals (LI, TGN 06/19). The assessment has drawn on information provided within the local development plans and landscape character assessments that cover the study area as well as other relevant guidance documents (see list of references).

Assessment Process

- 11.6 The assessment has involved information review, fieldwork observations and photography, and computer-based data processing and analysis, and has been undertaken in several stages, as presented in the following sections of this chapter:

- Predicted effects and mitigation – a review of the visual characteristics of the proposed development to identify the aspects with the potential to give rise to landscape and/or visual effects and a description of the measures that have been incorporated into the design to mitigate these effects during the design phase.
- Landscape and visual context – a review of the existing landscape and visual baseline of the study area, to identify landscape character, landscape designations and visual receptors in the study area as well as any operational solar schemes within the baseline.
- Visual analysis – visibility analysis using computer-generated zones of theoretical visibility (ZTVs) to identify the locations in the study area from where the East Stour Solar Farm could in theory be visible (based on topography only) as well as a cumulative ZTV to identify potential combined visibility with Sellindge Solar Farm, and a viewpoint analysis to predict the changes to views as a result of the proposed development

from a selection of viewpoints that represent the main visual receptors in the study area, including potential cumulative impacts.

- Landscape assessment – an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed solar farm on landscape fabric, landscape character and landscape designations in the landscape study area in combination with other operational solar schemes within the study area.
- Visual assessment – an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development on the visual amenity of receptors in the visual study area in combination with other operational solar schemes within the study area.
- Conclusions – a summary of the findings of the landscape and visual assessments.

Prediction Methodologies

- 11.7 The prediction methodologies for the viewpoint analysis, landscape assessment and visual assessment are provided at the beginning of

these sections, with a more detailed methodology provided in **Appendix 11.2**.

PREDICTED EFFECTS AND MITIGATION

- 11.8 A detailed description of the proposed development and information on the installation of the various components of this proposed development are provided in the Chapters of this ES as well as the accompanying Design and Access Statement.
- 11.9 From the point of view of landscape and visual assessment, there are two aspects of the proposal that have the potential to cause an effect on landscape character and visual amenity. These are the activities and elements of the proposal that would affect the fabric of the site landscape, and the activities and visual characteristics of the elements that would be visible from the surrounding locality. The nature of solar farm developments is such that these activities and elements would occur in three distinct phases: a short-term construction phase, a long-term operational phase and a short-term decommissioning phase.

Construction Phase

11.10 The construction phase would be approximately 9 months, and the activities and temporary features which would be visible on the site would include:

- Erection of approximately 9,040m of stock style fencing with wooden posts and open wire mesh, CCTV/infra-red camera and up to twelve internal security gates around the development and one new field gate.
- Creation of three temporary construction compounds.
- Temporary lighting – sensor activated and kept to a practicable minimum, with no night time construction activities.
- Installation of the mounting systems and solar arrays.
- Delivery and construction of 20 combined inverter/transformer units.
- Delivery and construction of four substation units (three internal substations, one within each parcel of land and a further central substation).

- Construction of site cabinets (two store cabins, one spare parts container and one welfare cabin).
- Creation of approximately 3,000m of new access tracks within the site. Tracks would be 4.0m wide.
- Upgrade of existing tracks and crossing points to 4.0m wide.
- Excavation of cable trenches including trenches for the connection of the central on site substation to the national grid at Sellindge Converter Station (See **Chapter 6** and the accompanying Figures for details).
- The presence of the HGV deliveries to site and movement of vehicles on-site. Details of the number of deliveries and removals associated with the groundworks during the construction period are contained within **Chapter 8 – Traffic and Transport**.
- Reinstatement works around areas disturbed by the construction activities and all habitat restoration and enhancement measures.

11.11 Many activities will occur in parallel as construction activities move

across the site with the anticipated programme described further in **Chapter 7 – Construction, Operation and Decommissioning** and **Chapter 8 – Traffic and Transport**.

11.12 The visual effects of the various aspects of the construction phase would be temporary, intermittent and short-term with each aspect lasting only part of the 9 month construction programme.

11.13 As the site fields are a mixture of arable and pasture, there would be limited loss of ground vegetation as a result of the temporary site compound, new tracks, inverter/transformer units, store buildings and cable trenches. Ground disturbance would be minimised by good site management with full reinstatement over all temporarily disturbed and excavated areas.

11.14 All the site tracks within the layout would utilise existing field entrances and gaps in field boundaries thereby minimising any potential loss of landscape fabric (excepting the small loss of boundary ‘scrub’ on the western side of the Church Lane at the crossing point to the south). The likely effects of the construction phase on

the existing landscape fabric of the site are considered in the Landscape Assessment below.

Operational Phase

11.15 The main elements that would be visible over the 40-year operational life of the proposed solar farm would be:

- Solar arrays – comprising rows of panels; the face of each panel would be approximately 4.4m deep and mounted at an approximate angle of 200. These would be fixed into the ground on galvanised frames so that the total height above ground of the highest part of the panels would be approximately 3.0m. The panels would be positioned in regular rows facing south with a spacing of approximately 3m to 5.34m between rows (depending on terrain).
- Transformer/ inverter units – 20 in number, rectangular in form, constructed of steel, approximately 6.0m by 3.0m and 3.0m high, and of a colour to be agreed in consultation with the Council, although a green colour

is suggested. Details provided in **Chapter 6 – Development Proposal** and accompanying figures (ES Volume 3).

- Store and spares – 3 cabinets in number, rectangular in form, of GRP construction and approximately 6.0m by 3.0m and 3.0m high and of a colour to be agreed in consultation with the Council, although a green colour is suggested. Details provided in **Chapter 6 – Development Proposal** and accompanying figures (ES Volume 3).
- Welfare cabin – 1 in number, rectangular in form, of GRP construction and approximately 6.0m by 3.0m and 3.0m high and of a colour to be agreed in consultation with the Council, although a green colour is suggested. Details provided in **Chapter 6 – Development Proposal** and accompanying figures (ES Volume 3).
- Site substations – 4 in number, rectangular in form, of GRP construction and approximately 6.0m by 3.0m and 3.0m high and of a colour to be agreed in

consultation with the Council, although a green colour is suggested. Details provided in **Chapter 6 – Development Proposal** and accompanying figures (ES Volume 3).

- Fencing – around the perimeter of the solar array. Main fence panels would be stock style fencing with wooden posts and open wire mesh up to 2m in height. Final style and colour to be agreed in consultation with the Council.
- CCTV - a system of CCTV and/or infra red cameras set at approximately 50m intervals along the deer fencing and set upon poles of a height up to 2m;
- Gates – up to 12 sets, within the fencing and made of welded hot dipped self-coloured galvanised steel. Gates would be double in design, totalling approximately 4m in width and 2m in height. Details provided in accompanying figures (ES Volume 3).
- Internal access tracks – sections of track extending into the site from existing roads and upgraded tracks, approximately 4.0m wide and approximately 3 000m in length in total.

- Seeding between solar panels with native grasses also wild flower seeding. A comprehensive mitigation scheme is also proposed including tree planting, new hedgerows and hedgerow management. See Figure 11.9 for details.
- Periodical visits to the site for operational and grounds maintenance purposes (management of grassed areas and mitigation planting), involving a light van or four-wheel drive vehicle.

11.16 From a landscape and visual perspective, the number of visual elements present over the anticipated 40 year operational phase has been minimised by siting the proposal close to existing infrastructure in the form of an existing solar farm, pylon lines, High Speed 1 (HS1) and local services railway lines, M20 motorway, Sellindge Substation and Converter Station. In addition, some of the solar arrays have been positioned adjacent to existing mature vegetation and woodland. Furthermore, light stock grazing would be able to occur in between the solar panels, tracks etc, thereby minimising the area of land taken out of agricultural use.

11.17 The proposed mitigation scheme will take several years to establish and provide additional screening of the proposed development, although year on year this screening will gradually improve. Therefore, the aspects of the operational phase that are likely to initially give rise to significant effects on landscape character and visual amenity during the operational life are the solar arrays, site tracks, stock style fencing, CCTV, inverter/transformer units, substations, spare parts and storage cabinets and welfare cabin, and these are considered in the Landscape and Visual Assessments below. The proposed development has also then been assessed at a stage ten years after completion of construction when the landscaping proposals are expected to be established, providing some further screening of the proposed development from parts of the study area, and contributing beneficially to the landscape character and landscape fabric of the local area. It should be noted that beyond this ten year period the landscaping proposals would continue to mature and integrate within the locality.

Decommissioning Phase

11.18 The decommissioning phase would be undertaken over a period of less than the 9 month construction period, and the activities and temporary features which would be visible on the site would include:

- The presence of HGV deliveries collecting materials and components from the site and the movement of vehicles on-site.
- Dismantling and removal of the solar array, fencing, inverter/transformer units, substations, CCTV, and storage/spares/welfare cabinets. Excavation and removal of associated hardstanding areas/plinths (where applicable). Access tracks and ancillary infrastructure may remain in place following decommissioning for use by the landowner if required.
- Reinstatement works over the other areas disturbed by the works.

11.19 The effects on landscape and visual amenity during the decommissioning phase would be minimised by the limited duration of the works, by removing all above ground structures

and materials, by leaving all deep below-ground structures in place and by restoring the ground disturbed by the works. All planting proposals associated with this application would remain in place.

- 11.20 The likely effects of the decommissioning phase on the landscape fabric of the site are considered in the Landscape Assessment below.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONTEXT

- 11.21 It is worthwhile noting at this stage that a proposal for a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) is due to come forward into the planning system within 6 – 12 months within part of the application area for the East Stour site. The location of the Pivot Power BESS is shown on Figure 3.1 along with an indicative layout. This future proposal would be located adjacent to existing infrastructure including Sellindge Converter Station and other electrical infrastructure as well as the nearby rail line. Whilst a detailed layout is not yet available, indications are that the majority of

elements within the proposal would be no more than 3.0m in height. Given that this is not currently a submitted application with a finalised layout, and given the low lying location of the site, its position adjacent to several existing developments of greater mass and height as well as adjacent mature woodland, the potential for this development has been noted, but has not been considered further within this assessment.

General Description

- 11.22 The proposed solar farm development would be situated within a series of agricultural fields to the southeast of Ashford, southwest of Sellindge and north of Aldington, near the M20 motorway. The site is formed by three separate parcels of land; the northern parcel is between the M20 and the HS1 rail line, the western parcel is across Bested Hill and the eastern parcel is to the east of Church Lane on fields adjacent to Partridge Plantation and Round Wood. The field pattern is irregular where the fields are bound by woodlands and hedgerows in some places, but fenced in other areas. The East Stour River is located immediately north of the western

land parcel and is generally flanked by mature trees and shrubs on both sides.

- 11.23 A pylon line crosses through the western land parcel and across Bested Hill to link into the Sellindge Converter Station/ substation which is positioned between the M20 and the HS1 rail line and close to the northern and western land parcels of the site. The converter station contains a number of large buildings as well as electrical infrastructure. A sewage works is located immediately east of the converter station.
- 11.24 The landform of the site varies across the three site land parcels. The northern parcel gently slopes down to the southeast towards the HS1 rail line, the western parcel rises gently from the rail line to a high point on Bested Hill and then gently slopes down again to the south and to Church Lane in the northeast, and the eastern land parcel gently slopes down to the northeast from its southern boundary.
- 11.25 A number of public rights of way travel through the site and nearby landscape. Within the northern land parcel of the site Footpath AE432 travels through the solar arrays, with Footpath AE437 travelling to the east

of the solar arrays. Footpaths AE656 and AE657 are located close to the northern boundary of the western site land parcel, and meet Footpath AE457 which then travels through the site between the solar array and Backhouse Wood on the southwestern side of Bested Hill. Within the eastern land parcel of the site Footpath AE459 travels between the solar arrays and between Partridge Plantation and Round Wood. These public rights of way are shown on **Figure 11.7**.

- 11.26 Two public highways bound the proposed site. The M20 motorway bounds the northern boundary of the northern site land parcel, although at this point the motorway is on an embankment surrounded by trees and access would not be available to the site. The northern land parcel would be accessed via an existing gated access point onto Church Lane to the east. The western and eastern site land parcels would also be accessed from Church Lane with a new highway crossing of Church Lane from the western land portion to the eastern land portion.
- 11.27 Overall, the 5.0km radius study area is broadly an undulating landform, varying in height between

approximately 2m and 150m AOD. The lowest part of the study area is within the far south, across the coastal plain, where the landform then rises in a distinct ridge. Centrally within the study area the landform undulates, rising further to form a second distinct ridge just on the northern edge of the study area at the North Downs.

Landscape Fabric

- 11.28 The proposed solar farm development would be located across five arable and pasture fields. The fields are bounded by a mixture of post and wire fencing, hedgerows and woodland blocks where the landscape elements within the site itself are the hedgerows forming some field boundaries within the site boundary as well as one mature tree within the Bested Hill site field positioned within the field away from field boundaries.

Landscape Character

- 11.29 At a national level, Natural England has divided England into 159 National Character Areas (NCAs). The study area falls within four NCAs: NCA 120: Wealden Greensand, NCA 119: North Downs, NCA121: Low Weald

and NCA 123: Romney Marshes, as illustrated on **Figure 11.2**. NCA 120 covers the site itself and the full NCA description for this area is included within **Appendix 11.1**, with the key characteristics for each of the four NCAs set out below.

NCA120 – Wealden Greensand

- A long, narrow belt of Greensand, typified by scarp-and-dip slope topography, including outcrops of Upper Greensand, Gault Clay and Lower Greensand. The Greensand forms escarpments separated by a clay vale: the overall undulating and organic landform – particularly in the west – gives a sense of intimacy to the landscape. Leith Hill in Surrey is the highest point in south-east England.
- There are extensive areas of ancient mixed woodland of hazel, oak and birch, with some areas having been converted to sweet chestnut coppice in past centuries. These areas reflect the diverse geology, including the distinctive chalk grassland elements within the East Hampshire Hangers Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the wooded commons

('charts') of East Surrey and West Kent, and conifer plantations.

- Semi-natural habitats include: remnant lowland heathland, mostly concentrated in West Sussex, Hampshire and West Surrey; the wetlands associated with the River Arun in West Sussex; and unimproved acid grasslands found in commons, parklands, heathland and other areas of unimproved pasture.
- Fields are predominantly small or medium, in irregular patterns derived from medieval enclosure. Boundaries are formed by hedgerows and shaws, with character and species reflecting the underlying soils. On the clay, hedgerows are dense and species-rich, with occasional standard oaks. On more acidic soils they generally consist of hawthorn and blackthorn, also with occasional oak trees, and often trimmed low.
- Agricultural land comprises a mosaic of mixed farming, with pasture and arable land set within a wooded framework. There is a fruit-growing orchard belt in Kent and also around Selborne in Hampshire.

- The rural settlement pattern is a mixture of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and some nucleated villages. Large houses set within extensive parks and gardens are found throughout the area.
- In the east of Kent, the Wealden Greensand has a gentler and more open aspect than in the wooded west. This part of the area is also more marked by development, with the presence of major towns and communication corridors such as the M26, M25 and M20 motorways and railway lines including the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (High Speed 1).
- The local built vernacular includes the use of Greensand, ragstone and, in the west, malmstone, bargate stone, plus dark carrstone patterned in the mortar between stones ('galleting') in Surrey, as well as timber-framing and weatherboarding.
- There are a range of historic landscape features, including field monuments, old military defences, prehistoric tumuli, iron-age hill forts, Roman forts, the Royal Military Canal, small quarries and relics of the iron industry (including

hammer ponds). Sunken lanes cut into the sandstone are a historic and characteristic feature, as are older deer parks and more recent 18th-century parklands.

- Surface water is an important feature across the Greensand, with many streams and rivers passing through the NCA: the Western Rother, Wey, Arun, Medway and the Great and East Stour.
- The Greensand ridge meets the coast of Kent between Folkestone Warren and Hythe. While most of the coastal strip is now built up and protected by sea defences, the undeveloped sea cliffs at Copt Point provide important geological exposures, are designated for their nature conservation interest and fall within the Dover–Folkestone Heritage Coast.

NCA119 – North Downs

- Cretaceous Chalk forms the backbone of the North Downs. A distinctive chalk downland ridge rises up from the surrounding land, with a steep scarp slope to the south providing extensive views across Kent, Surrey and Sussex and across the Channel seascape to France.

- The broad dip slope gradually drops towards the Thames and the English Channel, affording extensive views across London and the Thames Estuary. The carved topography provides a series of dry valleys, ridges and plateaux.
- Chalk soils are predominant across the NCA but the upper part of the dip slope is capped by extensive clay-with-flint deposits. Patches of clay and sandy soils also occur with coombe deposits common in dry valleys.
- The North Downs end at the dramatic White Cliffs of Dover, one of the country's most distinctive and famous landmarks. Most of the coast between Kingsdown and Folkestone is unprotected, allowing for natural processes. The cliffs are home to internationally important maritime cliff-top and cliff-ledge vegetation.
- The area is cut by the deep valleys of the Stour, Medway, Darent, Wey and Mole. The river valleys cut through the chalk ridge, providing distinctive local landscapes which contrast with the steep scarp slope.

- The south-facing scarp is incised by a number of short, bowl-shaped dry valleys, cut by periglacial streams and often referred to as combes. The undulating topography of the dip slope has also been etched by streams and rivers, today forming dry valleys, some of which carry winterbournes that occasionally flow in the dip slope, depending on the level of the chalk aquifer.
- The footslope of the escarpment supports arable cropping, the dominant land use within the NCA. In the east, the richer, loamy soils of the lower dip slope support large tracts of mixed arable and horticultural production.
- Woodland is found primarily on the steeper slopes of the scarp, valley sides and areas of the dip slope capped with clay-with-flints. Wellwooded hedgerows and shaws are an important component of the field boundaries, contributing to a strongly wooded character. Much of the woodland is ancient.
- Tracts of species-rich chalk grassland and patches of chalk heath are important downland

habitats and of international importance.

- Ancient paths, drove roads and trackways, often sunken, cross the landscape and are a distinctive feature of the dip slope. Defensive structures such as castles, hill forts and Second World War installations, and historic parks, buildings and monuments are found throughout.
- Small, nucleated villages and scattered farmsteads including oasts and barns form the settlement pattern, with local flint, chalk and Wealden brick the vernacular materials.
- In the western part of the area, around and to the west of Sevenoaks and into Surrey, there is increased urban development.

NCA121 – Low Weald

- Broad, low-lying, gently undulating clay vales with outcrops of limestone or sandstone providing local variation.
- The underlying geology has provided materials for industries including iron working, brick and glass making, leaving pits, lime

kilns and quarries. Many of the resulting exposures are critical to our understanding of the Wealden environment.

- A generally pastoral landscape with arable farming associated with lighter soils on higher ground and areas of fruit cultivation in Kent. Land use is predominantly agricultural but with urban influences, particularly around Gatwick, Horley and Crawley.
- Field boundaries of hedgerows and shaws (remnant strips of cleared woodland) enclosing small, irregular fields and linking into small and scattered linear settlements along roadsides or centred on greens or commons. Rural lanes and tracks with wide grass verges and ditches.
- Small towns and villages are scattered among areas of woodland, permanent grassland and hedgerows on the heavy clay soils where larger 20th-century villages have grown around major transport routes.
- Frequent north–south routeways and lanes, many originating as

drove roads, along which livestock were moved to downland grazing or to forests to feed on acorns.

- Small areas of heathland particularly associated with commons such as Ditchling and Chailey. Also significant historic houses often in parkland or other designed landscapes.
- The Low Weald boasts an intricate mix of woodlands, much of it ancient, including extensive broadleaved oak over hazel and hornbeam coppice, shaws, small field copses and tree groups, and lines of riparian trees along watercourses. Veteran trees are a feature of hedgerows and in fields.
- Many small rivers, streams and watercourses with associated watermeadows and wet woodland.
- Abundance of ponds, some from brick making and quarrying, and hammer and furnace ponds, legacies of the Wealden iron industry.
- Traditional rural vernacular of local brick, weatherboard and tile-hung buildings plus local use of distinctive Horsham slabs as

a roofing material. Weatherboard barns are a feature. Oast houses occur in the east and use of flint is notable in the south towards the South Downs.

NCA123 – Romney Marshes

- Romney Marshes is a flat, open and agricultural landscape, with distinctive drainage dykes, marshes and open skies. The treeless, low lying, reclaimed marshland is now maintained by manmade sea walls, drainage and river flood plain improvements.
- The majority of the land area is below high tide level, with the beach ridge, concrete sea walls and tidal embankments forming the main barriers to flooding by the sea.
- Internationally important for its geological and geomorphological features, the geology is dominated by coastal deposits of shingle. Dungeness and Rye Harbour comprise the largest cusped foreland in Europe.
- Wind-blown sand has formed sand dunes and, behind the shingle

beach, alluvial deposits have developed, giving rise to highly productive loamy and clayey soils with high groundwater.

- The diverse coastal landscape and hinterland host a number of habitats, including sand and shingle beaches, sand dunes, intertidal mud and sand, saline lagoons, natural freshwater pits and ditches, salt marsh, grazing marsh and reedbeds.
- Former sea cliffs, mainly of sandstone, mark the post-glacial shoreline and form a notable feature overlooking Romney Marshes at Lympne, Rye, Winchelsea, Hythe and Pett.
- The river valleys of the Rother and Brede are notable in the west, separated by sandstone ridges. The rivers Tillingham and Brede join the Rother Estuary at Rye.
- The irregular small- and medium-sized fields are almost entirely bounded by a complex ditch network, which is critical for providing drainage and irrigation for the marsh as well as supporting a range of species.

- Low woodland cover features throughout, with clumps of trees and patches of woodland found on the higher ground and around settlements. The agricultural land of arable fields and the pasture land, predominantly grazed by sheep, are of high quality. Although much reduced in extent, some traditional wet grazing marsh is still present.
- The area is home to several nationally scarce and rare species such as water voles, the medicinal leech, the hairy dragonfly and England's only remaining population of the Sussex emerald moth.
- Narrow, straight roads and winding lanes link the widely dispersed settlements, with their distinctive churches. The overall open character provides a sense of remoteness.
- Heritage assets include defensive structures such as the Royal Military Canal, Martello towers and more recent Second World War structures. Other historic features include old sea walls, medieval settlement sites and churches,

including a high number of lost church sites. The ancient towns of Lydd, New Romney, Rye and Winchelsea have a rich heritage.

- Settlement predominantly consists of dispersed farmsteads, with a few small villages and hamlets. Larger settlements are present at Rye, New Romney and Lydd. There is some nucleated settlement on higher ground, including the Isle of Oxney and the raised area around Appledore.
- Brick is the predominant walling material across the area, and roofs are commonly plain clay tile. There are also some timber-framed buildings, with the framing clad in white-painted weatherboarding or hung tile.
- The 20th and 21st-century coastal developments include Dungeness Power Station, Little Cheyne Court Wind Farm and associated recreation amenities such as caravan sites, holiday parks and golf courses.

11.30 The study area is characterised by a series of more detailed studies. The Landscape Assessment of Kent (KCC

2004) was undertaken by Jacobs Babbie in 2004 and covers the whole 5.0km radius study area, as illustrated by **Figure 11.2**. The landscape falls mainly within 11 landscape character areas (LCAs) within the study area with the site itself located predominantly within the Upper Stour Valley LCA. The main characteristics of each of the LCAs are set out below along with the sensitivity rating given by the study. This study rates sensitivity as very high, high, moderate, low or very low.

UPPER STOUR VALLEY LCA [SITE IS LOCATED WITHIN THIS LCA]

Characteristic features:

- *Flat, open valley landscape enclosed by outliers of Greensand;*
- *Mixed farming including a high percentage of arable; and*
- *Historic mills on river.*

Sensitivity: Low.

ALDINGTON RIDGE LCA

Characteristic features:

- *Raised landscape with steep slopes down to neighbouring character areas.*

- *Good quality loam soils;*
- *Mixed, generally open farmland;*
- *Landslips in association with the underlying clays; and*
- *Dramatic views to the Low Weald, Romney Marsh and the Downs.*

Sensitivity: High.

ALDINGTON:LYMPNE LCA

Characteristic features:

- *Rounded slopes;*
- *Deciduous woodland dominates the scarp;*
- *Gentle lower slopes with arable cultivation; and*
- *Large properties with views over the marsh.*

Sensitivity: High.

This LCA is not discussed further within this assessment as this LCA overlaps with the Lympe Greensand Escarpment LCA of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (see **paragraph 11.34 on page 237**) and discussion of landscape character is made in reference to the Lympe Greensand Escarpment LCA.

BRABOURNE LEES MIXED FARMLAND LCA

Characteristic features:

- *Gentle undulating landscape with fine loamy soils locally subjected to waterlogging;*
- *Medium-sized woodlands locally important;*
- *Mixed farmlands; and*
- *Remnant heathy habitats such as valley bogs, acid grassland and woodlands.*

Sensitivity: Moderate.

BRABOURNE VALE LCA

Characteristic features:

- *Gentle sloping landform with poor quality soils subject to waterlogging;*
- *Mixed farmland including a large percentage of grassland; and*
- *Small copses and larger woodlands locally, of high nature conservation value.*

Sensitivity: Moderate.

HYTHE ESCARPMENT: LYMPNE LCA

Characteristic features:

- Sandstone scarp with rough grassland;
- Remnant hedgerows;
- Unimproved agricultural grasslands; and
- Scrub at base of slopes.

Sensitivity: Very high.

This LCA is not discussed further within this assessment as this LCA overlaps with the Lympne Greensand Escarpment LCA of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (see **paragraph 11.33 on page 221**) and discussion of landscape character is made in reference to the Lympne Greensand Escarpment LCA.

MERSHAM FARMLANDS LCA

Characteristic features:

- Undulating landscape with good quality soils;
- Mixed farmland with small-scale pastoral farming and more open arable fields; and
- Small copses and gappy hedgerows.

Sensitivity: Moderate.

This LCA is not discussed further within this assessment as this LCA is covered by the Ashford Borough Landscape Character Assessments (see **paragraph 11.32 on page 233**) and discussion of landscape character is made in reference to the LCAs within Ashford Borough.

OLD ROMNEY SHORELINE WOODED FARMLANDS LCA

Characteristic features:

- Flat, or gently undulating with distinctive ridges and valleys dropping down to Romney Marsh;
- Large broadleaf or mixed woodlands;

- Small-scale pattern of pastoral fields;
- Scattered settlement;
- Historic churches along the Old Romney Shoreline; and
- Remote feel.

Sensitivity: Moderate.

This LCA is not discussed further within this assessment as this LCA is covered by the Ashford Borough Landscape Character Assessments (see **paragraph 11.32 on page 233**) and discussion of landscape character is made in reference to the LCAs within Ashford Borough.

ROMNEY MARSH: LYMPNE LCA

Characteristic features:

- Drainage ditches and canal. Reed vegetation;
- Flat and remote;
- Rich arable and pasture; and
- Scrubby, wind blown trees around settlements.

Sensitivity: Moderate.

SELLINDGE PLATEAU FARMLANDS LCA

Characteristic features:

- *Flat to undulating plateau farmlands on good quality soils;*
- *Open arable landscape with pasture locally important on more undulating ground; and*
- *Small copses and gappy hedgerows on undulating ground.*

Sensitivity: Moderate.

STOWTING: POSTLING VALE LCA

Characteristic features:

- *Relatively open;*
- *Intensively farmed, grass-scarp slopes and wooded hilltops; and*
- *Motorway and ribbon development at foot of scarp on edge of area.*

Sensitivity: Very high.

This LCA is not discussed further within this assessment as this LCA overlaps with the Postling Scarp and Vale LCA of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (see **paragraph 11.33 on page 222**) and discussion of landscape character is made in reference to the Postling Scarp and Vale LCA.

11.31 No landscape character assessment has been published within Folkestone and Hythe District. However, Ashford Borough Council has published two landscape character assessments pertinent to this assessment. In 2005 Studio Engleback published a landscape character assessment on behalf of the council covering parts of the 'urban fringe' of the borough. From this study, six LCAs are located within the study area, although none cover the site itself (see **Figure 11.3** for details). Each LCA is then split down further into smaller District Landscape Types (DLTs), although only the LCAs are considered further within this assessment as they cover a similar scale and level of detail as the other landscape character assessments within the study area. A brief description of each of the LCAs are set out below along with the sensitivity rating given by the study. This study rates sensitivity as high, moderate or low through its policy recommendations.

ALDINGTON RIDGE LCA

- *Part of the Wealden Greensand Ridge affording panoramic views over Romney Marsh to Dungeness.*

Sensitivity: Moderate/ high.

BRABOURNE VALE LCA

- *Located to the north of Hinxhill extending from Naccolt on the edge of the Great Stour Floodplain.*

Sensitivity: Moderate/ high.

BRABOURNE LEES MIXED FARMLANDS LCA

- *Undulating farmed landscape with scattered woodlands and a distinctive pattern of linear tree cover and copses.*

Sensitivity: High.

MERSHAM FARMLANDS LCA

- *Open, undulating farmed landscape of predominantly large arable fields that have lost hedges, but with some smaller scale pasture and intact hedges around Mersham.*

Sensitivity: Low to High.

OLD ROMNEY SHORELINE WOODLAND FARMLANDS LCA

- *Undulating mixed farmland with generally strong hedgerows interspersed with old coppiced woodlands.*

Sensitivity: Moderate/high.

UPPER STOUR VALLEY LCA

- *An extensive open valley floor landscape of predominantly arable farming where hedgerows have been removed during the conversion to unimproved pasture and riparian vegetation lost as cultivation extends close to the river banks.*

Sensitivity: Low to High.

11.32 The second landscape character assessment within Ashford Borough was undertaken in 2009 by Jacobs and covers the 'rural fringes' of the borough, including the site itself. Nine LCAs are identified, as indicated on **Figure 11.3** and the site is located partly within Evegate Mixed Farmlands LCA and partly within East Stour Valley LCA. The main characteristics of each of the LCAs are set out below along with the sensitivity rating given by the study. This study rates sensitivity as high, moderate or low.

EAST STOUR VALLEY LCA [SITE IS PARTLY LOCATED WITHIN THIS LCA]

Key characteristics:

- *Well vegetated East Stour River cuts through valley with land rising to Bested Hill in the north;*

- *Mosaic like pastoral field pattern;*
- *Mixed and broadleaf woodland blocks;*
- *Mature isolated oak trees within pasture;*
- *Narrow lanes follow the undulations of the landscape, often hedgerow and ditch lined;*
- *Some recent individual housing sporadically located along the lanes; and*
- *Scattered farmsteads set back from the lanes.*

Sensitivity: High.

EVEGATE MIXED FARMLANDS LCA [SITE IS PARTLY LOCATED WITHIN THIS LCA]

Key characteristics:

- *Undulating topography;*
- *Intensively farmed landscape with small pockets of pasture;*
- *Comprehensive network of tree cover provided by highway planting, hedgerows and a block of broadleaf ancient woodland;*
- *Ponds and vegetation lined water courses;*

- *Fragmentation caused by major infrastructure routes;*
- *Large electricity sub station; and*
- *Converted oast houses at Evegate Business Park.*

Sensitivity: Low.

BRABOURNE FARMLANDS LCA

Key characteristics:

- *Gently undulating landform which forms part of the immediate foreground to the Kent Downs AONB;*
- *Series of narrow streams run perpendicular to the Downs;*
- *Mature pollard ash trees mark woodland boundaries;*
- *Isolated oak trees set within arable fields;*
- *Series of parallel narrow lanes run perpendicular to the Downs;*
- *Clusters of vernacular style buildings; and*
- *Traditional and more recent residential development is strewn along the lanes.*

Sensitivity: High.

BRABOURNE ARABLE FARMLANDS LCA

Key characteristics:

- *Intensive arable land;*
- *Large, open, extensive fields;*
- *Extensive hedgerow loss and limited tree cover;*
- *Dramatic panoramic views of the Kent Downs AONB;*
- *Narrow water courses originating from a series of springs along the foot of the Downs; and*
- *Isolated farms.*

Sensitivity: Moderate.

BRABOURNE LEES HILLY FARMLANDS LCA

Key characteristics:

- *Hilly topography;*
- *Strong sense of enclosure provided by woodland blocks, hedgerows, landform and settlement;*
- *Pasture for horses and livestock;*
- *Chestnut coppice and evergreen woodland blocks;*
- *Recent development within Brabourne Lees; and*

- *Large, historic farm houses to the south amid a parkland landscape of pasture and isolated trees.*

Sensitivity: Moderate.

ALDINGTON RIDGELINE LCA

Key characteristics:

- *High ridgeline topography;*
- *North Downs frame the views to the north;*
- *Mixed farmland with enclosed pasture immediately surrounding settled areas;*
- *Loss of historic field pattern where land is intensively farmed;*
- *Small woodland copses, tree belts and native hedgerows;*
- *Very distinctive ragstone church and remains of Archbishops Palace isolated from main settlement of Aldington;*
- *Strong use of ragstone and locally distinctive chequered brick;*
- *Farm building conversions; and*
- *Recent development within Aldington situated along a Roman road.*

Sensitivity: High.

BONNINGTON WOODED FARMLANDS LCA

Key characteristics:

- *Undulating landform which forms part of the immediate foreground to the Kent Downs AONB which rises to the east;*
- *Mixed farmland with small fields;*
- *Deciduous and evergreen enclosing woodland blocks;*
- *Native hedgerows with large standard oak trees;*
- *Isolated oaks trees set within pasture;*
- *Strong sense of enclosure;*
- *Equestrian grazing and land use;*
- *Narrow and hedge lined roads;*
- *The non nucleic settlement of Bonnington with traditional houses and stone farm buildings; and*
- *Recent housing development arranged around closes.*

Sensitivity: Moderate.

OLD ROMNEY SHORELINE SETTLEMENTS LCA

Key characteristics:

- *Undulating landform slopes southwards towards Romney Marsh;*
- *Open views out of the area across the Romney Marsh to the south;*
- *Mixed land use;*
- *Higher wooded ground to the west, which would have been an island prior to reclamation of the surrounding marshes;*
- *Numerous small settlements along the former shoreline; and*
- *Distinctive stone churches are prominent landmark features.*

Sensitivity: High.

ROYAL MILITARY MARSHLANDS LCA

Key characteristics:

- *Flat, low lying marshland which forms part of the immediate foreground to the Kent Downs AONB which rise to the east;*
- *Rising Downs to the east, and higher ground to the north provide enclosure to the marsh;*

- *Large irregularly shaped arable fields, divided by a network of reed filled drainage ditches;*
- *Sporadic clumps of scrubby vegetation;*
- *Open and unvegetated Royal Military Canal;*
- *Recent, large scale agricultural buildings at Bridge Farm;*
- *Narrow, unenclosed lane skirts the edge of the marsh to the east; and*
- *Transmission towers.*

Sensitivity: High.

11.33 A landscape character assessment has also been undertaken across the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As yet this report is unpublished but it is understood that publication is imminent and the AONB kindly provided the relevant information as their preferred update to the 1995 published character assessment of the AONB. **Figure 11.4** illustrates that there are two main LCAs from this study that fall within the 5.0km radius study area and the key characteristics identified within the character assessment are set out below. No specific sensitivity ratings are given within the study.

POSTLING SCARP AND VALE LCA

Key characteristics:

- *Underlying geology comprises layers of Cretaceous chalk forming the scarp, with mudstone in the vale, and sandstone in the south around Sandling. Vale has areas of deposited sand, gravel, clay and alluvial material;*
- *Soils on the chalk scarp are thin and dry. Those in the vale are more fertile and often sticky;*
- *Landform comprises a strongly-crenelated and steep south-facing scarp, with an undulating landscape to the south. Isolated conical hills are distinctive features. Springs and ponds occur at the base of the scarp;*
- *Woodland blocks and shaws throughout the vale, and a distinctive band of trees and shrubs at the base of the scarp slope. Large numbers of ash trees;*
- *Land use predominantly agricultural, with arable and pastoral fields. Also pockets of woodland, parkland, recreation and transport uses;*

- Extensive semi-natural habitats including chalk grassland, scrub and woodland;
- Archaeological sites concentrated on scarp and hill tops. Strong estate influences in the south of the LCA;
- LCA is adjacent to urban areas, but within the LCA, settlement limited to scattered farms, and small historic springline villages with a dispersed pattern. Vernacular buildings constructed of red brick, tile, ragstone and flint;
- Network of historic lanes and tracks, with east-west motorway and rail corridor superimposed;
- Contrasting textures between the smooth outlines of the scarp and the wooded farmland at the base. Distinctive landforms of hills add to sense of place;
- Outstanding views from the scarp and hill tops across the patchwork of fields and woodlands in the vale to the south;
- Popular for recreation and walking, with the North Downs Way, Saxon

Shore Way and Elham Valley Way crossing the LCA; and

- Sense of tranquillity away from large settlements and transport infrastructure.

LYMPNE GREENSAND ESCARPMENT LCA

Key characteristics:

- Underlying geology of the escarpment is Greensand, with layers of clay causing it to slump. Soils on the escarpment are generally pitted and unstable;
- Landform dominated by a sloping south-facing escarpment (a former cliff line), with undulating land above, and the flat, artificially drained land of Romney Marsh below;
- Spring-fed streams flow down the escarpment into the Royal Military Canal at the base. This constructed watercourse and the associated Canal Cutting help to drain Romney Marsh;
- Woodland and scrub on the escarpment, with denser woodlands to the west, and strong

lines of trees (including pollards) following the Royal Military Canal and other watercourses;

- A range of land uses, including pastoral and arable agriculture, nature conservation and recreation. Fields generally irregular in shape, and bounded by hedgerows on the scarp, and by ditches on Romney Marsh;
- Semi-natural habitats include extensive grassland (The Roughs) and woodland blocks (mainly in the west). Also watercourses, scrub and hedgerows;
- Rich archaeological and cultural heritage, particularly related to coastal defence, including Lemanis Roman fort, Lympne Castle, Royal Military Canal and sound mirror;
- Roman road along top of escarpment, and winding lanes on Romney Marsh;
- A strongly patterned and textured landscape, showing variations in different parts of the LCA;
- Popular for recreation, with Royal Military Canal Path providing easy

access from Hythe. Port Lympne is a popular visitor attraction; and

- *Spectacular views across Romney Marsh from the top of the escarpment. The escarpment forms the backdrop to views inland from Romney Marsh.*

Landscape Designations

National Landscape Designations

- 11.34 There is one national landscape designation located within the study area. This is the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and its boundary is shown on **Figure 11.5**. At its closest point, this designation is located approximately 1.3km south and 3.3km northeast of the closest part of the proposed development.
- 11.35 Under Section 87 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, as amended by the Environment Act 1995, and then by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) (CROW Act), Natural England protects an AONB so as to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. AONBs differ from National Parks in that AONBs are

not designated for the purpose of promoting opportunities for public enjoyment and understanding of their special qualities by the public, that is, there is not a recreational purpose. This is discussed in more detail later within the assessment.

Local Landscape Designations

- 11.36 Policy ENV3a and 3b of the Ashford Local Plan 2030 (ABC, 2019) is a boroughwide policy. Policy ENV3a (Landscape Character and Design) sets out a series of landscape characteristics that development proposals within the borough must have regard to.
- 11.37 Policy ENV3b (Landscape Character and Design in the AONBs) broadly seeks to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONBs within the borough in relation to development proposals within these national designations, but also lists a set of circumstances under which proposals affecting the setting of AONBs within the borough would be permitted.
- 11.38 Policy ENV3 is discussed in more detail later within this report.

Visual Receptors

- 11.39 The visual receptor locations within the study area are illustrated on **Figure 11.6** and include:

- Settlements – the villages and hamlets of Aldington, Smeeth, Stone Hill, Sellindge, Brabourne Lees, Mersham, Brabourne, Barrowhill, Lympne, Bonnington, and Aldington Firth;
- Individual residential properties – scattered cottages and farmsteads;
- Visitor attractions – attractions open to the public are limited within the area mainly to a few fishing lakes, Hatch Park deer park and Port Lympne Wildlife Park. Sawton Mill can be accessed by public rights of way but does not seem to be open to the public;
- Long distance recreational routes – The North Downs Way National Trail, Saxon Shore Way and Royal Military Canal Path long distance routes and Sustrans route 2;
- Local public rights of way – footpaths, bridleways and byways open to all traffic (BOATs);

- Public highways – including the M20, A20, B2067, and a network of minor roads; and
- Passenger rail routes – HS1 running centrally through the study area between the Channel Tunnel and Central London.

11.40 The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Access Lands Maps on the Natural England website have been checked and there are three very small areas of access land within 5km of the site. The first area is at Gibbins Brook, approximately 2.6km east of the site at its closest point. The other two areas are north of the site around Brabourne Downs at a distance of approximately 4.2km from the proposed site. These three areas are indicated on **Figure 11.6**.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

Theoretical Visibility Analysis

11.41 The East Stour Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) has been generated using a computer-based intervisibility package, the Ordnance Survey Digital Terrain Model (DTM) with height data

at 5m intervals and a model of the proposed East Stour Solar Farm. This ZTV is shown within **Figure 11.1**. However, it should be noted that this ZTV is based on bare terrain topographical data only. It does not take into account the screening effects of minor topographic features, vegetation such as woodland and hedgerows and built structures and therefore tends to over-emphasise the extent of visibility in this type of undulating landscape, providing a worst case scenario.

11.42 There is one operational solar farm within a 5.0km radius, with no permitted or proposed solar farms identified within the study area at the current time by this assessment (January 2022). This operational scheme (Sellindge Solar Farm) has been included within the baseline of the assessment and its location is shown on **Figure 11.8**, located approximately 50m east of the proposed development at its closest point.

11.43 **Figure 11.1** illustrates the potential visibility of the proposed East Stour solar panels only, using the tops of the solar panels as the targets and so illustrates the locations in the study

area where topography would permit views of at least these portions of the solar farm. This ZTV suggests that the potential visibility of the proposed solar farm would mainly be contained within approximately 2.5km of the site centre, with further intermittent potential visibility extending out across limited further parts of the 5.0km radius study area. The deeper blue tone denotes that a greater proportion of the solar panels would potentially be visible. From the vast majority of the study area the proposed development would be entirely screened by intervening topography, indicated where no blue tone is visible.

11.44 However, in reality, as is illustrated on the ground by the existing operational Sellindge Solar Farm, surface features, such as woodland, tree belts, built form etc, would fragment and reduce the extent of most of these zones of theoretical visibility, and may also reduce the amount of the proposed solar farm visible from any given location, particularly given the limited height of the proposal and the existing woodlands adjacent to the site, where existing vegetation can be a very effective screening element.

- 11.45 The ZTV does not illustrate the decrease in the scale of the proposal with increased distance from the development which is better illustrated by the viewpoint analysis (see section below and **Appendix 11.2**).
- 11.46 A cumulative ZTV has been produced to illustrate the potential visibility of the operational Sellindge Solar Farm in conjunction with the East Stour proposal, as illustrated by **Figure 11.8** and the locations of these two solar schemes are shown on the CZTV. This CZTV indicates the very limited potential visibility of the operational Sellindge Solar Farm within the study area suggesting scattered potential combined visibility of the operational scheme in combination with the proposal. It should be noted that in reality the actual visibility of the operational Sellindge scheme is far more contained and limited than suggested by the ZTV due to the screening effects of surrounding elements such as vegetation and the railway embankment, and it is expected that the combined visibility of both schemes would also be far more limited than the CZTV suggests as well.

Viewpoint Analysis

Viewpoint Locations

- 11.47 The viewpoints were selected through consultation with officers of the Council and the Kent Downs AONB. These viewpoints were selected to represent the most open views of the proposed solar farm from a range of distances, directions and viewpoint receptor locations, as well as to illustrate a few locations which are outside of the study area requested by the AONB officer. The viewpoints are listed in **Table 11.1** below and the locations of these viewpoints are shown on the figures (**Figures 11.1 – 11.8**).
- 11.48 A detailed description of the viewpoint panoramas and the potential changes that would occur to each through the introduction of the proposed development are contained within **Appendix 11.2**. These findings are summarised below in **Table 11.2**. The findings in **Table 11.2** take into account the screening effects of intervening topography, existing vegetation and built form and assume excellent visibility conditions, and

have been directly assessed through field visits to each viewpoint by the landscape assessor. Those landscape and visual effects that may potentially be significant in accordance with the methodology set out within **Appendix 11.2** are highlighted in grey in **Table 11.2** below. Overall effects of major/moderate and above are considered significant and are shaded dark grey in **Table 11.2** below. Overall effects of moderate+ may be significant if experienced over a sustained length of a route or over most of a zone, area or location, and overall effects of moderate may contribute to significance if combined with greater changes at the same general location, whereas moderate/minor+ or lower changes are unlikely to result in significant changes to views or landscape character.

- 11.49 A detailed description of how the viewpoint graphics were produced is contained in **Appendix 11.3**.

Table 11.1 - Viewpoint Locations

Vp No	Location	Easting	Northing	Elevation (approx)	Distance (km)	Bearing (approx) to site	Landscape Character Type	Landscape Designations	Recreational and Transport Routes	Visual receptors
1	Footpath AE432 near Park Wood	607769	138808	59m AOD	0.02	S	Evegate Mixed Farmlands	None	Public Right of Way	Walkers
2	Footpath AE457 near The Paddock	607658	137343	58m AOD	0.09	N	East Stour Valley	None	Public Right of Way	Walkers
3	Church Lane near Bested House	608131	137737	57m AOD	0.16	W & SE	East Stour Valley	None	Local road	Motorists, nearby residents
4	Junction of footpaths AE459 and AE460 near Lower Park Farm	607875	137055	53m AOD	0.38	NE	East Stour Valley	None	Public Right of Way	Walkers
5	Harringe Lane by Harringe Bridge	609425	137904	68m AOD	0.77	W	Upper Stour Valley	None	Local road over HS1	Motorists and rail passengers
6	Footpath AE477 near Grove Cottage, Aldington	607625	136220	79m AOD	1.2	N	Aldington Ridgeline	None	Public Right of Way	Walkers, nearby residents
7	Footpath AE474 west of Aldington	607222	136331	85m AOD	1.16	N	Aldington Ridgeline	None	Public Right of Way	Walkers

Vp No	Location	Easting	Northing	Elevation (approx)	Distance (km)	Bearing (approx) to site	Landscape Character Type	Landscape Designations	Recreational and Transport Routes	Visual receptors
8	Footpath AE485 Saxon Shore Way by Roman Road near Postling Green	607294	135743	96m AOD	1.7	N	Aldington Ridgeline	Kent Downs AONB	Local road, long distance footpath	Motorists and walkers
9	PRoW AE299 North Downs Way by Kingsmill Down	610011	142777	178m AOD	4.58	SW	Stowting: Postling Vale/ Postling Scarp & Vale	Kent Downs AONB	National Trail, local road	Walkers and motorists
10	PRoW AE299 North Downs Way by Brabourne Lane	611063	142176	172m AOD	4.69	SW	Stowting: Postling Vale/ Postling Scarp & Vale	Kent Downs AONB	National Trail	Walkers
11	Car park by PRoW HE356 North Downs Way at Farthing Common	613620	140350	179m AOD	5.6	SW	Stowting: Postling Vale/ Postling Scarp & Vale	Kent Downs AONB	National Trail, main road	Walkers and motorists
12	PRoW AE143 North Downs Way through Wye Downs Nature Reserve	607914	145165	174m AOD	6.2	S	Wye: Stour Valley/ Stour Valley	Kent Downs AONB	National Trail	Walkers

EAST STOUR SOLAR FARM

Table 11.2 - Landscape and Visual Assessment

Viewpoint Information				Landscape Assessment			Visual Assessment		
No	Location	NGR	Distance/ direction to site	LCA (sensitivity)	Magnitude of change	Effects on Landscape Character	Receptors (sensitivity)	Magnitude of change	Effects on Visual Amenity
1	Footpath AE432 near Park Wood	607769 138808	0.02km/ S	Evegate Mixed Farmlands (Medium/low)	Substantial adverse	Moderate+ adverse	Walkers (High/ medium)	Substantial	Major/ moderate+
2	Footpath AE457 near The Paddock	607658 137343	0.09km/ N	East Stour Valley (High/ medium)	Substantial adverse	Major/ moderate+ adverse	Walkers (High/medium)	Substantial	Major/ moderate+
Viewpoint 2: 10 years post construction				East Stour Valley (High/ medium)	None	No effect	Walkers (High/ medium)	None	No effect
3	Church Lane near Bested House	608131 137737	0.16km/ W & SE	East Stour Valley (High/ medium)	Very substantial/ substantial adverse	Major adverse	Nearby residents (High)	Very substantial/ substantial adverse	Major+
							Motorists (Medium)		Major/ moderate+
Viewpoint 3: 10 years post construction				East Stour Valley (High/ medium)	Substantial/ moderate adverse	Major/ moderate adverse	Nearby residents (High)	Substantial/ moderate	Major/ moderate+
							Motorists (Medium)		Moderate+
4	Junction of footpaths AE459 and AE460 near Lower Park Farm	607875 137055	0.38km/ NE	East Stour Valley (High/ medium)	Slight adverse	Moderate/ minor+ adverse	Walkers (High/ medium)	Slight	Moderate/ minor+
Viewpoint 4: 10 years post construction				East Stour Valley (High/ medium)	None	No effect	Walkers (High/ medium)	None	No effect

Viewpoint Information				Landscape Assessment			Visual Assessment		
No	Location	NGR	Distance/ direction to site	LCA (sensitivity)	Magnitude of change	Effects on Landscape Character	Receptors (sensitivity)	Magnitude of change	Effects on Visual Amenity
5	Harringe Lane by Harringe Bridge	609425 137904	0.77km/ W	Upper Stour Valley (Medium/ low)	Moderate/ slight adverse	Moderate/ minor adverse	Motorists (Medium)	Moderate/ slight	Moderate/ minor+
							Rail passengers (Low)		Minor+
Viewpoint 5: 10 years post construction				Upper Stour Valley (Medium/ low)	Moderate/ slight adverse	Moderate/ minor adverse	Motorists (Medium)	Moderate/ slight	Moderate/ minor+
							Rail passengers (Low)		Minor+
6	Footpath AE477 near Grove Cottage, Aldington	607625 136220	1.2km/ N	Aldington Ridgeline (High/ medium)	Moderate/ slight adverse	Moderate adverse	Walkers (High/ medium)	Moderate/ slight	Moderate
							Nearby residents (High)		Moderate+
Viewpoint 6: 10 years post construction				Aldington Ridgeline (High/ medium)	Slight adverse	Moderate/ minor+	Walkers (High/ medium)	Slight	Moderate/ minor+
							Nearby residents (High)		Moderate
7	Footpath AE474 west of Aldington	607222 136331	1.2km/ N	Aldington Ridgeline (High/ medium)	Moderate/ slight adverse	Moderate adverse	Walkers (High/ medium)	Moderate/ slight	Moderate
Viewpoint 7: 10 years post construction				Aldington Ridgeline (High/medium)	Slight adverse	Moderate/ minor+ adverse	Walkers (High/ medium)	Slight	Moderate/ minor+

EAST STOUR SOLAR FARM

Viewpoint Information				Landscape Assessment			Visual Assessment		
No	Location	NGR	Distance/ direction to site	LCA (sensitivity)	Magnitude of change	Effects on Landscape Character	Receptors (sensitivity)	Magnitude of change	Effects on Visual Amenity
8	Footpath AE485 Saxon Shore Way by Roman Road near Postling Green	607294 135743	1.7km/ N	Aldington Ridgeline (High/medium)	Negligible adverse	Minor+ adverse	Motorists (Medium)	Negligible	Minor
							Walkers (High/ medium)		Minor+
9	PRoW AE299 North Downs Way by Kingsmill Down	610011 142777	4.6km/ SW	Stowting : Postling Vale/ Postling Scarp & Vale (High)	Slight/ negligible adverse	Moderate/ minor+ adverse	Walkers (High)	Slight/ negligible	Moderate/ minor+
							Motorists (Medium)		Minor+
10	PRoW AE299 North Downs Way by Brabourne Lane	611063 142176	4.7km/ SW	Stowting : Postling Vale/ Postling Scarp & Vale (High)	Slight/ negligible adverse	Moderate/ minor+ adverse	Walkers (High)	Slight/ negligible	Moderate/ minor+
11	Car park by PRoW HE356 North Downs Way at Farthing Common	613620 140350	5.6km/ SW	Stowting : Postling Vale/ Postling Scarp & Vale (High)	Slight/ negligible adverse	Moderate/ minor+ adverse	Walkers (High)	Slight/ negligible	Moderate/ minor+
							Motorists (Medium)		Minor+
12	PRoW AE143 North Downs Way through Wye Downs Nature Reserve	607914 145165	6.2km/ S	Wye : Stour Valley/ Stour Valley (High)	Negligible adverse	Moderate/ minor	Walkers (High)	Negligible	Moderate/ minor

Findings of Visual Analysis

- 11.50 In general terms the visibility of the proposed solar farm would be confined to an area local to the proposed site, much in the same way as the existing Sellindge Solar Farm. This is due to the limited height of solar infrastructure, the undulating nature of the local topography and the good levels of vegetation across the landscape, which combine to serve as useful containment and screening tools in combination with the screening provided by the HS1 rail embankment and the M20 motorway embankment and associated mature vegetation. In cumulative terms the viewpoints illustrate clearly that, in most cases, the operational solar farm would not be visible from the same locations as the proposal.
- 11.51 The viewpoint analysis has considered the operational solar farm within the baseline, as well as other nearby larger scale development such as the converter station. The ZTV and the viewpoints indicate that there is a core area proximate to the proposal within which the proposed development could be visible. This is an area of very limited extent (approximately 0.05km from the site boundary to the north, 0.7km to the east, 1.2km to the south and 0.3km to the west), and beyond this the proposal would generally be screened from the majority of the study area, with only a few small pockets of visibility from more distant higher ground to the north at distances of over 4.5km away.
- 11.52 Taking into account the visual analysis (ZTVs), fieldwork observations and the viewpoint analysis, these findings suggest that the introduction of the proposed East Stour Solar Farm to the baseline would result in a significant change in the view for high sensitivity receptors (e.g. some residents and users of national trails) within approximately 0.75km of the proposed solar farm, high/medium sensitivity receptors (e.g. equestrians, cyclists and walkers on local PRow network and long distance routes) within approximately 0.35km of the proposed solar farm, and medium sensitivity receptors (e.g. motorists) within approximately 0.2km of the proposed solar farm. The viewpoint analysis also suggests that a significant effect on landscape character would be limited to within approximately 0.3 – 0.4km of the proposal.
- 11.53 Over time the mitigation planting proposals would establish and begin screening parts of the proposal. In many cases, this vegetation would reduce the overall visibility of the proposal, the magnitude of change in the view and the overall effects of the development.
- 11.54 It is also worth noting that there are locations where the proposed development would be largely or entirely screened by topography, built form or intervening vegetation for some receptors such that views from within these zones would be intermittent in places. The zones of visibility would be much more fragmented than suggested by the ZTV in **Figure 11.1** and the proportion of the proposal that would be visible would be reduced in some locations. In these instances the magnitude of change in the view and resulting overall effects are also likely to be reduced.
- 11.55 A more detailed discussion of the likely effects on the visual amenity of receptors in settlements and residential properties, at visitor attractions, on recreational routes and on public highways is provided in the Visual Assessment below.

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

11.56 This assessment draws on the review of the predicted effects of the development, the landscape fabric of the site, the key characteristics of the LCAs, the purposes/objectives of the landscape designations, the visibility analysis, the viewpoint analysis and fieldwork observations, and discusses the significance of the predicted effects on:

- Landscape fabric of the site;
- Landscape character; and
- Purposes of the landscape designations.

Effects on Landscape Fabric

Prediction Methodology

11.57 Landscape fabric is composed of the physical components of the landscape (e.g. landform, land cover and landscape elements and features). Developments can bring about both direct and indirect effects on landscape fabric. Direct effects occur where changes to the fabric of the landscape arise as the result of

physical disturbance, for example, the loss of landscape elements such as hedgerows, walls and trees. Indirect effects are consequential changes that are separated from the source of the change in a temporal or spatial manner, for example changes in vegetation downstream as the result of modifications to surface water patterns upstream in a catchment area.

11.58 This assessment of effects on landscape fabric considers the existing landscape fabric of the site and the predicted effects of the development, and makes a judgement as to whether there are likely to be any significant beneficial or adverse changes to landscape fabric (as well as the range in between) based on the following two definitions:

- Significant beneficial effects on landscape fabric - could occur where important/mature/diverse/distinctive components, which had previously been lost or degraded as the result of agricultural operations or other development, would be added, reinstated or improved.

- Significant adverse effects on landscape fabric - could occur where existing important/mature/diverse/distinctive components would be permanently lost (or long term temporarily lost) and the effects cannot be adequately mitigated.

Construction Phase

11.59 There would be no significant adverse effects on landscape fabric during the construction phase as there would be no removal of hedgerows at key entrance points and no other loss of important, mature, diverse or distinctive landscape components. It is envisaged that the site entrances from the highway network into the fields containing the proposed development would utilise existing field access points and gaps in hedgerows.

11.60 As the fields are used for arable crops and pasture, there would be minimal loss of ground vegetation as a result of the temporary site compound, new tracks, inverter/transformer units, substations, store/spare/welfare cabinets and cable trenches. Beneath the solar arrays each field would be

pasture and so the site fields would all convert to pastureland. Therefore, overall there would not be any significant (adverse or beneficial) effects on landscape fabric as a result of the construction phase.

Operational Phase

11.61 Once the construction phase has been completed, the proposed mitigation measures would be implemented. These measures are illustrated on **Figure 11.9** and include some sizeable areas of tree and hedgerow planting, hedgerow management to maintain and grow the height of some existing site hedgerows and hedgerow enhancement to gap up and improve some existing site hedgerows. In addition, some areas of wildflower/ riparian/ grassland have been accommodated within the layout to encourage biodiversity. There would be a beneficial effect on landscape fabric as a result of these measures which would last throughout the operational phase of the proposed development and would be maintained and replaced where necessary through an operational planting management plan.

Decommissioning Phase

11.62 There would be minimal disturbance of landscape features during this phase as underground structures below approximately 1.0m depth (e.g. lower parts of the building foundations and cables) would be left in situ and there would be reinstatement of the ground over all ground disturbed by the works. All the new tree and hedgerow planting measures as part of the application would remain in place. Therefore, there would be a negligible effect on landscape fabric during the decommissioning phase.

Effects on Landscape Character

Prediction Methodology

11.63 Landscape character is composed of physical, biological and social components, combined with aesthetic and perceptual factors. This assessment of effects on landscape character considers the existing landscape character of the site and study area by using the information collected during fieldwork and within the local landscape character assessments and sensitivity

assessments. It considers the predicted effects of the development, and assesses the area within which there is likely to be a significant change to landscape character (as well as the range in between), based on the following two definitions:

- Significant beneficial effects on landscape character - are likely to occur where the proposed development would materially enhance the quality (condition) of the landscape, would complement the existing character and/or where particularly valued characteristics, previously lost or degraded, would be reinstated.
- Significant adverse effects on landscape character - are likely to occur where the proposed development would become a key or one of the defining characteristics of the landscape, would contrast with the existing character, and/or where existing key characteristics would be permanently lost or changed.

11.64 The long-term addition of a renewable energy development into an area of landscape that is not currently characterised by built form or

renewable energy development will usually have an appreciable effect on the character of at least a localised area within that landscape.

11.65 Whether such effects would be significant depends on the sensitivity (susceptibility and value) of the landscape resource and the scale or magnitude of landscape effects, as indicated by fieldwork and the viewpoint analysis. Therefore, fieldwork observations are examined together with the findings of the viewpoint analysis so as to determine the degree and extent of likely significant effects of the proposed development on landscape character within the various landscape character units in the study area.

11.66 Landscape units are often relatively large geographical areas and the screening effects of topography and vegetation will vary across each unit, so that the predicted extent of significant effects on landscape character will almost always be intermittent. However, with increasing distance from the proposed site, the proposed development will have a decreasing effect on landscape character and there will come a point

where there are few or no further significant landscape effects. This is defined as the extent of the significant effects on landscape character.

Effects on Character of the Site Landscape

11.67 There would be some short-term effects on the character of the site as a result of the construction phase. Overall, the construction phase would be short-term, with the various activities lasting for only small parts of the overall timescale. The presence of construction machinery and activities would be transient (temporary, short-term and reversible) and ground and vegetation disturbance would be limited. Therefore, the effects of the construction phase would not result in a significant beneficial or adverse effect on the landscape character of the site.

11.68 The main effects on the landscape character of the site would occur during the operational phase as a result of the presence of the solar panels and associated infrastructure. All these parts of the proposed development would be located within

the Evegate Mixed Farmlands LCA and the East Stour Valley LCA.

11.69 The elements of the proposal most likely to be visible across the surrounding area during the initial stages of the operational phase would be the solar panels forming the solar array, new tracks, the transformer/ inverter units, substations, store/spares/ welfare containers, stores, stock style fencing and CCTV, all of which would become key characteristics of the site landscape and, although no existing key characteristics would be lost or changed, they would contrast with the existing character such that these elements of the proposal would result in a significant adverse effect on the character of the site landscape.

11.70 Over time these significant changes to landscape character would diminish to a degree as the mitigation proposals establish and reach maturity. However, across the site itself, these significant changes would still be evident.

11.71 The decommissioning phase would be very short-term, ground disturbance would be very limited in extent and there would be the removal of the built form and the reinstatement of the ground on completion of the

works, which should return much of the site to its current character, albeit with additional hedgerow and tree planting as well as some slight changes to the heights of hedgerows within the site. Therefore, the decommissioning phase would result in a significant beneficial effect on the landscape character of the site relative to the operational phase. Overall, the change occurring as a result of the introduction of the tree planting and new hedgerows would be beneficial and in keeping with the existing character of the local area. Therefore, the change in character upon decommissioning relative to the current landscape character of the site would be beneficial, but not significant.

- 11.72 Therefore, there would be a significant adverse long-term but temporary change in the character of the site landscape for the duration of the operational phase but by the end of the decommissioning phase the site character would have been enhanced for the long-term by the planting proposals.
- 11.73 However, it would be impossible to site a solar array of this scale in the

UK without significantly affecting the character of at least the site and immediate surroundings. The key issue is how far this change in landscape character would extend and whether this change would be acceptable.

- 11.74 As noted in **paragraph 11.17 on page 223**, the aspects of the development that are likely to give rise to significant effects on landscape character (and visual amenity) during the operational phase are the solar array, new tracks, transformers/inverter units, store/spares/welfare cabinets, substations, stock style fencing and CCTV, and the effects of the presence of these features on the character of the wider landscape are considered below.

Effects on Character of Wider Landscape

- 11.75 The viewpoint analysis suggests that there would be no significant adverse effects on the character of the landscape further than approximately 0.3 – 0.4km from the proposed development. Therefore, this indicates that potential significant effects on landscape character would be limited to parts of the Evegate

Mixed Farmlands LCA, the East Stour Valley LCA and the Upper Stour Valley LCA within the locality of the site. It has already been acknowledged above that the character of the site landscape itself would be significantly affected by the proposal.

EVEGATE MIXED FARMLANDS LCA

- 11.76 The key characteristics of this LCA are set out within **paragraph 11.32 on page 233**, and a more detailed description of this LCA is provided in the extract in **Appendix 11.1**. The area is described within the character assessment (extract): 'there is a comprehensive network of tree cover....the pattern of the landscape is much influenced and fragmented by major infrastructure routes. The M20 and A20 run parallel, bisecting the area and leaving a narrow strip of land which is used mostly for arable production and pasture.'
- 11.77 This is a small LCA covering a central section of the study area and it derives its character primarily from its key characteristics and internal features and only partly from views out of the LCA to neighbouring landscapes.

11.78 The overall evaluation of the sensitivity of this LCA within the published assessment is low, with only three levels of high, moderate and low used within the published assessment. Our assessment considers the sensitivity of the LCA to solar development using a five point scale and has determined the sensitivity as medium/ low. This is a landscape with mainly local value with features of local value, that could have a slight susceptibility to the type, scale and location of development proposed.

11.79 Within the viewpoint analysis, only Viewpoint 1 is located within this LCA, in close proximity to the proposal where the viewpoint suggests that a moderate+ adverse effect on landscape character would occur from the viewpoint, indicating a significant adverse effect on landscape character may occur if experienced over a greater local area. However, in reality this viewpoint is located within the solar farm site itself, which, as already acknowledged above, would experience a significant effect on landscape character as a result of the proposal. This portion of the solar farm is situated in between woodland blocks which form natural

screens to more distant views of the proposal. As a result, beyond these woodland blocks within the LCA the proposal would not be visible and would not result in significant effects to the remainder of this LCA.

11.80 In cumulative terms, whilst the CZTV in **Figure 11.8** suggests that the Sellindge Solar Farm could be visible from some parts of this LCA, the screening effects of the embankment for the HS1 rail line and the associated mature vegetation entirely screen this existing development from view.

11.81 Therefore, these significant effects (contained section of the LCA through the site itself and immediately surrounding the site, enclosed by surrounding woodland) would be adverse, direct, individual (rather than cumulative), long-term, temporary and reversible once the proposed development is decommissioned.

EAST STOUR VALLEY LCA

11.82 The key characteristics of this LCA are set out within **paragraph 11.32 on page 233**, and a more detailed description of this LCA is provided in the extract in **Appendix 11.1**. The area is described within the character

assessment as (extract) 'a mosaic like pastoral field pattern is concentrated around the East Stour River, with field shape often dictated by the non linear route of water courses. Woodland blocks are scattered throughout the landscape. Roads comprise narrow lanes, following the undulations across the landscape. Hedgerows often line the lanes, at times containing hedgerow trees, becoming more significant tree belts in places.' This LCA covers a small area centrally within the study area and derives its character mainly from its key characteristics and internal features but also in part from its views out to other LCAs.

11.83 The overall evaluation of the sensitivity of this LCA within the published assessment is high, based on a three point scale. This assessment has determined the sensitivity of the LCA to solar development as high/medium based on a five point scale. This is a landscape with mainly local value with features and special qualities of local value, that could be susceptible to the type, scale and location of development proposed.

11.84 Within the viewpoint analysis Viewpoints 2 – 4 are located within this LCA at distances of between 0.09km and 0.38km from the proposed development, respectively. The viewpoints suggest that in close proximity to the site a very substantial/substantial or substantial adverse magnitude of change could occur, which would result in major or major/ moderate adverse effects on landscape character, which would be significant. These types of effect would be expected from parts of the landscape directly adjacent to the proposal and where the proposal can be viewed in several directions, such as Viewpoint 3. However, Viewpoint 4 illustrates the natural screening provided within this landscape by both undulating topography and high levels of woodland where at a distance of 0.38km from the proposal, a slight adverse magnitude of change and no significant adverse effect would occur initially. Furthermore, mitigation proposals would reduce visibility of the proposal even further so that no adverse effects on landscape character are expected at Year 10 from this Viewpoint.

11.85 Mitigation proposals have been carefully designed to improve and enhance existing local landscape fabric such as site boundary hedgerows, and these measures will assist in limiting the adverse effects of the proposal on local landscape character. In turn, the natural screening provided by existing woodland and tree belts within the LCA and also by the rail embankment would also contain these potential adverse landscape character effects.

11.86 In cumulative terms, Sellindge Solar Farm is also located within this LCA but is broadly visually contained within the northeast edge of the LCA by boundary vegetation. The significant adverse effects on parts of this LCA resulting from the proposed development would be significant due to the size and proximity of the proposal and not due to the very limited cumulative visibility with the smaller operational development.

11.87 Therefore, these significant effects (contained section of the LCA through the site itself and immediately surrounding the site) would be adverse, direct, individual (although limited cumulative effects

would occur), long-term, temporary and reversible once the proposed development is decommissioned.

UPPER STOUR VALLEY LCA

11.88 The ZTV suggests another LCA within the study area with potential visibility of the proposal would be the Upper Stour Valley LCA. The key characteristics and a description of this LCA are set out within **paragraphs 11.30 on page 229 and 11.31 on page 232**, and a more detailed description of this LCA is provided in the extract in **Appendix 11.1**. The area is described within the Ashford character assessment as (extract) ‘an extensive open valley floor landscape of predominantly arable farming where hedgerows have been removed during the conversion to unimproved pasture and riparian vegetation lost as cultivation extends close to the river banks.’ This is an average sized LCA within the central and western part of the study area that derives its character partly from its key characteristics and internal features and also in part from its views out to other LCAs in neighbouring landscapes.

11.89 The evaluation of the sensitivity of this LCA within the published assessment ranges between high and low. This assessment has determined the sensitivity of the LCA to solar development as medium based on a five point scale. This is a landscape with mainly local value with features and special qualities of local value, that could be moderately susceptible to the type, scale and location of development proposed.

11.90 None of the viewpoints within the viewpoint analysis are located within this LCA, where the LCA is located directly bordering the proposed development at its closest point. Fieldwork has found that the proposal may be partially visible from some limited areas of the LCA within approximately 0.3-0.4km of the proposal, immediately to its west, but beyond this distance, the low elevation of the LCA and the screening effects of Backhouse Wood and vegetation along East Stour River would screen the proposal entirely from view. The field boundary hedgerow along the northwestern side of Bested Hill would partially screen the proposal from view so that typically within 0.3-0.4km of the site a

moderate adverse or lower magnitude of change and no significant adverse effect on landscape character would be expected.

11.91 In cumulative terms the CZTV in **Figure 11.8** indicates that the low elevation of this LCA means that no cumulative visibility with the Sellindge Solar Farm would be available.

11.92 These limited effects would be adverse but not significant, direct, individual (rather than cumulative), long-term, temporary and reversible once the proposed development is decommissioned.

OTHER LCAS

11.93 The viewpoints have illustrated that beyond the immediate landscape, visibility of the proposal would be partial and intermittent. In terms of neighbouring LCAs within the study area, fieldwork found some limited potential visibility of the proposal would be available from some parts of the Aldington Ridgeline LCA where intervening vegetation allows (and as illustrated by Viewpoints 6 – 8 at distances of between 1.2km and 1.7km from the proposal. The viewpoints illustrate at worst a

moderate/slight adverse magnitude of change is predicted initially, which would result in a moderate adverse effect on landscape character (not significant) in this high/ medium sensitivity LCA. Over time mitigation planting would reduce this magnitude of change down to slight adverse (by Year 10) and a moderate/ minor+ adverse effect, which would not be significant. Viewpoint 8 notes the Aldington Ridgeline LCA at this location as the viewpoint sits on the boundary of the AONB, but even with the high sensitivity Lympne Greensand Escarpment LCA within the AONB, the effects on landscape character would be moderate/ minor adverse and not significant.

11.94 Fieldwork was unable to find any clear views of the proposal from Brabourne Farmlands, Brabourne Arable Farmlands, Brabourne Lees Hilly Farmlands, Brabourne Vale or Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmlands, Mersham Farmlands and Sellindge Plateau Farmlands LCAs. The layering effects of mature vegetation in the intervening landscape and the gently undulating landform of these areas means that views of a low elevation development such as

a solar farm would generally not be possible. This has been illustrated by the complete lack of visibility of the operational Sellindge Solar Farm from these LCAs. Therefore, no significant adverse effects on the character of these LCAs would occur as a result of the proposal.

11.95 The ZTV in **Figures 11.2** and **11.3** has also clearly identified that topography would entirely screen any potential visibility of the proposal from Old Romney Shoreland Woodland, Bonnington Wooded Farmlands, Old Romney Shoreline Settlements and Royal Military Marshlands and Romney Marsh: Lympe LCAs.

11.96 Very limited parts of the proposal would potentially be visible from distant higher land within the AONB and it is acknowledged that in landscape character terms these LCAs are of high sensitivity. It is worthwhile noting that the solar panels would be south facing and viewed from the AONB LCAs from the north so that no potential glint from the panels would be possible. In addition, as the backs of the panels are in shade, they would be dark toned, seen against an immediate context of woodland

(Backhouse Wood, Partridge Plantation and Round Wood) and from distances of over 4.6km away where their dark tone would blend with the woodland context within which they would be seen. As such, at worst a slight/ negligible adverse magnitude of change and a moderate/ minor+ adverse effect on visual amenity is expected, which would not be significant.

Effects on Landscape Designations

11.97 There is one national landscape designation within the study area; this is the Kent Downs AONB.

KENT DOWNS AONB

11.98 At its closest point, this designation is located approximately 1.3km south and 3.3km northeast of the closest part of the proposed development (see **Figure 11.5**). This figure indicates that the proposal would be almost entirely screened from the southern section of the AONB except for a few limited areas of potential visibility along the AONBs northern boundary close to Aldington. Viewpoint 8 illustrates a typical view from this part of the

AONB at a distance of 1.7km from the proposed development, showing that in reality extremely limited potential visibility of the proposal would be available and a negligible adverse magnitude of change is expected, resulting in no significant effects on landscape character at this point.

11.99 Further afield, the eastern parts of the AONB are located beyond the 5.0km radius study area boundary and **Figure 11.5** indicates that the proposal is extremely unlikely to be visible from this section of the designation. However, a distinct scarp slope rises in the distance to the north and it is this section of the AONB where some potential visibility of the proposal is expected. From the lower parts of the scarp slope, within approximately 3.3km and 4.4km of the proposal the elevation of the landform is unlikely to allow any visibility of the proposal. However, from the top of the scarp slope, limited visibility of the proposed development would be possible at distances of over 4.6km away where intervening vegetation allows. Viewpoints 9 – 12 illustrate these potential views, seen as part of detailed and panoramic views where the proposal would be a barely discernible element of these views and

a moderate/ minor+ or lower adverse effect on landscape character is anticipated. These effects would not be significant.

11.100 Therefore, the proposed development would have no significant effect on the purpose of the AONB, that is, the ability of the designation “to conserve and enhance the natural beauty”.

LOCAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

11.101 Policy ENV3a & 3b is a borough-wide policy. Policy ENV3a (Landscape Character and Design) sets out a series of landscape characteristics that development proposals within the borough must have regard to:

- a) Landform, topography and natural patterns of drainage;
- b) The pattern and composition of trees and woodlands;
- c) The type and composition of wildlife habitats;
- d) The pattern and composition of field boundaries;
- e) The pattern and distribution of settlements, roads and footpaths;
- f) The presence and pattern of historic landscape features;

g) The setting, scale, layout, design and detailing of vernacular buildings and other traditional man made features;

h) Any relevant guidance given in the Landscape Character SPD;

i) Existing features that are important to and contribute to the definition of the local landscape character shall be retained and incorporated into the proposed development; and,

j) Any non-designated, locally-identified, significant landscape features justified in a Parish Plan or equivalent document.

11.102 Given that there would be no removal of landscape fabric elements such as trees or hedgerows and no loss of important, mature, diverse or distinctive landscape components as a result of the proposal, it is considered that the proposed development complies with Policy ENV3a. In addition, the proposed mitigation measures associated with the application seek to reinforce and strengthen the existing landscape fabric and landscape components within the site.

11.103 Policy ENV3b (Landscape Character and Design in the AONBs) broadly seeks to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONBs within the borough in relation to development proposals within these national designations, but also lists a set of circumstances under which proposals affecting the setting of AONBs within the borough would be permitted:

- The location, form, scale, materials and design would conserve and where appropriate enhance or restore the character of the landscape;
- The development would enhance the special qualities, distinctive character and tranquillity of the AONB;
- The development has regard to the relevant AONB management plan and any associated guidance; and
- The development demonstrates particular regard to those characteristics outlined in Policy ENV3a, proportionate to the high landscape significance of the AONB.

11.104 As set out above regarding potential effects on the AONB, the proposal would have no significant effect on the

purpose of the AONB and would be a barely discernible element within a very limited number of views from the AONB.

VISUAL ASSESSMENT

Prediction Methodology

11.105 Visual amenity arises from a visual receptor's experience of the visual world around them and the value they place on a particular view or views. It is possible for a development to result in a significant change in the view from a particular location without resulting in a significant effect on the visual amenity of any receptors if, for example, the location is not accessible to receptors or if the view is acknowledged as having limited value. An important differentiation to make at this stage is between visual amenity and residential amenity. Impacts on residential amenity include the assessment of acoustic impacts and impacts on TV reception combined with the impacts on the visual amenity of residents. The impacts on the visual amenity of residents within settlement areas are broadly discussed below.

11.106 For the purposes of this assessment, the predicted changes in views have been examined and significant effects on visual amenity have been identified where the proposed solar farm would result in a significant effect on the primary view(s) at a location or along a route and the view(s) is/are valued and can be appreciated by receptors who are at that location for purposes that include the appreciation of the view(s).

11.107 Significant effects on visual amenity can be perceived as beneficial, adverse or neutral and this depends largely on the perceptions and opinions of the individual receptors and, to a certain extent, on the type of development proposed. The polarisation of public opinion on renewable energy is such that it is difficult to define significant changes in a view as having a definitely beneficial or definitely adverse effect on visual amenity for all members of the public who may experience that view.

11.108 Accordingly, the assessment identifies whether the predicted effects on visual amenity would be significant or not significant and, whilst it is expected that these significant effects

would be considered to be adverse, it is important that the broad range of public opinions on such effects is also taken into account in the decision making process.

11.109 This assessment draws on the predicted effects of the development, the viewpoint analysis and fieldwork observations, and discusses the significance of the predicted effects on the visual amenity of receptors at a range of visual receptor locations within the study area. Within this study area these include settlements, individual residential properties, long distance recreational routes, visitor attractions, the local public rights of way network, public highways and passenger rail routes.

Settlements

11.110 The visual analysis suggests that there could be significant changes in the view for high sensitivity receptors, such as residents in their properties, within approximately 0.75km of the proposal as a result of the introduction of the proposed solar farm into the current baseline landscape. The villages and hamlets of Aldington, Stone Hill, Sellindge, Brabourne Lees,

Mersham, Brabourne, Barrowhill, Lympne, Bonnington, and Aldington Frith are all more than 0.75km from the proposed development. The ZTV indicates no potential visibility of the proposal would be available from Lympne, Bonnington, and Aldington Frith, but does suggest some potential visibility of the proposal may be available from the remaining settlements. However, fieldwork has found that the layering of mature vegetation within the landscape and the additional screening provided by the HS1 and M20 embankments would result in Aldington being the only settlement where visibility of the proposed development would be available for some residents.

- 11.111 Aldington is split into two settlements; the modern settlement based around Roman Road and the older settlement based around the church and Church Lane. Both are located on high points of land south of the proposed development and Viewpoints 6 - 8 illustrate some of the most open views of the proposal from within and close to Aldington (the older settlement section around Church Lane) at distances of between 1.2km and 1.7km from the proposed solar farm.

These views illustrate that the northern portion of the site, beyond the HS1 rail line would be screened from view, with an intervening ridge of land south of Partridge Plantation also screening large parts of the eastern portion of the proposal in combination with mature woodland adjacent to this part of the site. The western portion of the proposal over Bested Hill would be the main visible part of the proposal from some northern parts of Aldington (the older settlement section around Church Lane), mainly from those properties adjacent to and north of Viewpoint 6. As the viewpoint indicates, initially a moderate/ slight magnitude of change and a moderate+ effect on the visual amenity of residents would occur, reducing down over time to a moderate effect as mitigation measures establish and provide some further screening to the proposal. Beyond Viewpoint 6 the landform tends to form a plateau around the church and parts of the village to the south of Viewpoint 6 where built form often obscures the view to the north and in turn any views of the proposed development from within the settlement. Therefore, due to the orientation of properties within the

settlement and along Church Lane, only a handful would gain open views to the north, such as is illustrated by Viewpoint 6, where partial visibility of the proposal would be expected and no significant effect on the visual amenity of these residents would occur.

- 11.112 The more modern Aldington settlement has some areas of mature woodland immediately north of the settlement which limit views out towards the site, as well as the intervening Backhouse Wood which is a significant area of woodland immediately southwest of Bested Hill. As a result, views of the proposal from this part of Aldington are expected to be extremely limited and resulting in a slight/ negligible or lower magnitude of change, which would not result in a significant effect on the visual amenity of these residents.

- 11.113 In cumulative terms **Figure 11.8** suggests that the operational Sellindge Solar Farm would potentially be visible from parts of Aldington. However, as Viewpoints 6 – 8 all illustrated, this solar farm is entirely screened from view, and so cumulative impacts on residential amenity are not anticipated to occur.

11.114 As noted above, significant effects on visual amenity can be perceived as beneficial, adverse or neutral and this depends largely on the perceptions and opinions of the individual receptors and, to a certain extent, on the type of development proposed. Therefore, these predicted significant effects on visual amenity could be perceived as positive or negative by these residents depending on their personal opinion of renewable energy developments.

Individual Residential Properties

11.115 There are a limited number of residents within farmsteads and individual properties local to the proposed development who may gain near and open views of the proposal. The three closest residential properties are Partridge Farm (approximately 100m east of the proposal), Bested House (approximately 150m from the proposal) and The Paddock (approximately 150m south of the proposal). Partridge Farm is a landowner property situated on the east side of the farmyard with a series of large agricultural barns located immediately adjacent to the property that would entirely screen any views of the proposal from the property.

Bested House

11.116 Bested House is located adjacent to Church Lane. This two storey property is broadly orientated in a southwest/ northeast position, with a number of single storey outbuildings and a garage (with office space located above) positioned to the north and east of the main property. Parking is located to the north of the main property and a long garden area extends to the southeast all the way to meet Partridge Plantation. A number of structures are located within the garden area including a covered pool, sheds, polytunnels and a summerhouse. A mature hedgerow forms the boundary of the property along the roadside to Church Lane and is over 2m in height and of good quality. Mature vegetation forms the northern boundary of the property and adjacent to this tree planting associated with Sellindge Solar Farm was planted approximately 5 years ago to provide a screen along the southern boundary of the development. A further hedgerow forms the southern boundary to the property but this is gappy in some places and of varying height.

11.117 The property was visited as part of fieldwork and this visit confirmed that ground floor views of the proposed development from the property itself would be limited due to the existing vegetation along the boundaries of the property. The proposal has been set back from Bested House to the south so that even in winter months when the hedgerow along the southern boundary is not in leaf, the proposal would be oblique to the main ground floor views. The main views of the proposal from this property would be from south facing parts of the upper storey, used as bedrooms, a bathroom and office space. A south facing flat roof space is also available which has open views to the southwest, south and southeast and is apparently used by the owners as an open space. From here, open and panoramic views of the proposal would be available, similar to those illustrated by Viewpoint 3, where a significant effect on the visual amenity of these residents would occur.

11.118 Through discussion with these residents, it is proposed to create a new hedgerow within the site boundary along the boundary with Bested House. This hedgerow would

be of good sized plant stock to ensure that the hedgerow would reach maturity within approximately 5 years. This aims to reduce the visibility of the proposal from garden areas due to the gappy nature of the existing garden hedgerow.

- 11.119 Overall, as set out above, the main visibility of the proposal would be from south facing upper storey areas of the property, with some further partial visibility of the eastern portion of the proposal available from some garden areas where intervening vegetation allows. This garden visibility would initially result in a moderate magnitude of change in winter months, and a major/ moderate effect on visual amenity. However, once the new boundary hedgerow has established, these views would be screened and no effect on the visual amenity of these residents is expected. Ground floor views from the property are much more limited, as described above, and a slight or lower magnitude of change and a moderate effect would be expected initially, reducing down to no effects once the hedgerow has established and would screen any views of the proposal entirely. In cumulative terms, no ground floor or

garden views of Sellindge Solar Farm are available due to the screening effects of outbuildings and mature vegetation. However, some limited upper storey views of the existing development are available from some north facing windows where the intervening outbuildings do not intervene, seen in the context of the HS1 rail line and converter station behind. The orientation of the property means that these views are entirely separate to the views of the proposed development.

The Paddock

- 11.120 The Paddock is a single storey property located approximately 150m south of the western portion of the proposal by Bsted Hill. The property is orientated broadly southwest/ northeast with parking located to the immediate east of the property and garden areas located to the west and south. The northern boundary hedgerow of the property curtilage is located almost immediately north of the property and it is this façade of the property that faces towards the proposed development. Two windows and a sunroom are located on this

northern façade and the landform rises north from the property and across the site. Nevertheless, the low set position of the property adjacent to a mature hedgerow along its boundary means that views north across the site are limited by the landform and this foreground hedgerow, given that this is a single storey property. Views from some garden areas mainly to the west of the property would also gain some visibility north to Bsted Hill and the site, although again this is partly limited by existing vegetation along the northern property boundary. Whilst visibility of the proposal would be limited, it would be relatively proximate and on rising land, where initially a moderate magnitude of change is expected and a significant effect on the visual amenity of these residents would occur. It is important to note that the views available from the property and grounds would not be as open as those illustrated by Viewpoint 2. However, this viewpoint does give a good indication of the mitigation measures that are proposed along the southern boundary of Bsted Hill and how this planting would screen views of the proposal in relation to the boundary with The Paddock, which is

visible in the far right of the viewpoint. A new hedgerow is proposed along the southern boundary of Bested Hill, which is located on higher ground than The Paddock, and an area of low density woodland is proposed along the southern boundary of the proposal, as well as a hedgerow adjacent to the southern fence line of the proposal. Over time, these measures would entirely screen the proposal from The Paddock, with this planting anticipated to take approximately 5 – 7 years to begin to effectively screen the proposal. In cumulative terms, Sellindge Solar Farm is entirely screened from view from this property by intervening topography, built form and vegetation.

Forehead, Hogben Farm and Forehead Farm

11.121 A number of other properties are located adjacent to Church Lane, including Forehead (approximately 300m south of the proposal), Hogben Farm (330m south), Forehead Farm and an adjacent property (640m and 680m south, respectively), and each of these properties is expected to gain some limited visibility of the proposal,

mainly of sections of the Bested Hill portion of the development. Existing mature vegetation along Church Lane would predominantly screen the other portions of the proposal from view, even in winter months, with any visibility of the Bested Hill section of the proposal viewed over the top of The Paddock and constrained by the woodland at Backhouse Wood which extends towards The Paddock. Many of these views towards Bested Hill are secondary, upper storey views from these properties and would be limited to approximately 15 – 200 in extent, where their main views would remain unaffected by the proposal. Initially a slight magnitude of change and a moderate effect on the visual amenity of these residents is expected, which would not be significant. Over time the mitigation proposals would add further vegetation into these views, similar to that illustrated by Viewpoint 2, which would reduce visibility of the proposal even further. However, as these properties are all two storey properties, some upper storey visibility of the proposal may remain available, although this would be below the level of significant effects. In cumulative terms, the CZTV in **Figure 11.8**

indicates that topography entirely screens the Sellindge Solar Farm from view from these properties.

Middle Park Farm, Lower Park Farm & adjacent properties

11.122 A series of four properties are located in the landscape east of Church Lane; Middle Park Farm and a property adjacent to it (approximately 890m and 830m south of the proposal, respectively) and Lower Park Farm and an adjacent property (approximately 450m and 430m south of the proposal, respectively). Fieldwork has found that from each property ground floor views of the proposal would be limited by garden vegetation as well as vegetation in the intervening landscape and that upper storey views would be similar to those illustrated by Viewpoint 4, where the intervening rise of the landform immediately to the south of the eastern portion of the proposal would screen large parts of the proposed solar arrays from view. Initially a slight adverse magnitude of change would be expected for residents at Lower Park Farm and the adjacent property, reducing down to negligible or lower

from upper storey views as a result of mitigation measures at Year 10. These effects would not be significant for these visual receptors. Middle Park Farm and the adjacent property are located at a slightly more elevated location than Lower Park Farm and whilst the views towards the eastern portion of the proposal would be largely the same, some limited visibility northwest towards parts of Bested Hill are available where parts of the western portion of the proposal would be discernible, mainly from upper storey windows of these properties. These views would be similar to, but less elevated and less open than, Viewpoint 6 where a moderate/ slight magnitude of change is predicted. For these residents, a more limited proportion of the proposal would be visible than illustrated by Viewpoint 6, especially from ground floor views which would be interrupted by garden and intervening vegetation, where a slight magnitude of change is predicted initially. Nevertheless, mitigation proposals on the southern edge of Bested Hill would over time add a degree of further screening of the proposal, reducing the magnitude of change to slight/negligible over

time. These effects would not be significant for these visual receptors. The CZTV in **Figure 11.8** indicates that topography entirely screens the Sellindge Solar Farm from view from these properties.

Apple Barn

11.123 Apple Barn is a property located northeast of the northern portion of the proposal at a distance of approximately 280m from the proposed development. Intervening between the property and the proposal is the M20, along with its embankment and associated mature vegetation. As a result, no part of the proposal would be visible from this property.

Harringe Court & nearby properties

11.124 Harringe Court and a series of nearby properties are located to the east-southeast of the proposal, at distances ranging between approximately 670m and 770m from the closest part of the proposal. Fieldwork has indicated that parts of the proposal would be visible from these properties where intervening garden vegetation and the tree belt to the west of Harringe Lane allow. These views would be broadly similar to those illustrated

by Viewpoint 5 and would be seen in the context of Sellindge Solar Farm, where a moderate/ slight magnitude of change and a moderate+ effect on the visual amenity of these residents would occur, which would not be significant.

Woodleas Farm

11.125 Woodleas Farm is located to the west of Backhouse Wood and within the western edge of the farmyard, with a number of agricultural buildings located on the eastern side of the farmyard. At its closest point, the proposal would be located approximately 770m from this property and on the other side of Backhouse Wood, which would entirely screen the proposal from view from this property.

Little Goldwell Farm, Symnell & nearby properties

11.126 Little Goldwell Farm, Symnell and a series of properties are located along Goldwell Lane approximately 850m – 1.0km to the southwest of the proposal. Backhouse Wood, vegetation in the intervening field boundaries and along Church Lane is expected to entirely screen the proposal from these residential properties.

Evegate Manor

11.127 126. Evegate Manor includes residential properties as well as retail businesses and office space. At its closest point it is located approximately 550m west of the northern section of the site, with Park Wood intervening as a mature woodland on the western boundary of the site. The rail line and its associated planting intervenes to entirely obscure the eastern portion of the site and large parts of the western portion of the site, although the highest parts of Bested Hill may be very partially discernible in the middle distance over intervening woodland and the planting along the rail line. At worst a slight magnitude of change in the view may occur, which would not be significant for these receptors. A hedgerow along the western edge of the northern solar array is proposed and over time this would establish and mature to provide a screen to the views of the nearest solar panels within the northern section of the proposal. This would reduce the overall magnitude of change and resulting effects on visual amenity even further for these residents.

Park Wood Cottage

11.128 This residential property is located approximately 520m west of the northern parcel of the site and adjacent to the rail line. A mature area of woodland is located approximately 170m east of the property, and this woodland is directly adjacent to the boundary of the site. This woodland would almost entirely screen the northern section of the proposal from view, although extremely limited and filtered visibility may be available, mainly in winter months, where a slight/ negligible or lower magnitude of change and a moderate/ minor+ or lower effect on visual amenity would be expected, which would not be significant. All the other parts of the proposal are expected to be screened from view by intervening mature vegetation and the rail line.

Visitor Attractions

11.129 There are a few leisure facilities and visitor attractions within the study area including Aldington Races, a few fishing lakes, Hatch Park deer park and Port Lympne Wildlife Park.

11.130 The ZTV in **Figure 11.6** suggests no potential visibility of the proposal from Hatch Park deer park or Port Lympne Wildlife Park. Aldington Races is a point to point event occurring once a year on Easter Monday. The circular route of the event crosses fields immediately south of the eastern section of the proposal where some visibility of this part of the proposal would be available for both horse riders and spectators, although the focus of the event would be on the races. Nevertheless, at worst the proximate visibility of part of the proposal would initially result in a substantial/ moderate or moderate magnitude of change and a significant effect on these high sensitivity receptors. However, planting proposals of new hedgerows with scattered hedgerow trees along the southern boundary of the eastern part of the proposal would in time provide some screening to parts of these views, similar to the screening illustrated by Viewpoint 4. Depending on the position of the visual receptor around this point to point course, at best the mitigation planting would entirely screen their view of the proposal (as indicated by Viewpoint 4) or at worst, would reduce

the visibility of the solar panels so that a moderate/ slight or slight magnitude of change would be expected at Year 10, resulting in a moderate+ or moderate effect on receptors, which would not be significant. In cumulative terms, fieldwork found that Sellindge Solar Farm is not visible from the point to point course.

11.131 The nearest fishing lake to the site is a private members lake located immediately south of the northern portion of the proposal and west of the converter station. The lake is surrounded by mature woodland but is accessed along a track from Church Lane meaning that visitors would drive in the vicinity of the proposed solar farm to access the lake. Once at the fishing lake they would gain no visibility of the proposal. Therefore, whilst they would gain short-lived and glimpsed views of part of the proposal on their way to the lake, no visibility of the proposal would be available during fishing and so no significant effect on the visual amenity of these receptors would occur.

11.132 In cumulative terms, the Sellindge Solar Farm is shown on the CZTV in **Figure 11.8** as not visible in

combination with the proposal from this fishing lake. Therefore, no cumulative effects with the proposed development are expected.

Long Distance Recreational Routes

11.133 There are four long distance recreational routes within the study area, as shown on **Figure 11.6**, some of which are located at a distance from the proposed development. This figure also illustrates that of these routes, the proposed development would be screened entirely from The Royal Military Canal Towpath and Sustrans Route 2, although some limited potential visibility of the proposal may be available from the Saxon Shore Way and North Downs Way.

11.134 The Saxon Shore Way travels through the south of the study area at a distance of approximately 1.5km from the proposed development at its closest point. As the ZTV indicates, for the vast majority of this route within and close to the study area, the proposed development would be entirely screened. However, for a 1km section of the route in the vicinity of

Aldington, potential visibility of the proposal is predicted. Viewpoint 8 is located on this section of the route and illustrates that at a distance of 1.7km away a negligible magnitude of change and a minor+ effect on the visual amenity of these walkers is expected due to the very limited potential visibility of the proposal. The viewpoint also illustrates that whilst the CZTV in **Figure 11.8** may suggest that the operational Sellindge Solar Farm is potentially visible from this section of the route, it would in fact be entirely screened from view. Therefore, no significant effects and no cumulative effects on walkers on this route would occur as a result of the proposed development.

11.135 The North Downs Way is a National Trail located just beyond the study area, although **Figure 11.6** indicates that some potential visibility of the proposal would be available from several sections of this route at distances of over 4.6km away. Fieldwork verified this to be the case, with Viewpoints 9 – 12 all located on this National Trail at distances of between 4.6km and 6.2km from the proposal. Each of the viewpoints illustrates the open, panoramic and

wide ranging views available from the section of the North Downs Way in the vicinity of the study area. The wealth of mature woodland within these views is also important to note as it is these woodland blocks which would recurrently screen large parts of the proposal from view. As the solar panels would be orientated to slope down to the south, it is the rear of the proposal that would be discernible from this long distance route to the north, and as such, the solar farm would be viewed as a dark swathe amongst interlocking woodland blocks and would generally not be definable as a solar development within this context. As a result, a moderate/ minor+ or lower effect on the visual amenity of walkers would be expected along some limited sections of this route, where no significant effect on the visual amenity of these walkers would occur. In cumulative terms, the CZTV in **Figure 11.8** suggests the operational Sellindge Solar Farm is recurrently visible from the North Downs Way. However, Viewpoints 9 – 12 indicate that it is entirely screened by intervening vegetation and so no cumulative effects with the proposal are anticipated for users of this route.

Local Public Rights of Way

11.136 There is a network of public byways, footpaths and bridleways in the study area, including some footpaths crossing through the site itself and some footpaths just outside of the boundary of the site, as indicated on **Figure 11.7**. It is worthwhile noting that there are no bridleways or byways within 2.5km of the site centre and so the following text focusses on walkers (as horse riders and cyclists can only use bridleways and byways). Currently the footpaths through the site cross through the agricultural fields of the site and are at times bound on one side by woodland or tree belts. The proposal would introduce development to these fields, although a space of at least 10m to 15m width between the site fencing will be allowed for each footpath, with the solar panels set back at least a further 4m or 5m behind the fencing. Whilst this would inevitably alter the current open aspect across agricultural fields to create more enclosed views it is worthwhile noting that the footpaths through the site would not be tightly constrained by the proposed development. Nevertheless, for users of Footpaths

AE432 and AE459 through the site, open and proximate visibility of the proposal would be available for the duration of the operational life of the development, where a significant effect on the visual amenity of these walkers would occur, as illustrated by Viewpoint 1.

11.137 Some mitigation planting is proposed along the southern boundary of the site on Bested Hill, near to Footpath AE457, so that over time these hedges and the low density woodland area would grow and establish a screen to views of the proposal. As illustrated by Viewpoint 2, immediately post construction this mitigation planting would be introduced only once construction is complete and so users of Footpath AE457 across the site would gain clear and open views of the proposal, where a significant effect on their visual amenity would occur. However, once these hedgerows and trees have established, they would provide screening of the proposal, even in winter months, where the solar farm would be entirely screened from view with no effects on views occurring for walkers. It is anticipated to take between 5 and 7 years for this vegetation to fully establish.

11.138 Users of some sections of Footpaths AE656 and AE437 would be located in the vicinity of the solar arrays and so would experience a significant effect on their visual amenity as a result of relatively open views of the proposal. However, other sections of these routes travel through woodland and tree belt areas where no visibility of the proposed development would be available. Furthermore, it is worthwhile noting Viewpoint 4 which illustrates a proximate view of the proposal from the junction of two footpaths at a distance of 380m from the proposed development. Here topography plays an effective role in reducing visibility of the proposal, despite its proximity, so that initially a slight magnitude of change and a moderate/ minor+ effect on the visual amenity of walkers is predicted (not significant), reducing down to no effect by Year 10 as a result of the screening effects of new mitigation hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees.

11.139 Public rights of way in the landscape local to the site vary between enclosed character, partially enclosed and open, depending on the undulating landform and vegetation levels local to the route. As a result, visibility

of the proposal would vary from different routes, but also from different sections of the same route. This has been summarised above for some of the closest routes to the proposal, but is also illustrated by a number of the viewpoints. Viewpoints 1, 2, 4, and 6 – 12 are all located on the public rights of way network at distances ranging between 0.02km and 6.2km from the proposal and from sections of the majority of these routes the proposal would be entirely screened, even some of those closest to the site. The viewpoints have sought to illustrate some of the most open and worst case views of the proposal. Of these viewpoints, VPs 1 and 2 are both located within 0.1km of the proposal and indicate a significant effect on the visual amenity of walkers would occur initially. However, the establishment of mitigation measures associated with the application would remove impacts at Viewpoint 2 entirely by Year 10. The Viewpoint Analysis has suggested that approximately 0.35km from the site would be the limit of significant effects on the visual amenity of walkers initially post construction and this is illustrated by Viewpoints 4 and 6 – 12 which, at distances of over 0.38km

from the site, all suggest a moderate/ slight or lower magnitude of change and a moderate or lower overall effect on visual amenity, which would not be significant. It is worthwhile noting that these are individual points on these rights of way, many of which then travel further away from the proposal and that mitigation measures would reduce the visibility of the proposal even further over time from a number of these routes.

11.140 In cumulative terms fieldwork found that the operational Sellindge Solar Farm is visible from very few of the public right of way routes local to the site due to its position nestled adjacent to the HS1 rail line and surrounding woodland. None of the viewpoints from public rights of way show any visibility of the development. Furthermore, fieldwork noted that Footpath AE656 was not accessible in the vicinity of the solar farm so that proximate views of the development were unavailable. No significant cumulative effects on users of the rights of way network is expected.

Public Highways

11.141 Public highways in the 5.0km radius study area include the M20, A20, B2067, and a network of minor roads. The viewpoint analysis has predicted that, for medium sensitivity receptors, such as motorists and their passengers, significant changes in the view are unlikely to occur more than 0.2km from the proposed development. The M20 motorway and Church Lane are the only two roads within 0.2km of the proposed development. It is also useful to note that the A20 is located to the north of the M20 and so fieldwork has found that the embankments and mature vegetation associated with the motorway would entirely screen the proposal from view.

11.142 Fieldwork has also found that in summer months the mature vegetation alongside the M20 would screen the proximate views of the proposal that may be available from the M20 in the vicinity of the site. However, in winter months some filtered views through the roadside tree belts may be available in the vicinity of the converter station where split second glimpsed views of the northern portion of the

proposal and the western portion over Bested Hill may be available to the side of the direction of travel for those travelling towards Ashford. Nevertheless, this extremely short-lived visibility in the vicinity of views of the converter station and nearby pylons would not result in a significant effect on the visual amenity of these motorists whose main focus would be on the road itself. It is also important to note that no cumulative visibility with Sellindge Solar Farm would be available due to its position behind the rail embankment and converter station.

11.143 Church Lane crosses between the western and eastern portions of the site, with a part of the western portion of the proposal located directly adjacent to the road. Roadside hedgerows line much of the length of Church Lane, although a section of hedgerow has been removed close to the point that the route crosses under the HS1 rail line, as the road turns sharply. It is assumed that this section of hedgerow has been removed for safety purposes so as to be able to see oncoming traffic approaching (this reduced height would be maintained through the lifetime of the proposal).

Therefore, a small section of the proposal would be openly visible in the field to the west (left) of Church Lane where the hedgerows have been removed, and also over roadside hedgerows within the Bested Hill field. South of Bested House the proposal is located to the east of Church Lane, approximately 150m set back from the roadside and would be partially visible over the roadside hedgerows here. This visibility along a 1km stretch of Church Lane would initially see the proposal in the foreground and middle distance, where a significant effect on the visual amenity of these road users would occur. Various mitigation measures are proposed as part of this application including improving some of the existing hedgerows along Church Lane which are gappy and thin in places, but also increasing their height to approximately 1.5m to match other hedgerows along this road. In addition, improvements to the hedgerow along the eastern boundary of the Bested Hill field are proposed, and new hedgerows are proposed along some parts of the proposal visible from Church Lane. As a result, as illustrated by the mitigation montages on Viewpoint 3 on Church

Lane, these measures would lessen the visibility of the proposal from this road over time. Nevertheless, some proximate visibility of the proposal would still remain available, mainly in the vicinity of the section of the route close to the HS1 rail line, where a significant effect on the visual amenity of motorists would occur. Sellindge Solar Farm is also located close to this route and close to the rail line although it is also set back from the roadside and roadside hedgerows screen the vast majority of any visibility of the solar farm from the road. A gated entrance does allow a split second view of the existing solar farm but this is located on a bend where drivers are generally focussed on the road ahead and no significant cumulative effects with the proposed solar farm are expected to occur.

- 11.144 A network of local roads service the study area, although none are particularly proximate to the site except for Church Lane. Viewpoints 5 and 8 are located on the local road network at distances of 0.77km and 1.7km from the proposal, respectively. Each would gain a very partial view of the proposal from the road. As a result, neither of the viewpoints indicates a

significant effect on the visual amenity of motorists or their passengers.

- 11.145 In cumulative terms, roadside hedgerows or built form are a characteristic feature of most roads within the study area and so views out from local roads are often not available. As a result, no significant cumulative effects for motorists are anticipated.

Passenger Rail Routes

- 11.146 HS1 and local rail services run centrally through the study area and divide the northern portion of the proposal from the western and eastern portions. Much of the route is on an embankment through the study area, with several areas of mature vegetation associated with the route. Nevertheless, especially in winter, some limited visibility of the proposal, mainly to the south of the rail line may be available. Given the speed of travel on this route, these would be extremely short-lived views, seen in association with pylons, Sellindge Solar Farm and also the nearby converter station, where at worst a moderate/ minor effect on the visual amenity of passengers would occur,

resulting in no significant effect. From the perspective of rail passengers, the visibility of the operational solar farm in conjunction with the proposed solar farm would be concurrent and would seem linked; as an extension of the existing panels.

CONCLUSIONS

- 11.147 This assessment has examined the likely effects of the proposed solar farm on the landscape and visual amenity of the site and surrounding area, in conjunction with the operational Sellindge Solar Farm within the study area. Consideration of other existing large scale development within the baseline of the study area has also been given.

- 11.148 Through careful site design the significant effects of this proposal would be limited to:

- The character of the landscape of the site and surrounding area up to approximately 0.3 – 0.4km from the site. This is contained to parts of the Evegate Mixed Farmland LCA and the East Stour Valley LCA. Over time mitigation measures associated with the application would limit these significant effects even further.

- The visual amenity of some residents within a few individual residential properties local to the proposal. Mitigation planting measures have been proposed, where feasible, to further screen the proposal and once established these measures would begin to add further filtering and screening of views of the solar panels from these properties.
 - The visual amenity of users of a few sections of public rights of way local to the site (mainly the footpaths through and adjacent to the site itself). Some mitigation planting measures have been proposed to further screen the proposal and once established these measures would begin to add further filtering and screening of views of the solar panels.
 - The visual amenity of users of a limited section of Church Lane immediately adjacent to the site. Over time mitigation measures associated with the application would reduce these significant effects further.
- 11.149 There would not be any significant adverse effects on landscape fabric, landscape designations or any of the other LCAs located within the 5.0km radius study area. There would be no significant effects on the visual amenity of the vast majority of residential receptors within the study area, or on the visual amenity of visitors to any of the visitor attractions, long distance footpath users or rail passengers within the study area.
- 11.150 Furthermore, over time the proposed mitigation measures within the site would establish and begin to provide increased filtering and screening of views of the proposal within the area local to the site, strengthening the local landscape fabric in the locality.
- 11.151 Therefore, it is considered that the significant effects on landscape and visual amenity as a result of the proposal would be very limited in this location.

REFERENCES

- Ashford Borough Council, (2005), Studio Engleback Urban Fringes Landscape Character Assessment.
- Ashford Borough Council, (2009), Jacobs Rural Fringes Landscape Character Assessment.
- Ashford Borough Council, (2019), Ashford Local Plan 2030.
- Countryside Commission, (1995), The Kent Downs Landscape.
- DCLG, (2017), The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.
- DCLG, (2021), National Planning Policy Framework.
- DCLG (2015-9), Planning Practice Guidance for: Environmental Impact Assessment; Natural Environment; Renewable and Low Carbon Energy.
- Folkestone and Hythe District Council, (2020), Places and Policies Local Plan.
- Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh Shepway District Council Shepway Core Strategy Local Plan.
- Kent County Council, (2004), The Landscape Assessment of Kent.
- Kent Downs AONB (UNPUBLISHED) Landscape Character Assessment Update.
- Kent Downs AONB, (2020), AONB Management Plan 2021 - 2026.
- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition.
- Landscape Institute, (2015), Landscape Character Assessment (LI TIN 08/15).
- Landscape Institute, (2019), Visual Representation of Development Proposals (LI Advice Note 06/19).
- Landscape Institute, (2019), Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (LI TGN 2/19).
- Natural England, (2013), National Character Area Profile 119 – North Downs.
- Natural England, (2013), National Character Area Profile 120 – Wealden Greensand.
- Natural England, (2013), National Character Area Profile 121 – Low Weald.
- Natural England, (2013), National Character Area Profile 123 – Romney Marshes.
- Natural England, (2014), An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment.