

Statement of Community Involvement

Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Low Carbon

February 2021

Quality information

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Revision History

Revision	Revision date	Details	Authorized	Name	Position
Rev 1	08.12.20	First draft	JH	Jonny Hill	Associate, Planning
Rev 2	03.02.21	Revised draft	JH	Jonny Hill	Associate, Planning
Rev 3	12.02.21	Revised draft	JH	Jonny Hill	Associate, Planning
Final	19.02.21	Final draft	JH	Jonny Hill	Associate, Planning

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1. Introduction

Aim of the Statement of Community Involvement

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been prepared in support of an application for full planning permission submitted to Chelmsford City Council (the 'Council') under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) on behalf of Low Carbon Solar Park 5 Limited (the 'Applicant'), which is a special purpose vehicle ('SPV') owned by Low Carbon UK Solar Investment Company Limited ('Low Carbon').
- 1.2 The proposal comprises the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic ('PV') farm, battery storage facility and associated infrastructure, including inverters, security cameras, fencing, access tracks and landscaping. The proposal is referred to collectively as the 'Proposed Development' and the project is known as 'Sandon Brook Solar Farm'.
- 1.3 The proposed site (hereafter referred to as the 'Site') measures approximately 86.75 hectares ('ha') and comprises of agricultural land near Church Road, West Hanningfield, Chelmsford, CM2 8UJ.
- 1.4 The comments received during public consultation are detailed in the feedback section of this report. A record of all correspondence with stakeholders has been kept, in order to monitor relations and to make sure actions from all meetings or queries have been responded to / resolved.
- 1.5 This SCI has been submitted as part of the planning application for the Sandon Brook Solar Farm. It should be considered in conjunction with the Planning, Design and Access Statement and other planning documents. The engagement activities and outcomes follow the Council's principles for community engagement, which are detailed in its September 2020 Statement of Community Involvement.
- 1.6 The approach to community engagement ensured that comprehensive and meaningful engagement took place, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Applicant used a number of traditional and digital engagement methods to maximise engagement and ensure that local feedback was secured prior to the submission of the planning application.

2. Engagement Activity

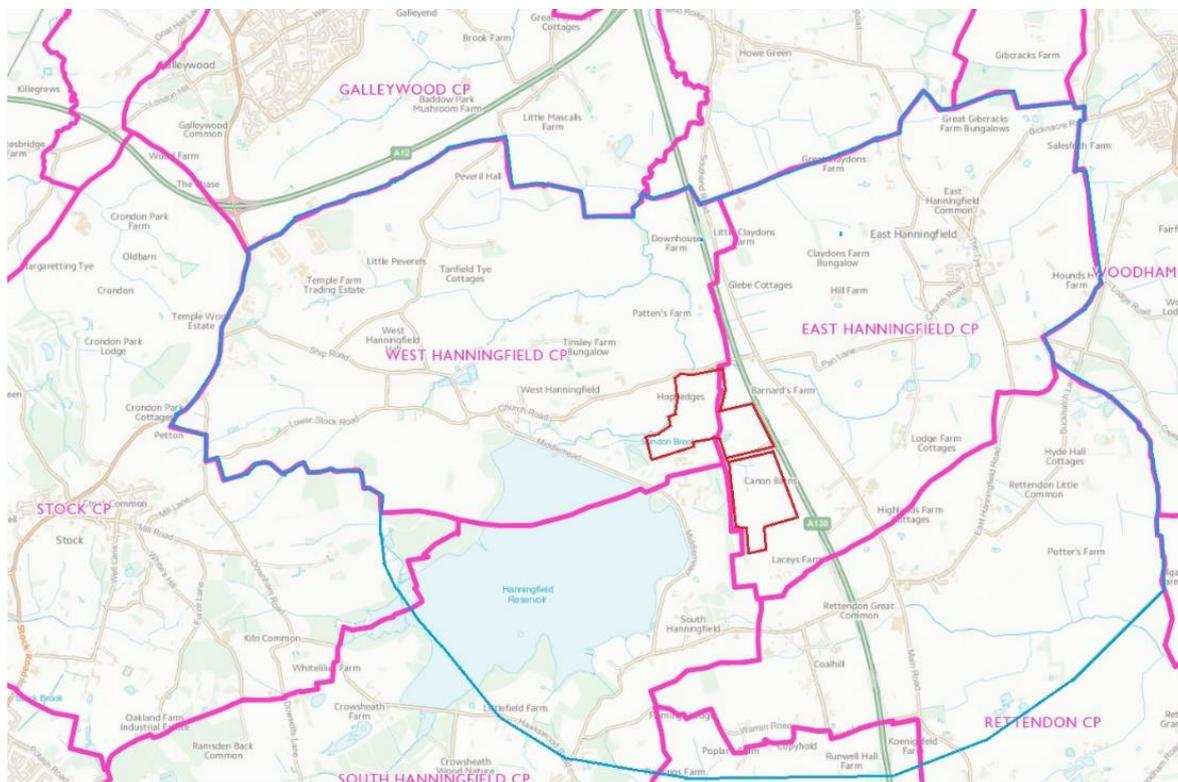
- 2.1 As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a variety of methods were used to maximise engagement with relevant stakeholders and the local community. This centred on a bespoke digital consultation platform – <https://sandonbrooksolarfarm.commonplace.is/> – which provided detailed information about the proposals, as well as an interactive questionnaire. The approach, which is detailed below, also included meetings with stakeholders via Microsoft Teams, and responses to enquiries via the dedicated project Freepost, Freephone and email channels.
- 2.2 The engagement process began in October 2020, when the Applicant wrote to South Hanningfield, West Hanningfield, East Hanningfield and Rettendon parish councils. A full list of political stakeholders contacted by the Applicant is provided in Table 1 (on page 8 below). The introductory email provided a background to the Applicant, the proposals for Sandon Brook Solar Farm, and the approach and timescales for public consultation.

Publicising the Consultation

- 2.3 **To engage the local community, a wide range of consultation activities were launched during the week commencing Monday 9 November 2020.** The consultation ran from Monday 9 November to Friday 4 December 2020. It was initially planned to run to Monday 30 November. However, following a request from East Hanningfield Parish Council, the consultation boundary was extended to cover all of the West Hanningfield parish area. The consultation period was subsequently extended by four days to provide the residents living in the wider consultation area with additional time to share their feedback. The consultation area can be seen in Figure 1 below.
- 2.4 **Emails to local community groups were issued on Monday 9 November.** This included the Essex Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Friends of Hanningfield Reservoir. The full list of groups is set out in Table 2 of this report (page 8). The email included the offer of a telephone or Teams briefing. To date, none of the groups have taken up this offer.
- 2.5 **A consultation pack was delivered to 989 residential and business properties, via Royal Mail, on Monday 9 November 2020.** This included a letter to introduce the Applicant, a leaflet to provide more information about the proposals, and a five-page questionnaire for members of the public to provide their feedback. The questionnaire was a physical version of the website questionnaire. Please see Appendix A for the consultation pack. As referenced in section 2.3 above, consultation packs were mailed to an additional 447 properties on Saturday 21 November, following a request from East Hanningfield Parish Council. In order to promote effective engagement, several channels were provided for residents to provide feedback and ask questions:
- **A Freepost business reply address** was provided (Freepost LOW CARBON SOLAR DEVELOPMENT), to enable residents to provide their feedback without using the internet. No stamp was required to respond.
 - A bespoke consultation website (<https://sandonbrooksolarfarm.commonplace.is/>)
 - A dedicated email address (sandonbrook@aecom.com)
 - A Freephone telephone information line – 0800 048 7731 (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)
- 2.6 **The consultation pack was also delivered to 121 near neighbours by Royal Mail on Monday 9 November 2020.** The pack was sent as a recorded delivery to ensure receipt. This is in addition to the 989 properties referenced in section 2.5. The full consultation area is provided in Figure 1 below.
- 2.7 **A digital consultation platform was launched on Monday 9 November 2020.** The platform, hosted by consultation specialist Commonplace, provides detailed information about the project, including Frequently Asked Questions, before-and-after-views of the proposals, key project documents, and an online feedback form. The consultation website also includes the option to download the community information leaflet, feedback form, Frequently Asked Questions, and indicative images of the proposed development, including the viewpoint map. Please see Appendix D for an image of the Commonplace consultation platform.

2.8 A newspaper advert was published in the *Essex County Standard* on 13 November 2020. In addition, a digital advert was uploaded to the newspaper's website from 19 November to 30 November 2020. The advert provided a brief introduction to the proposed development, alongside details of the consultation website, the Freepost address, the Freephone number and consultation email address. Please see Appendix C for a copy of the Newspaper advertisements.

Figure 1: Consultation distribution area



Please note that the blue line indicates the consultation area. The red lines show the approximate site location. The pink lines show the boundaries of local parish councils. Please refer to Appendix D for a larger version of the consultation area.

Briefings with Local Elected Representatives

2.9 Following Low Carbon's offer to brief local elected representatives, briefings took place with West Hanningfield, East Hanningfield and Rettendon Parish Councils.

2.10A full list of elected representatives who received information emails is provided below. Introductory emails were sent by the Applicant on Tuesday 27 October 2020.

Table 1: List of elected representatives who received information emails

Name	Position	Organisation
Rt Hon John Whittingdale OBE MP	Member of Parliament	House of Commons
Councillor David Finch	Leader of Essex County Council	Essex County Council
Councillor Simon Walsh	Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change	Essex County Council
Councillor Ian Grundy	County Councillor for the Sandon Brook site	Essex County Council and Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Marie Goldman	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Mike Mackrory	Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Rose Moore	Cabinet Member for a Greener, Safer Chelmsford	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Natacha Dudley	Deputy Leader for Community Engagement and Local Economy	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Roy Whitehead	Ward Councillor for South Hanningfield	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Richard Poulter	Ward Councillor Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Sue Dobson	Ward Councillor Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Paul Clark	Ward Councillor Rettendon and Runwell	Chelmsford City Council
Councillor Lance Millane	Ward Councillor Rettendon and Runwell	Chelmsford City Council
Mrs Katherine Kane	Parish Clerk of Rettendon Parish Council	Rettendon Parish Council
Karen Kuderovitch	Parish Clerk of West Hanningfield Parish Council	West Hanningfield Parish Council
Councillor Karen Plumridge	Parish Clerk of East Hanningfield Parish Council	East Hanningfield Parish Council
Julie Moule	Parish Clerk of South Hanningfield Parish Council	South Hanningfield Parish Council

Table 2: List of community groups who received information emails

Organisation
Essex Wildlife Trust
Chelmsford Civic Society
Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) – Essex
Chelmsford & Maldon Friends of the Earth
Bug Life
Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Discovery Centre

3. Feedback and Analysis

Introduction

- 3.1 In total, 73 questionnaires were received during the public consultation period (via the website and Freepost address). One respondent completed their questionnaire verbally through the use of the Freephone number. This feedback has been included in the analysis in sections 3.2 to 4.19 of this SCI.
- 3.2 An additional phone call and 11 emails were received by the Applicant. A summary of the comments received via these platforms is provided in section 4.20 below. Responses to key feedback themes – including comments received via the questionnaire – are provided in section 5 of this SCI.
- 3.3 Table 3 provides a breakdown of the platforms by which people submitted their comments or questions.

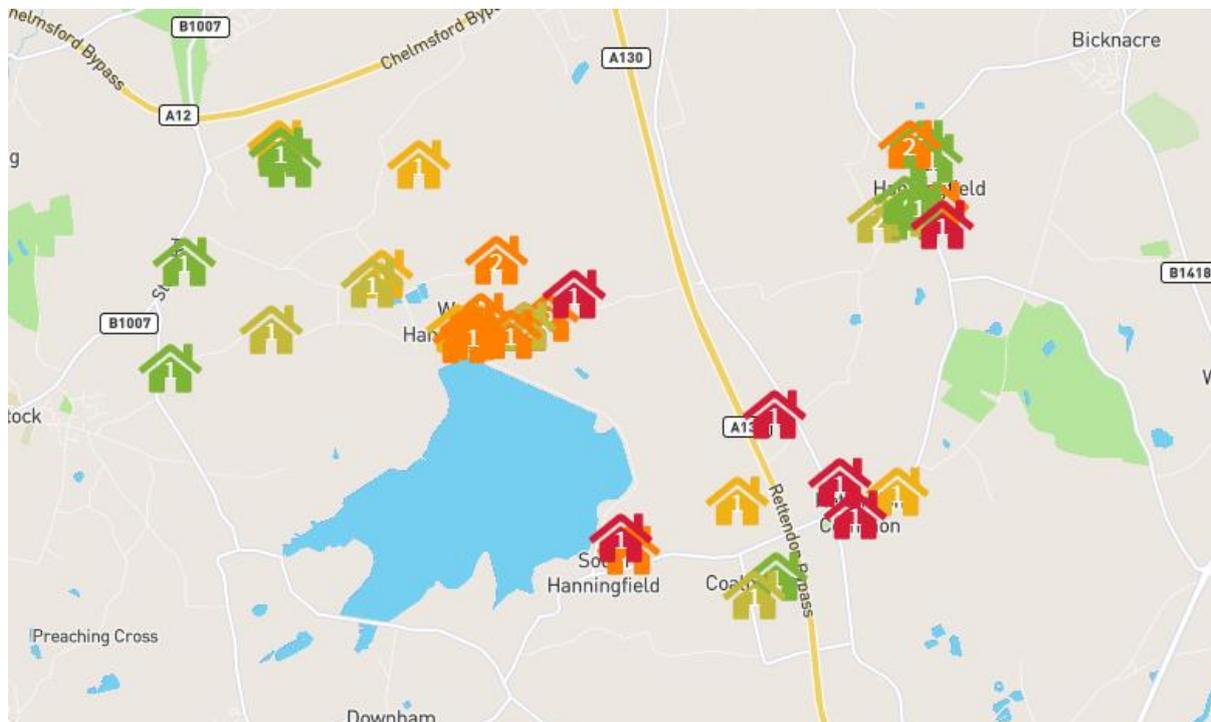
Table 3: Total number of responses received

Platform	Number
Sandon Brook Commonplace website	29
Physical copies of the questionnaire sent via Freepost	43
Email	11
Freephone	2

Location

- 3.4 Commonplace provides a map to summarise the postcodes of respondents who submitted comments through the consultation website. The map confirms that all responses received were from the local community who live in relatively close proximity to the site. The map shown in Figure 2 below demonstrates a strong level of engagement from the local community across the consultation distribution area.

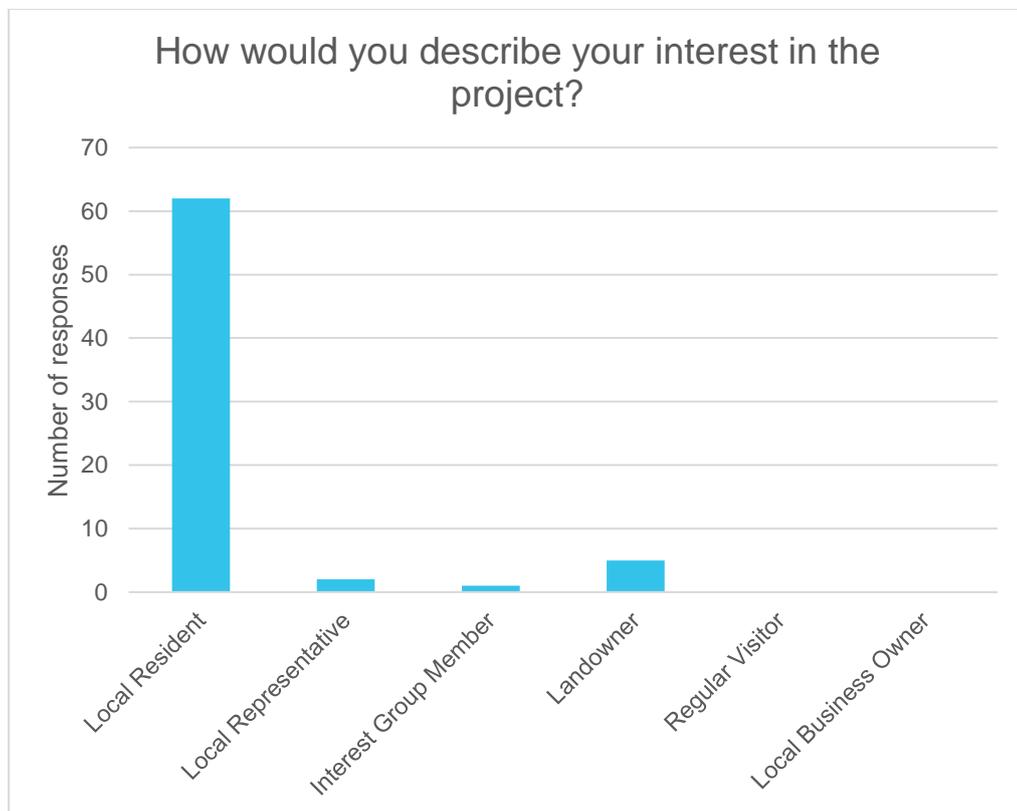
Figure 2. Map of responses received from commonplace consultation website



4. Response to the Consultation Questionnaire

- 4.1 The consultation website anonymises all responses received online, as well as the Freepost copies that were inputted separately. The following section provides a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the questionnaire responses.
- 4.2 It should be noted that respondents were not required to answer each question. Therefore, there are different response rates to each question.
- 4.3 When describing their interests in the consultation, a total of 62 respondents (89%) confirmed they were local residents. 5 respondents (7%) confirmed that they were landowners, followed by 2 respondents (3%) confirming that they were local representatives. 1 respondent (1%) confirmed that they were an interested group member.
- 4.4 Please note that some respondents left this question blank.

Figure 3: Bar chart showing respondents' interest in the project



- 4.5 With regard to demographics, 34% fell into the 51-70 age category (25 respondents). A further 29% were 71 and over (21 respondents), followed by 16% of respondents being between 31-50 (12 respondents). 16% of respondents did not state their age group (12 respondents), with 4% of respondents preferring not to say (3 respondents).
- 4.6 62% of the respondents were male (38 respondents), 38% of respondents were female (23 respondents).
- 4.7 Please note that some respondents left these questions blank.

Figure 4: Bar chart showing respondents' age group

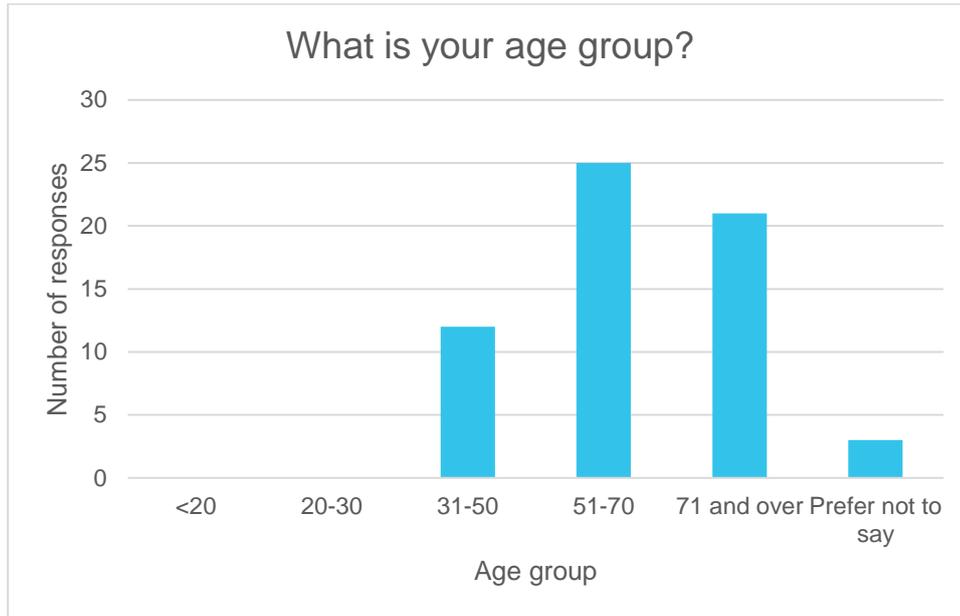
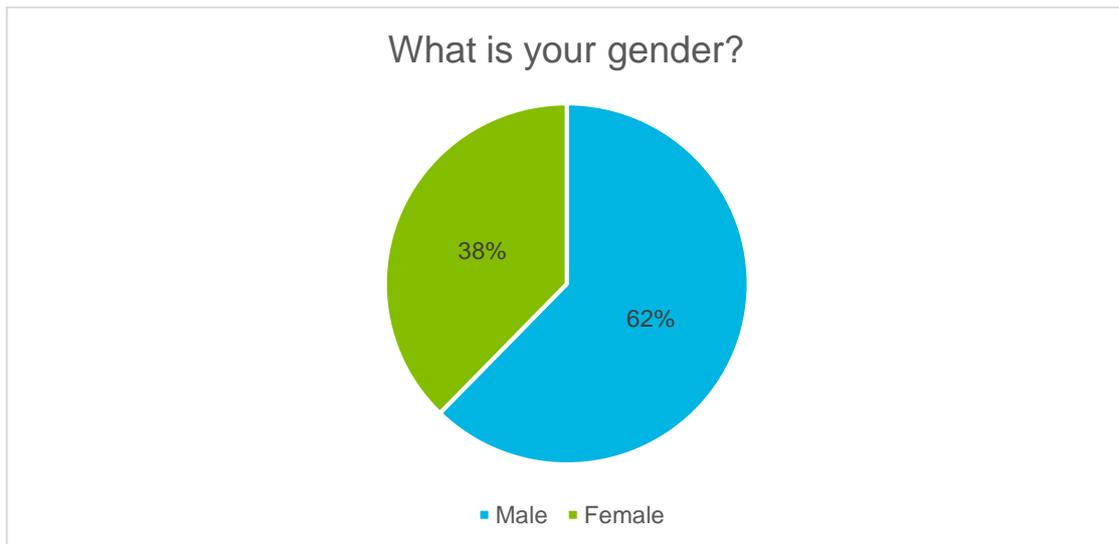


Figure 5: Pie chart showing respondents' gender

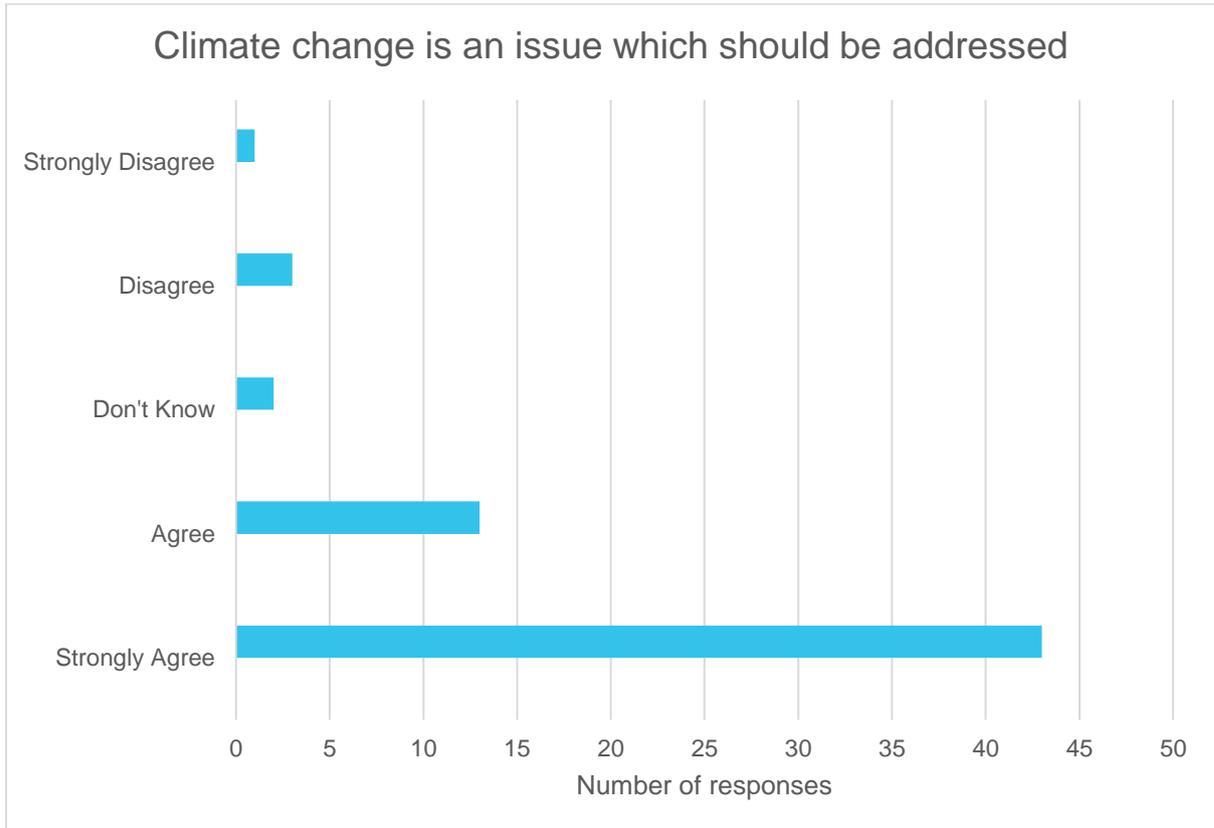


Climate Change is an issue which should be addressed?

4.8 The majority of respondents (69%, or 43 respondents) confirmed that they strongly agreed with climate change being an issue which should be addressed. A further 21% of respondents agreed with this (13 respondents). Therefore, 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this question. 6% of respondents stated that they strongly disagree or disagree with climate change being an issue (4 respondents), followed by 3% (2 respondents) who said they did not know.

4.9 Please note that some respondents left this question blank.

Figure 6: Bar chart showing respondents' view on climate change



Which technologies should the UK be investing in to generate our electricity?

4.10 Respondents were invited to rate the following technologies, as 1 being the most preferred and 5 being least preferred. The options were:

- Fossil Fuels (Gas and Coal)
- Nuclear
- Solar PV (Ground-mount)
- Wind Turbines
- Other (Please Specify)

4.11 Solar PV (ground mount) and wind turbines were rated as the most popular technology choices, with 20 respondents selecting them as their first choice. 13 respondents selected Nuclear technologies as their preferred choice. Only four respondents said that they preferred fossil fuel energy generation.

4.12 Examples of technologies listed when respondents stated "other" include, hydro, tidal, solar PV retrofitted on to existing buildings and nuclear fusion.

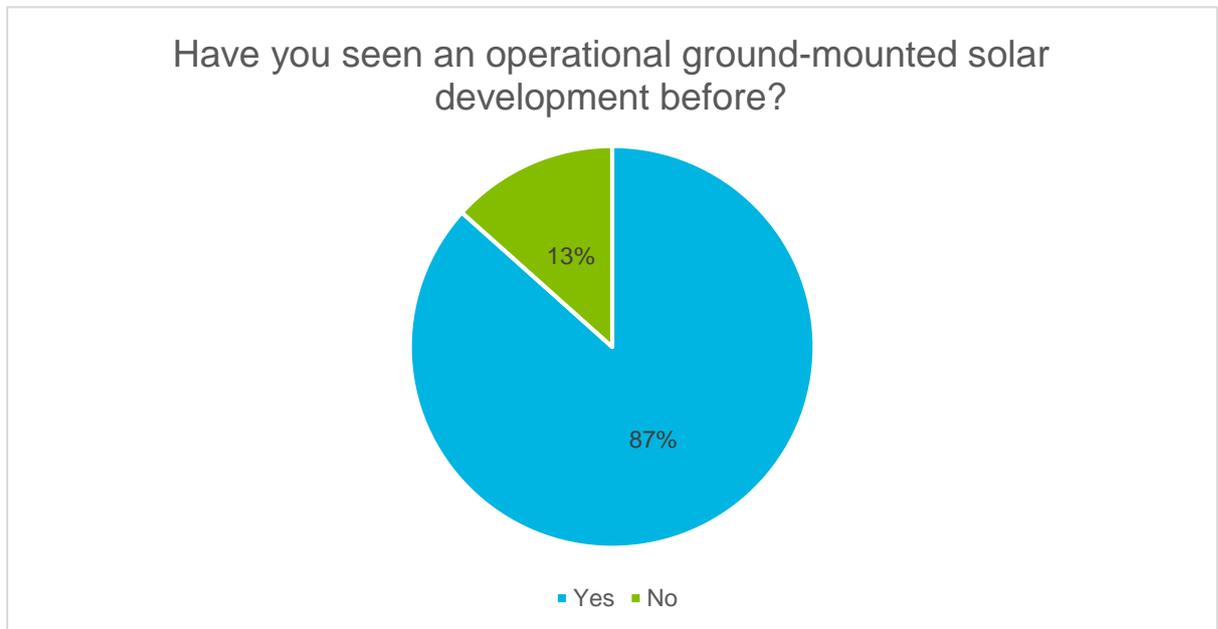
Figure 7: Table showing respondents' view on energy technologies

Technology	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
Fossil Fuels (Gas and Coal)	4	6	11	14	25
Nuclear	13	8	12	21	5
Solar PV (Ground-mount)	20	20	8	10	5
Wind Turbines	16	19	21	4	0
Other	10	7	7	10	24

Have you seen an Operational Ground-Mounted Solar Development Before?

4.13 The majority of respondents (87%) confirmed they had seen a ground-mounted solar development before (52 respondents). 13% of respondents had not (8 respondents). A number of respondents left this question blank.

Figure 8: Pie chart showing respondents' knowledge of operational ground-mounted solar developments



New initiatives as part of the project

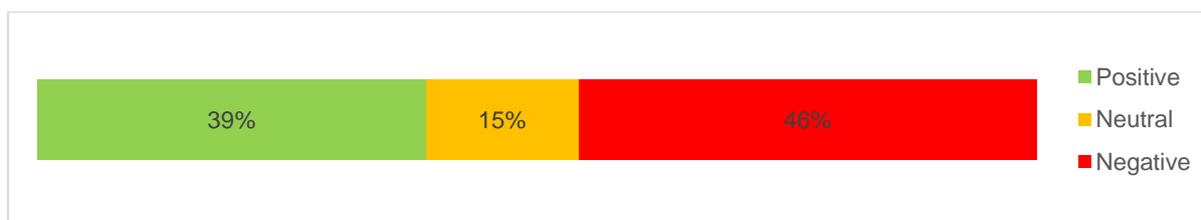
4.14 Respondents were invited to give their views on a number of proposed initiatives as part of the proposed development, rating them from one to five, with one being the most preferred and five being least preferred. The majority of respondents (56 respondents) selected '*New habitat for wildlife*' as their preferred initiative as part of the proposal.

Initiative	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
New habitat for wildlife	56	1	3	2	0
Educational areas	3	42	10	7	0
Education packs for schools	1	8	21	16	1
Tours of the site for the community	0	11	12	34	0
Other	0	0	0	0	63

Received Comments

4.15 The overall summary confirms that 39% of responses to the questionnaire were positive or mostly positive (28 respondents), with a further 15% of responses being neutral (11 respondents). 46% of overall responses were negative or mostly negative (33 respondents).

Figure 9: Bar chart showing general sentiment



4.16 In reviewing the responses, thematic analysis has been used and comments grouped by theme. The number of comments on each comment card have been counted and attributed to a different theme. Therefore, although 73 questionnaire submissions have been analysed, this includes a much larger number of 147 individual comments as many responses contained comments relating to more than one topic. Microsoft Excel was used to count and group the comments and produce graphics to represent the feedback.

4.17 An overall summary of the comments received provides an indication of the aspects of the project which the comments relate to, the number of comments for each, and whether the comments were positive (green), neutral (amber) and negative (red).

4.18 The majority of comments received were in relation to local ecology and bird life (46 comments), visual impact (41 comments), traffic and construction (31 comments) and archaeology and local heritage (21 comments). The table overleaf outlines the aspects of the project that respondents commented on.

Table 4: General sentiment towards each key aspect of the project

# of comments	Which aspect of the project are your comments in relation to?	Sentiment
46	Local ecology and birdlife	
21	Archaeology and local heritage	
40	Visual impact	
31	Traffic access and construction	
14	Tourism and recreation	
19	Noise	

Do you think there is anything we can improve about our consultation?

4.19 For this question, respondents were asked to provide feedback on the ways in which the Applicant could improve its approach to consultation. The feedback was very useful to the Applicant in light of the recent shift to online consultation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This constructive information will be used to improve future public consultations.

- *“Please keep the site regularly updated”.*
- *“Appreciate this form – simple and direct”.*
- *“Map not clearly showing where it extends to West Hanningfield. Should show where it is (i.e. road names it comes to)”.*
- *“More information could be provided about the future of the site... what happens post the initial set up of the solar farm? How might it be expanded over time and what factors are considered when looking at the future of the site? Also, what might happen to the site once the solar farm lease is up?”*
- *“Yes, have an operational website. After pointing out the areas that were not functioning I still find that much of it does not work”.*
- *“I appreciate the consultation that you have put forward, it seems very well set out. However there really shouldn’t be any consultation during the Covid 19 pandemic. There are far more important things that we are worried about such as families, jobs etc. You would do much better to wait until we can talk face to face and get the real feeling of the Parish. This seems like a cowardly way out”.*
- *“It was very useful”.*

- *“Site map should include road names and a 'north' compass orientation. Map should be bigger in the paper version of the leaflet. Some people have not been able to work out where the site is”.*

4.20 In addition to the questionnaire responses, the Applicant received questions and comments via the consultation email address and Freephone number. An anonymised sample of indicative comments and questions is provided below. Responses to individual questions were provided by the Applicant via email or phone call.

- *“Although I agree wholeheartedly with any project to minimise global warming, I would like to know how we the local people will benefit directly. After all we shall have to endure all the results of the works over time and the monumental change to the landscape. If the low carbon product only benefits others elsewhere, as in the case of the reservoir, I do not think your project will be well received”.*
- *“For a project as extensive as this, and its impact on West Hanningfield village and surrounding countryside, a public consultation in vivo is essential. This project should be put on hold until the Coronavirus protocols are relaxed”.*
- *“Once the site is up & running, will there be any noise associated with it? i.e. machinery?”*
- *“Battery storage - what will that look like? Would it be visible?”*
- *“I can visualise what the panels will look like - will you put some screening around the perimeter to hide them?”*
- *“What weather conditions are required to obtain the 49.9MW output? On an overcast day what output would you expect to obtain? On a dull rainy day what output would you expect? What output do you get at night? What is the life expectancy of the solar panels? How long will it take to build the farm?”*
- *“If not all the site is being used for solar panelling, what will the remainder of the site be used for? Will any trees be removed?”*

4.21 It is noted by the Applicant that some respondents experienced technical issues in accessing the Commonplace website. The Applicant was aware of this issue, which arose on Thursday 26 November 2020. The issue was looked in to immediately and resolved on the same day. The Applicant apologises for any inconvenience caused.

4.22 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to hold in-person consultation events and meetings. This is vital to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of the local community and the Applicant's team. The Applicant has instead offered a variety of ways for local people to share their feedback, both online and through traditional methods.

5. Responses to Feedback

5.1 The table below provides a snapshot of the most common comments under each theme. It includes samples of comments received via the website in the open-ended comment sections, written questionnaire responses, as well as comments received via email and Freephone.

Table 5: Summary of top comments with response from project team

Theme	Example comments	Project team response
Visual impact	<p><i>“This seems the more appropriate area with less visual impact on the scenery around West Hanningfield. However, we personally feel that solar panels are not particularly unattractive and would have no issues seeing them en-route through the village”.</i></p> <p><i>“That is a particularly large area to use. I would prefer it to be unseen form the road, behind large hedges if possible”.</i></p> <p><i>“I am worried about the visual appearance of the solar farm – they are not attractive and emit a glare”.</i></p> <p><i>“[The] solar farm will be an eyesore and spoil the rural character of the area”.</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t have a problem with the location of this solar farm as I feel it is likely to be visible from the A130 but there are very few properties which will be directly affected”.</i></p> <p><i>“The proposed site is wholly inappropriate as it would have a high visual impact on the environment, the site is highly visible from Church Road upon entering and existing the village of West Hanningfield”.</i></p>	<p>The Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) submitted as part of the planning application considers the effects of the Proposed Development on both the landscape (landscape impact) and on representative viewpoints from around the Site (visual impact), including from public rights of way (‘PRoW’). It concludes that the proposed development is assessed as being able to be accommodated within the landscape and visual context. This is because the solar panels would be located adjacent to the A130 and within fields which are generally enclosed in relation to the wider landscape.</p> <p>The proposed mitigation would infill existing gaps in field boundary vegetation and establish new planting at the edges of the site, which, once established, would screen views of the panels and fencing. While the Point of Connection mast would remain visible, this would be seen in the context of exiting pylons. The predicted landscape and visual effects are therefore localised and reversible.</p> <p>The key mitigation measures are explained in more detailed in the LVIA.</p> <p>With regard to glint and glare, solar panels are designed to absorb light and not to reflect it. A Glint and Glare assessment has been undertaken which concluded no significant effects to residential receptors or road users.</p>
Climate change	<p><i>“I believe that there needs to be significant investment in renewable energy sources in the near future and I would much rather have a solar farm than wind turbines in the area”.</i></p> <p><i>“We need to do more to increase environmentally friendly energy solutions – above what can be achieved with panels on roofs and in brown belt. I would be proud for this to be in my back yard. It’s vital to ensure promises to ensure the area accommodates other</i></p>	<p>The proposed development will contribute towards the UK’s efforts to tackling climate change and achieving Net Zero emissions.</p> <p>The Committee on Climate Change (CCC), which advises the Government on achieving Net Zero, is clear that solar power has a vital role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The CCC says that electricity from renewable sources, including solar, will need to quadruple in order for the UK to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Crucially, this requires a vast expansion of solar power</p>

Theme	Example comments	Project team response
	<p><i>environmental benefits are also fulfilled”.</i></p> <p><i>“We are world leaders in offshore wind farms so develop more of these rather than destroying valuable green belt which is rapidly disappearing in our parish”.</i></p> <p><i>“Just reading an LSE report from 2018 which states quite categorically that Solar Farms are NOT environmentally benign and have a significant negative impact on property prices. This report mirrors finding in studies carried out in other countries as well”.</i></p>	<p>alongside an increase in offshore wind power. The CCC states that the UK requires 23-43 gigawatts of solar power by 2030. At present, the UK has capacity for 13 gigawatts.</p> <p>The Sandon Brook solar farm will generate 49.9 megawatts of clean, renewable energy. That is enough electricity to power 16,581 homes each year.</p>
Wildlife and biodiversity	<p><i>“Please adhere to the promise of use of sheep on the landscape and ensure they are properly cared for and protected with checks being put in place to ensure this is undertaken”.</i></p> <p><i>“I would need convincing that wildflower meadows would have appropriate longevity and sufficient establishment success”.</i></p> <p><i>“As you should be aware the habitat for wildlife is developed over years. To remove this and trees and hedges would have a detrimental effect”.</i></p> <p><i>“From an ecological perspective the impact will be considerable with the near 100% destruction of all fauna and flora directly attached to the land bank at the time of construction”.</i></p> <p><i>“The existing farmland presumably has a low biodiversity except for the hedgerow areas which I understand are to remain and be added to”.</i></p> <p><i>“Birds migrating to the reservoir will be confused by the appearance of the solar panels, thinking them an additional body of water.”</i></p>	<p>The Applicant, as the leaseholder for the site, will be responsible for its upkeep throughout the lifetime of the project, which is expected to be around 40 years. This will ensure the site is properly maintained over the long term.</p> <p>Sheep grazing is possible between the rows of panels, and this is encouraged by the Applicant.</p> <p>The project will have a positive impact on local wildlife. A ‘biodiversity net gain’ will be delivered, which means the natural environment will be left in a measurably better state than beforehand.</p> <p>All trees and hedgerows on site will be retained, where possible. Dead trees will be removed, and new trees planted in their place.</p>
Noise	<p><i>“Will the substation make lots of noise?”</i></p> <p><i>“Noise & construction create unacceptable pollution.”</i></p> <p><i>“Seriously Concerned about noise from the operation and unsightly substation and generating equipment in an historic agricultural landscape”.</i></p>	<p>During the daytime, noise from operational sources is expected to be below background levels and nearby residential properties are predicted to experience an increase that is imperceptible to the human ear.</p> <p>Overall, even on a worst-case basis, the solar farm is not expected to have an ‘adverse impact’ on health or quality of life.</p>

Theme	Example comments	Project team response
Public Rights of Way	<p><i>"I am concerned that the PROW's across the site do not become tunnels with high hedges.</i></p> <p><i>"In my view the hedging should be no higher, possibly lower than the stock fencing. "As part of the project the sign posting, ditch bridging etc needs improvement".</i></p>	<p>With regard to construction, A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) will be agreed with the Local Highways Authority ahead of any construction. This will carefully consider any impacts and set out a list of mitigation requirements.</p> <p>As standard practice for the Applicant, the Public Rights of Way (PROW) which run through the site will be kept open throughout construction and operation of the solar farm.</p> <p>In some cases, the Applicant may need to have a managed crossing on a footpath during construction for safety reasons, such as a temporarily controlled crossing and/or a banksman.</p> <p>To screen views on footpaths, the Applicant will incorporate buffers of meadow planting either side of the footpath and two-metre-thick hedgerow planting. The objective is to obtain a width of approximately 5-10 metres in total, unless there are specific space restrictions on a particular Public Right of Way, thereby maintaining a feeling of openness.</p>
Community benefits	<p><i>"Although I agree wholeheartedly with any project to minimise global warming, I would like to know how we the local people will benefit directly".</i></p>	<p>The project will deliver significant benefits for the local community. This includes enhancing local biodiversity, including wildflower planting and the potential addition of beehives to the site.</p> <p>In addition, it will deliver wide-reaching benefits for the environment. This includes a carbon saving equivalent to 11,210 tonnes of CO2 every year, which is equivalent to taking 5,175 cars off the road.</p>
Public consultation	<p><i>"For a project as extensive as this, and its impact on West Hanningfield village and surrounding countryside, a public consultation in vivo is essential. This project should be put on hold until the Coronavirus protocols are relaxed".</i></p> <p><i>"Appreciate this form - simple and direct."</i></p> <p><i>"My hard copy was rather late in arriving, I only received it on 26th November."</i></p>	<p>Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to hold in-person consultation events and meetings. This is vital to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of the local community and the Applicant's team. The Applicant has instead offered a variety of ways for local people to share their feedback, both online and through traditional methods.</p> <p>The Applicant has responded to feedback on its approach to consultation. An additional distribution of the consultation pack was carried out on Saturday 21 November following a request from a local elected representative. This extended area covered the western part of West Hanningfield, which is at least two miles from the site. The Applicant therefore ensured that an even greater number of local people were able to participate in the consultation. In addition, the consultation deadline was extended by five</p>

Theme	Example comments	Project team response
Impact on the Green Belt	<p><i>“This is taking far too much space up and shouldn’t be on greenbelt end of story”.</i></p> <p><i>“The proposed site sits firmly in the metropolitan green belt - so an Environmental Impact Assessment must be carried out before taking this project further”.</i></p>	<p>days to enable people additional time to comment.</p> <p>It is considered that the significant benefits of the proposed development clearly demonstrate very special circumstances for development on the Green Belt. This includes the provision of low-carbon energy to 16,581 homes, as well as enhancing the public right of way through the site, and the planting of native species trees and hedgerows.</p> <p>With regard to an Environmental Impact Assessment, it was determined by the Council that this was not required.</p>
Impact on farmland	<p><i>“Better for wheat/cereal or rape production or cattle or horse grazing we need more food security in UK as we leave the EU”.</i></p>	<p>Agricultural land is graded from 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest quality and 5 being the lowest. The best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land is graded 1 to 3a. The Sandon Brook Solar Farm site is majority Grade 3b moderate quality land. Therefore, the site’s development will not cause a significant removal of BMV agricultural land.</p> <p>In order to tackle climate change, the UK has an urgent need to expand the provision of low-carbon renewable power. As referenced above, the proposed Sandon Brook Solar Farm will generate up to 49.9 megawatts of clean, renewable energy, on land that is not BMV agricultural land.</p>
Access	<p><i>“I would just ask please, if possible, don’t use Church Road for access as its narrow and windy and could cause traffic problems/unhappiness”.</i></p> <p><i>“Strongly object to proposed site access off of Church Road”.</i></p> <p><i>“Ensure all construction and operational/maintenance traffic does not travel via Church Road through the village. Access to site to/from the EAST only via the ‘old’ A130”.</i></p>	<p>The Applicant has assessed options for access into the site and Local Highways Authority will review the accesses once the application has been submitted to the Council for determination.</p> <p>The primary site access in association with the north western parcel of the site is proposed to be located on Canon Barns Road. The secondary (backup) site access is proposed to be provided to the west of the Church Road / Southend Road junction for very limited trips where HGVs cannot access via Canon Barns Road. The proposed primary access for the eastern land parcel and south western land parcel is also Canon Barns Road.</p> <p>Please refer to the Transport Statement for more information.</p> <p>Part of any subsequent planning permission would require a detailed Construction and Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) will be agreed with the Local Highways Authority via</p>

Theme	Example comments	Project team response
Impact on heritage and archaeology	<p><i>"I appreciate that there will be no appreciable ground works, however will there be an archaeological survey, minimum of field walking, prior to the construction of the solar farm? This is my number 1 and only concern".</i></p>	<p>condition. This would seek to mitigate local impacts where possible.</p> <p>An Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment was carried out for the planning application. It has been submitted as part of the planning application and can be referred to for additional information.</p> <p>The Assessment covers above ground built heritage and below ground archaeology. It recommends further liaison with the Council regarding the commissioning of geophysical surveys to assess the potential presence of below-ground remains within the site boundary. This is currently being undertaken and the results will be submitted during the determination of the application.</p>
Principle of a solar farm development at the site	<p><i>"Panels should be on roofs not fields".</i></p> <p><i>"Reduce the scale or move the location".</i></p> <p><i>"No panels on suggested site are acceptable due to industrialisation of our raised agricultural landscape."</i></p>	<p>The amount of renewable energy that needs to be delivered in the UK means that both solar panels on building and solar farms are necessary.</p> <p>With regard to the site location, the Planning Design and Access Statement sets out how the site was carefully selected.</p> <p>The site selection process ensures that the proposed site represents the most suitable and deliverable and, therefore, demonstrates the lack of alternative sites to deliver the proposed development.</p> <p>The section process concluded that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site benefits from viable grid connection. • Within the 3km search area, there is no land that is significantly worse in agricultural quality (i.e. Grade 4 or 5) • There was no available previously developed land within the search area of sufficient size • No contactable landowners with suitable land outside the Green Belt responded to the Applicant's correspondence to ascertain their interest in leasing the land • Land further to the north of the proposed development site is characterised more by open fields, and would likely increase the visibility and landscape impacts of the development. In contrast, the proposed development site is largely bounded by the A130 to the east, Hanningfield Reservoir to the west as well as commercial buildings to the south. • The whole site is in Flood Zone 1 – land with the least risk of flooding. • The size of the site allows space for environmental and biodiversity

Theme	Example comments	Project team response
Flooding	<i>“Impact on the both the distribution of surface water supply”.</i>	<p>improvements, such as beehives and planting.</p> <p>A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy was prepared for the planning application. It sets out the proposed flood mitigation measures for the development – including for surface water. Grass swales will be used to provide temporary attenuation for runoff water from hardstanding areas of the site, before being discharged to ordinary water courses and ditches on the site.</p> <p>The proposed drainage system provides an improvement over existing drainage arrangements. Overall, the strategy reduces the runoff rates from the site by around 35%.</p>
Construction and traffic	<p><i>“Very concerned about increased traffic during construction, the duration of which has not been specified”.</i></p> <p><i>“Local disruption due to more traffic whilst being constructed”.</i></p> <p><i>“Ensure all construction and operational/maintenance traffic does not travel via Church Road through the village. Access to site to/from the EAST only via the 'old' A130”.</i></p>	<p>The typical construction period for a solar farm development is 16 weeks.</p> <p>It is proposed that construction working hours will be as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday • 8am to 1pm on Saturday <p>It is estimated that there will be an average of 6 HGV trips per day. While this figure is an average, there will often be a higher volume earlier the construction period and less towards the end.</p> <p>Once operational, the development will only generate a very limited number of vehicle movements associated with servicing and maintaining the equipment. It is expected that under normal circumstances no more than four cars / vans would visit the site each week.</p>

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Applicant has undertaken pre-application consultation with the local community as encouraged by the National Planning Policy Framework and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.
- 6.2 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a wide range of consultation channels were provided to maximise local engagement during the public consultation. This included physical and digital consultation channels. In addition, the Applicant maximised the opportunity for local community groups and elected representatives to share their feedback.
- 6.3 The feedback received during the public consultation has been carefully considered and, where possible, addressed through the planning application and supporting documentation.
- 6.4 The Applicant is committed to ongoing engagement with the local community, through planning determination and beyond. The consultation website will be updated with any news of progress on the planning application, including the ways in which the local community and stakeholders can comment on the application.

Appendix A Consultation pack

A.1 Resident Letter

Dear Resident,

RE: PUBLIC CONSULTATION FOR PROPOSED SOLAR FARM AND BATTERY STORAGE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF WEST HANNINGFIELD

I am writing on behalf of Low Carbon Limited to invite you to provide feedback on our proposals for a new solar farm co-located with battery storage to be known as Sandon Brook Solar Farm. The site is located on land near Church Road, West Hanningfield, shown as a redline boundary on page 3 of this letter.

Sandon Brook Solar Farm would generate up to 49.9 megawatts (MW) of clean renewable electricity and provide enough energy to power more than 16,500 homes each year. This clean power would be exported to the local electricity network, maintained by UK Power Networks, the distribution network operator (DNO) via the overhead power lines running to the west of the site. The exact location of the connection is not yet known but the connection would be made via underground cable into a pylon. For further information we have enclosed a leaflet for the solar farm with this letter.

The redline contains more land than is required for a 49.9 megawatts (MW) site at approximately 98 hectares (242 acres), we have therefore selected an area within the site, indicated here with an overlay of an initial layout of panels and other infrastructure associated with a solar farm, which would provide sufficient land for a 49.9MW project in what we consider to be the least sensitive location; this roughly equates to around 71 hectares (175 acres).

Amongst other matters, we are seeking views on whether there are any more or less sensitive areas in which to locate panels within the redline boundary. Your views will be considered alongside feedback from our environmental specialists, who are in the process of carrying out numerous surveys to identify where development can be best located. Whilst we cannot guarantee that we will be able to meet every demand, it is ultimately our aim to achieve the best balance possible.

Introducing Low Carbon and AECOM

Low Carbon is a UK company committed to making a positive and significant impact on the causes of climate change. Low Carbon has funded the development of more than 322 megawatts of UK solar energy, generating enough clean energy to power more than 100,000 UK homes and saving in excess of 143,600 tonnes of CO₂ each year. Low Carbon is proud to be a Certified B Corporation™.

AECOM will be assisting Low Carbon in bringing forward the planning application for Sandon Brook Solar Farm. This includes supporting us in consulting with the local community. AECOM is the world's premier infrastructure firm, delivering professional services throughout the project lifecycle. AECOM are planners, designers, engineers, consultants and construction managers driven by a common purpose to deliver a better world.

Low Carbon Group Limited
Second Floor
13 Berkeley Street
London W1J 8DU

T +44 (0)20 7409 0700
F +44 (0)20 7409 1511
E enquiries@lowcarbon.com

Public Consultation

Owing to the current health risks associated with COVID-19, public drop-in events are no longer appropriate, but we are still committed to hearing your views. Please visit our interactive digital engagement consultation platform to view further information about our proposal or leave your feedback on by pinning your comments to the map, click 'Have your say'.

Consultation platform: www.sandonbrooksolarfarm.commonplace.is

Alternatively, you can provide your comments via post. Enclosed with the information leaflet is a feedback form which you can complete and post back to us using our Freepost address. You do not need a stamp, simply insert your completed feedback form into a blank envelope and write the address:
Freepost LOW CARBON UK SOLAR DEVELOPMENT.

If you would like to speak to a member of the project team to ask a question, request further information or leave your feedback via this means, please call our **Information Freephone: 0800 048 7731 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm).**

Alternatively, you can email any comments or questions to us at sandonbrook@aecom.com.

The public consultation will be available from **Monday, 9th November 2020** for 3 weeks. All comments on the project should be received no later than **Monday, 30th November 2020**.

Next Steps

All of the feedback we receive during this period will be reviewed and considered by the project team and will be incorporated into the scheme where possible, before a planning application may be submitted to Chelmsford City Council.

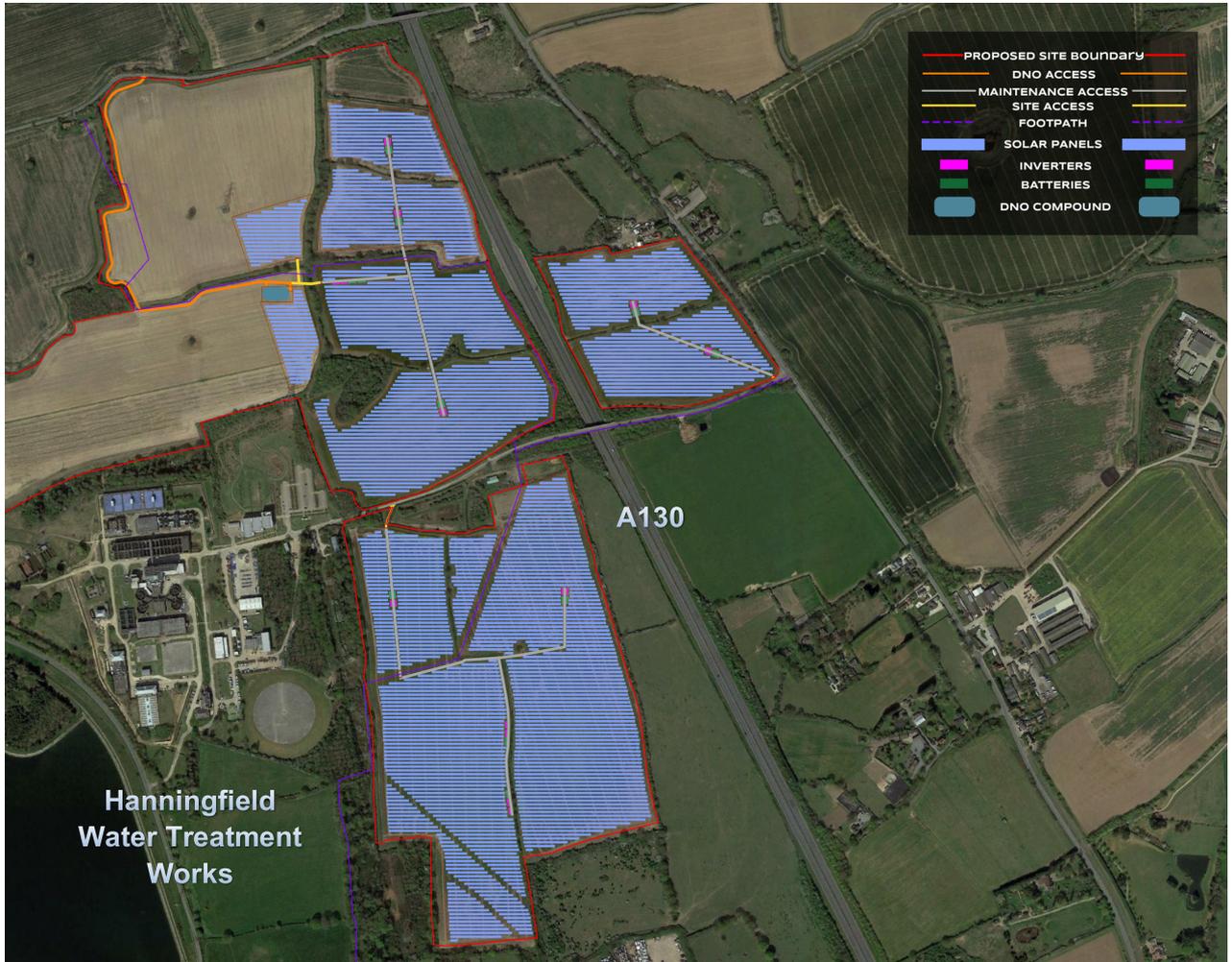
We hope to see you online and look forward to hearing your feedback and answering any questions you may have.

Yours faithfully,

Low Carbon

Enclosed: Information Leaflet and Feedback Form

Fig 1: Site Location and initial indicative layout for 49.9MW



A.2 Community Leaflet

Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Community information



About the project

Low Carbon is introducing a proposal for a new solar farm which would be located on predominately moderate quality agricultural land (Grade 3) east of West Hanningfield, to be known as Sandon Brook Solar Farm.

Sandon Brook Solar Farm will have a capacity of up to 49.9 megawatts (MW) to produce clean renewable electricity by photovoltaic (PV) solar panels. The electricity produced on this solar farm will be exported to the distribution network operator (UK Power Networks) via underground cables. The point of connection that we have been given by UK Power Networks is via an existing overhead tower to the east of West Hanningfield.

The site spans approximately 98 hectares (242 acres) which is more land than is required to generate 49.9 MW. An important part of this consultation will be to obtain feedback from the local community on where it might be best to locate solar panels, and areas that are less favoured. Your views will be considered alongside feedback from our environmental specialists, who are in the process of carrying out numerous surveys to identify where development can be best located. Whilst we cannot guarantee that we will be able to meet every demand, it is ultimately our aim to achieve the best balance possible.

This site was carefully selected through our development process ensuring it met with Low Carbon's criteria including: a viable grid connection nearby with capability of accepting the power generated; being a site which compares favourably in terms of planning designations and; a willing landowner.

49.9

MW solar farm capacity



16,581

Homes powered each year



11,210

Tonnes of CO₂ saved each year



5,175

equivalent cars taken off the road



About Low Carbon

Low Carbon, the developer of this project, is a British-owned investment and asset management company whose business model is based on the financing, development, construction and operation of renewable energy projects at scale. Low Carbon is committed to making a positive and significant impact on the causes of climate change with the goal of a low carbon future with environmental stewardship and collaboration with local communities at the heart of this approach.

Community engagement

We want to ensure the community around this proposal is informed and fully understands the plans for the project. We encourage feedback and suggestions to help influence the design. Our digital engagement platform provides a simple and transparent way for the community to provide feedback, where comments can be pinned to an interactive map of the project area.

Biodiversity and solar farms

It's important to Low Carbon that the area is improved for nature and, as part of the planning process, Low Carbon is required to demonstrate that there will be biodiversity gain on the site. Across all its sites, Low Carbon seeks to increase biodiversity and support pollinators such as bees. It does this by understanding the characteristics of each site location and planting species that are native to that area. All existing woodland, trees and hedgerows are retained only ever adding new planting for additional screening.

Find out more

If you have queries in relation to this project, please contact the project team by emailing development@lowcarbon.com quoting "Sandon Brook Solar Farm" in the subject header.

www.lowcarbon.com



Low Carbon is a certified B Corporation®. B Corps™ are businesses that meet the highest standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Introducing the plan



The site contains existing trees and hedgerows which will be retained and added to using native species.



Within the site, biodiverse grassland meadows will be sown to support wildlife.



Sheep-grazing is possible between the rows of panels and is encouraged.



This type of habitat is important to support bees and other pollinators we rely on.

Find out more

If you have queries in relation to this project, please contact the project team by emailing development@lowcarbon.com quoting "Sandon Brook Solar Farm" in the subject header.

www.lowcarbon.com



Low Carbon is a certified B Corporation®. B Corps™ are businesses that meet the highest standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

A.3 Feedback Form

Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Community Feedback Form



We want to hear from you

Add your voice using this feedback form and help improve our proposal, or find out more about the proposal through our digital engagement platform or contact the project team.

Access our digital engagement platform via <https://sandonbrooksolarfarm.commonplace.is/>

Email us at: sandonbrook@aecom.com, quoting Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Call our Freephone information line: 0800 048 7731 (Monday-Friday, 9am—5pm)

Write to us at: Freepost LOW CARBON UK SOLAR DEVELOPMENT

Please note the deadline for the submission of feedback is **Monday, 30th November 2020.**

Renewable Energy Questions

Broadly, we are interested in people’s views on climate change and renewable energy. It would be useful to receive feedback on the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Climate Change is an issue which should be addressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Which technologies should the UK be investing in, to generate our electricity? (Please rate, with 1 being your preferred and 5 being your least preferred).	Fossil Fuels (Gas and Coal)	Nuclear	Solar PV (ground-mount)	Wind Turbines	Other, please specify
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you seen an operational ground-mounted solar development before?

Yes No Don't know

Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Community Feedback Form

Project specific questions

Provide comments about what's important to you.

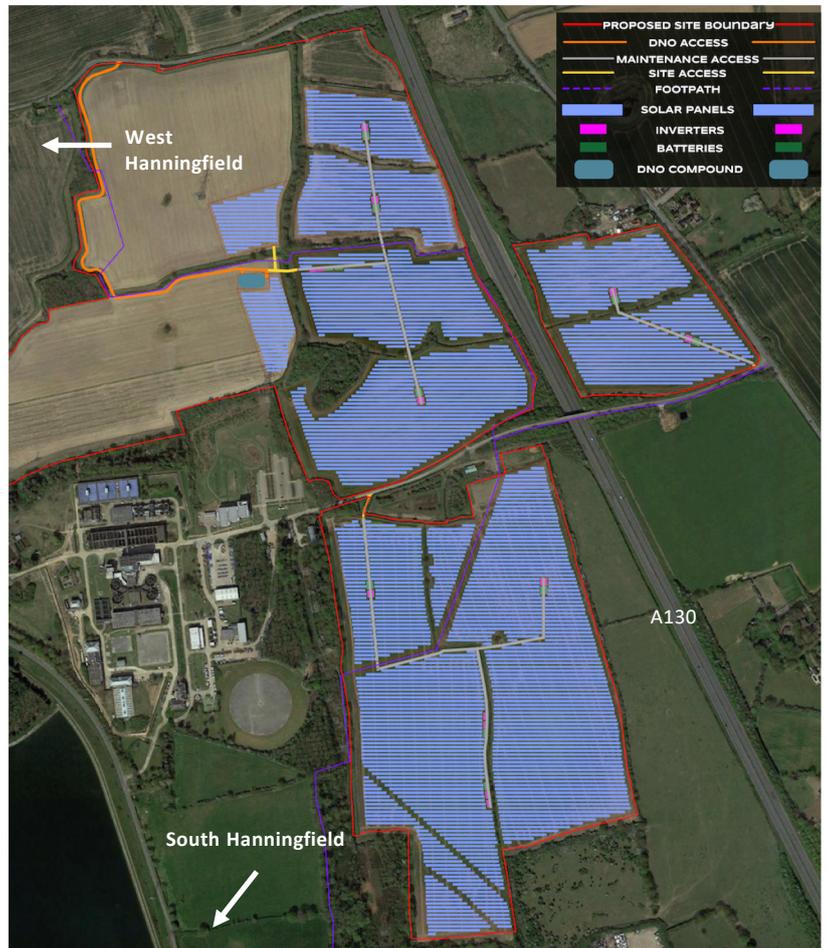
The questions are the same as the ones on our online digital engagement platform (<https://sandonbrooksolarfarm.commonplace.is/>). We will add your comments to it and therefore the comments will be in the public domain and visible to others. Your personal details however, will not be shown.

The site currently includes more land than is required for solar panels and we will not be using this whole area as shown in this layout.

We would like to hear from you about which areas of the map are your least favourite (or best) for the solar panels to be installed. Please draw on the map to show us.

We will use this information alongside information from our environmental specialists to help formulate our final design.

Please review the “now” and “after” photos which can be found on our digital engagement platform, as well as view this indicative layout plan.



Which aspect of the project are your comments in relation to? Tick all that apply

Local ecology and bird life



Archaeology and local heritage



Visual impact



Traffic access and construction



Tourism and recreation



Noise



Other, please specify



Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Community Feedback Form

We are considering a number of initiatives as part of this proposal. Please rate the following which you consider the most important. [1 being the most important and 5 being the least important]

New habitat for wildlife	<input type="radio"/>	Educational areas on edge of site	<input type="radio"/>	Education packs for schools	<input type="radio"/>
Site tours for the community and/or schools	<input type="radio"/>	Other, please specify	<input type="radio"/>		

What are your overall feelings towards the project? Please circle your choice.

<input type="radio"/>				
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Our consultation

How did you find out about this consultation?

Letter	<input type="radio"/>	Online	<input type="radio"/>	Word of mouth	<input type="radio"/>	Press	<input type="radio"/>	Other	<input type="radio"/>
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Do you think there is anything we can improve about our consultation?

We are using a new system, "Commonplace" to assist with our consultation and utilising postal feedback forms, rather than holding events in light of restrictions around COVID-19. We appreciate any feedback you have on the content, questions or more generally around the method of consultation so that we can improve our future consultations. Please let us know for example if you think we have asked too many questions, we missed a question/s, or if was it useful.

Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Community Feedback Form



Please tell us more about you

The following questions are optional. You can answer all the questions, some, or none of them. They will only be seen by Low Carbon's project teams and won't be public.

We thought we would let you know why we are asking these questions and how they will help us.

This type of digital engagement alongside paper engagement is new to us. We want to ensure our engagement process has engaged with a cross-section of the community so that everyone has a chance to put forward their views.

We appreciate to some people these questions might seem intrusive; however, they are optional, therefore please don't feel the need to complete them.

Please place a tick if you agree with the following statement:

I agree to my information being processed by Low Carbon Limited and/or Commonplace Digital Ltd for the purpose of consulting the nearby community to the Sandon Brook Solar Farm.

What's your postcode? (this helps us identify which areas have responded)

For the following questions, please tick the box most applicable to you:

How would you describe your interest in the project?

Local Resident	Local Representative	Interest Group Member	Landowner	Regular Visitor	Local Business Owner
<input type="radio"/>					

What is your age group?

< 20	20-30	31-50	51-70	71 and over	Prefer not to say
<input type="radio"/>					

What is your gender?

Male	Female	Other	Prefer not to say
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Sandon Brook Solar Farm

Community Feedback Form



We would like to keep you updated on news and activity for Sandon Brook Solar Farm. If you agree to being contacted, please tick your preferred method in the relevant boxes below and provide your personal details.

Email Post

Name Title

Organisation (if applicable)

Address

Postcode Telephone

Email

We keep it separate and safe

We will only keep your answers for so long as necessary to carry out the purposes for which we collected it.

You may at any time contact us to request access to and rectify or erase your answers (see contact details below).

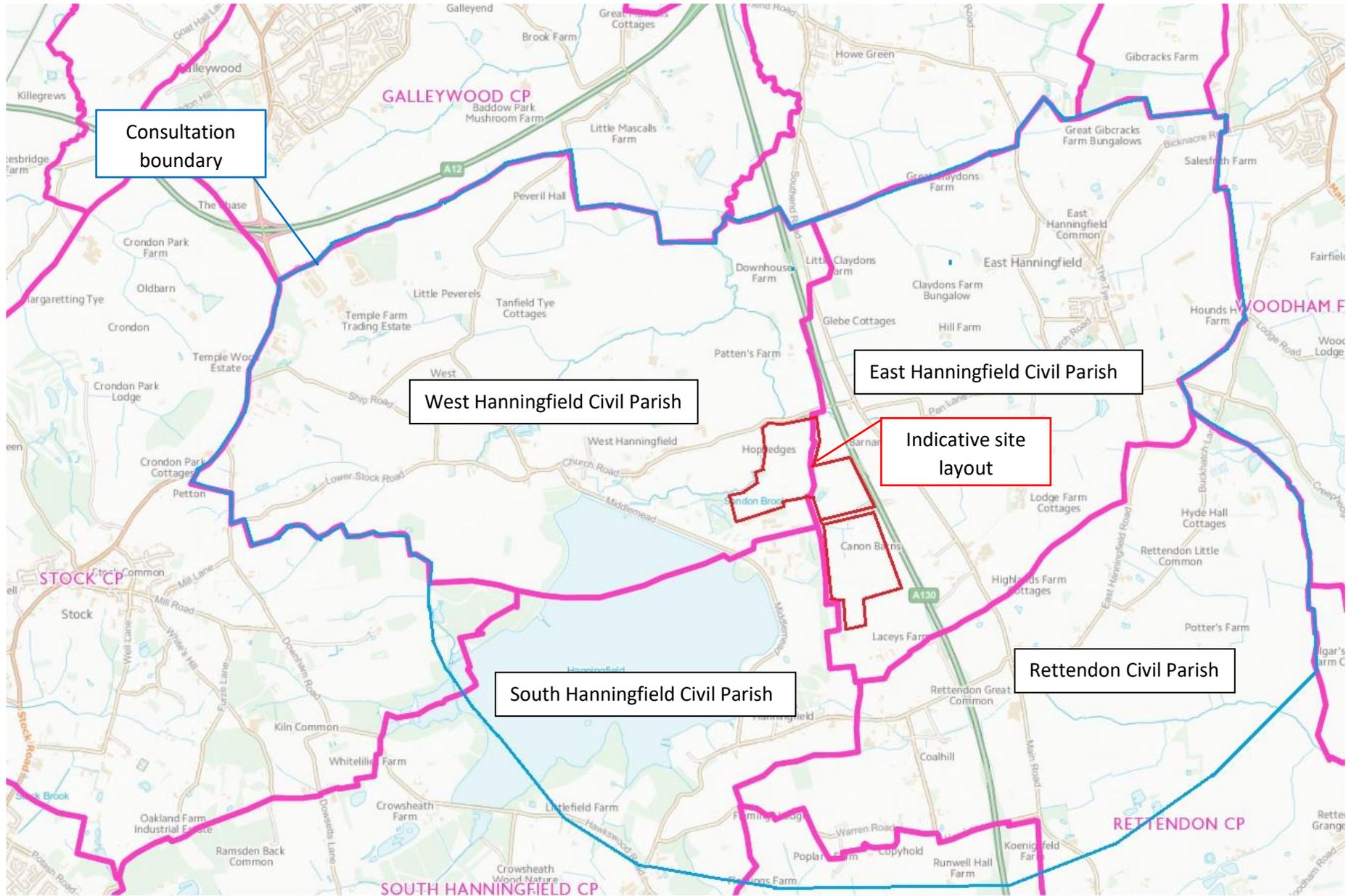
You may at any time contact us to withdraw your consent (see contact details below).

For more information read Commonplace's privacy policy which can be found at <https://www.commonplace.is/privacy> and Low Carbon's privacy policy which can be found at <https://www.lowcarbon.com/privacy-policy/>.

If you have any question please contact us by email (enquiries@lowcarbon.com).

Thank you for participating in the consultation for Sandon Brook Solar Farm.

Appendix B Distribution area



Appendix C Newspaper Advertisements

C.1 Essex County Standard Newspaper advertisement

50
November 13, 2020
Essex County Standard



Low Carbon
powering tomorrow

Low Carbon is seeking your views on a proposed solar farm on land located on the outskirts of West Hanningfield – known as Sandon Brook Solar Farm.

Sandon Brook Solar Farm will generate clean renewable power of up to 49.9 megawatts (MW), enough to power over 16,500 homes.



To find out more about the proposal please visit the consultation website <https://sandonbrookfarm.commonplace.is/>. Owing to current health risks associated with COVID-19, public drop-in events are not longer appropriate, but we are still committed to hearing the views of the community on our proposals before we submit a planning application.

To submit feedback click on the 'Have your say' icon within the consultation website.

You can also find out more and provide your views through our freephone line, freepost address, and dedicated project email address, listed below.

Please note that the deadline for submitting comments is **Monday 30th November 2020**.

@ sandonbrook@aecom.com, quoting Sandon Brook Solar Farm

☎ 0800 048 7731, Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm

✉ Freepost LOW CARBON UK SOLAR DEVELOPMENT

WILL YOUR LEAFLET CAMPAIGN TICK ALL THE BOXES?

- PLANNING
- DESIGN
- PRINT
- DELIVERY
- RESEARCH



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SHOPFITTING DRAUGHTSPERSON WANTED!

Are you an experienced Draughtsperson? Looking for a challenge that will put your talents to work with some of the country's finest retailers?

Brown & Carroll work with many of the UK's most prestigious contractors, architects and clients, we've proved ourselves to be a 'no-fail' business. We complete every project on time and on budget, maintaining the preferred status with all the projects it undertakes.

Successful candidate will be responsible for managing the design resolution process to enable manufacture and procurement of joinery, M&E services and interior finishes as a full shop fitting solution.

Applicants should have the following competencies:

- Previous experience within a Shopfitting environment is essential
- Strong organisational skills with a flexible and proactive approach
- Attention to detail and a strong desire for accuracy
- Excellent communication and relationship building skills
- Must be fluent in AutoCAD 2D
- Proficient in Microsoft Software Packages

In return, the right candidate will receive a competitive salary, an excellent benefits package and 25 days holidays per year.

SHOPFITTING CONTRACTS MANAGER WANTED!

Are you an experienced Contracts Manager? Looking for a challenge that will put your talents to work with some of the country's finest retailers?

Brown & Carroll work with many of the UK's most prestigious contractors, architects and clients, we've proved ourselves to be a 'no-fail' business. We commit to complete every project on time and on budget, maintaining the preferred status with all the projects it undertakes.

Successful candidate will be responsible for overall procuring and managing design, manufacture and procurement of joinery, M&E services and interior finishes as a full shop fitting solution.

Applicants should have the following competencies:

- Previous experience within a shopfitting environment is essential
- Strong organisational skills with a flexible and proactive approach
- Good attention to detail and a strong desire for accuracy
- Team player with excellent communication and relationship building skills
- Proficient in Microsoft Software Packages

In return, the right candidate will receive a competitive salary, an excellent benefits package and 25 days holidays per year.

In you are interested in a career with one of the UK's top fit-out specialists, visit www.brown-carroll.co.uk to learn more about Brown & Carroll and apply online.

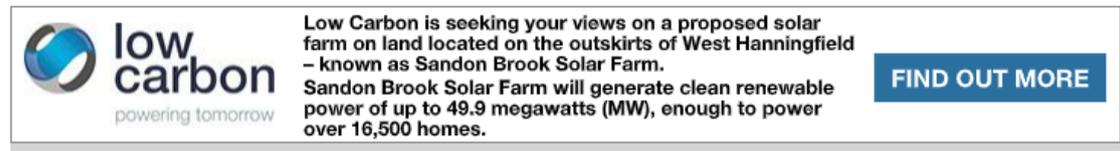
C.2 Essex County Standard online advertisement



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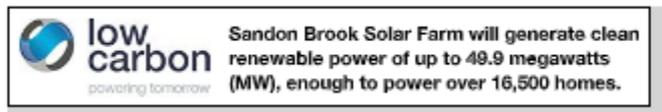
[FIND OUT MORE](#)



low carbon
powering tomorrow

Low Carbon is seeking your views on a proposed solar farm on land located on the outskirts of West Hanningfield – known as Sandon Brook Solar Farm. Sandon Brook Solar Farm will generate clean renewable power of up to 49.9 megawatts (MW), enough to power over 16,500 homes.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



low carbon
powering tomorrow

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[FIND OUT MORE](#)



low carbon
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[FIND OUT MORE](#)



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[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Appendix D Commonplace consultation platform

This project is now closed. [See the latest projects in your area.](#)

Welcome to Sandon Brook Solar Farm and Energy Storage

Low Carbon is introducing a proposal for a new solar farm including battery storage which will be located east of West Hanningfield.

We are consulting the community on these proposals before determining whether to submit a planning application to Chelmsford City Council.

This consultation closed on Friday 4th December 2020 - more information to follow.

If you would like to speak to one of the Project Team, call our freephone number 0800 048 7731 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm), or email us at sandonbrook@aecom.com quoting Sandon Brook Solar Farm.

[View map and comment](#)

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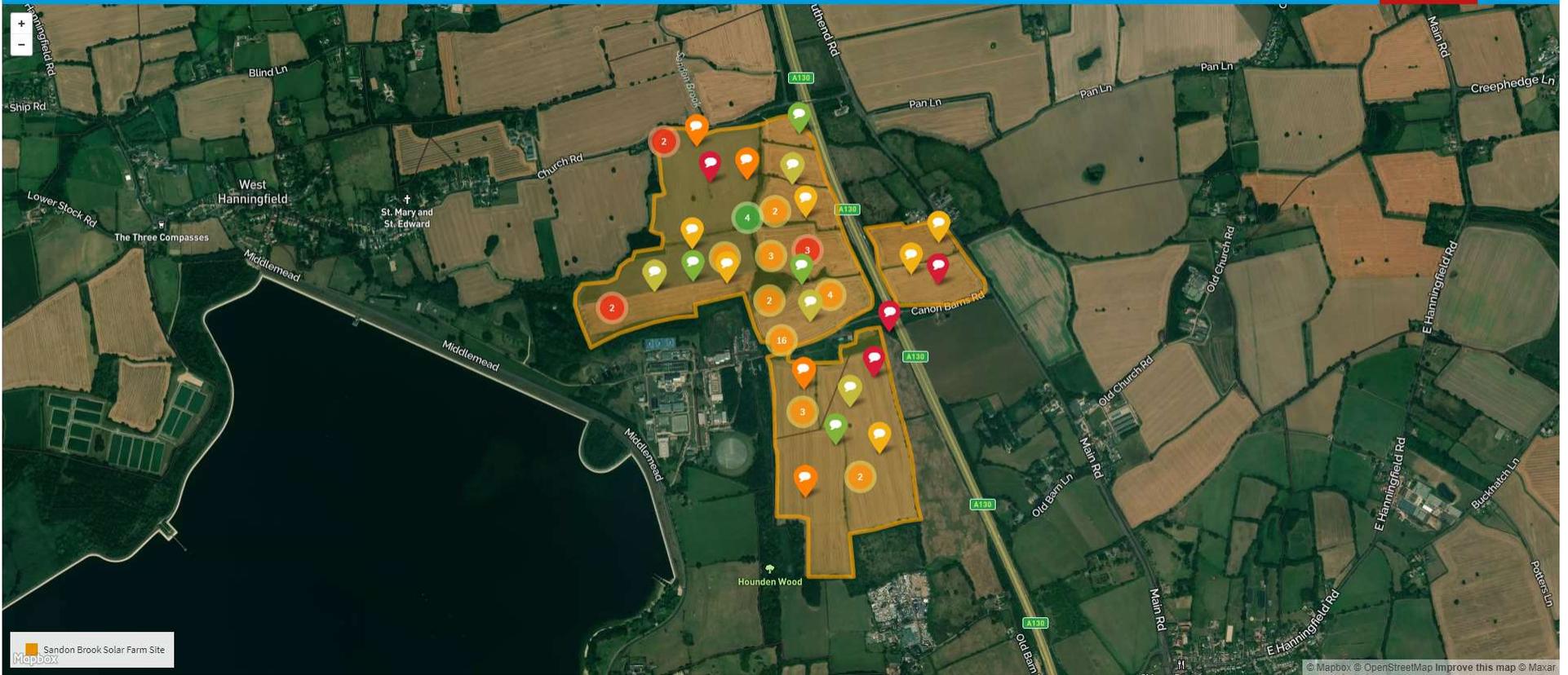
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