



## **Priory Farm Solar Array**

# **Proposed Development of a Photovoltaic Solar Array on Land at Priory Farm to the East of Great Wymondley, North Hertfordshire**

**PINS Ref: APP/X1925/V/23/3323321**

**LPA Ref: 21/03380/FP**

**Summary Proof of Evidence on Planning  
Matters by Alistair Hoyle**

On Behalf of the Applicant



**AGR 4 Solar Limited**

**August 2023  
APP/AH/1**



# Document Control

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF EVIDENCE**

- 1.1.1 I am Alistair Iain Hoyle an Associate Director at Axis, a multi-disciplinary planning and environmental consultancy.
- 1.1.2 I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. I have twenty years professional experience and have specialised in the energy and infrastructure sectors.
- 1.1.3 I have prepared a proof of evidence to consider the planning-related matters relevant to the call-in Inquiry for the proposed solar farm development (the 'Proposed Development') on land at Priory Farm to the East of Great Wymondley, North Hertfordshire ('the Site').
- 1.1.4 My evidence addresses the following:
- i) A brief description of the Proposed Development
  - ii) Approach to site selection
  - iii) Consistency with Green Belt policy
  - iv) Consistency with the Development Plan for the area and other material considerations
  - v) Matters raised by the Inspector
  - vi) Consideration of other matters raised by other parties
  - vii) Planning conditions
  - viii) Conclusions on the planning balance
- 1.1.5 I confirm that the views expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## **2.0 THE SITE AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

- 2.1.1 The Site is circa 88 hectares and is in two parts. The Site principally comprises arable farmland, with hedges, woodland blocks and hedgerow trees.
- 2.1.2 The Site is served by existing farm access tracks from Graveley Road, which would be upgraded for use in construction and maintenance of the Proposed Development.
- 2.1.3 The grid connection would be located within the carriageway or verge along Graveley Lane, Priory Lane, Stevenage Road, Blakemore End Road and Stevenage Road to the National Grid Substation at Wymondley.



2.1.4 The Proposed Development is for the construction and operation of a photovoltaic solar array and ancillary development for a period of up to 40 years, after which the development would be decommissioned.

2.1.5 The Proposed Development would export up to 49.995MWe of renewable electricity to the National Grid during peak operation.

### **3.0 GREEN BELT**

3.1.1 I accept that the Proposed Development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

3.1.2 Inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the Proposed Development, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

3.1.3 Although the Proposed Development is, by definition to it being inappropriate development, harmful to the Green Belt, from my analysis I have concluded a moderate level of harm to the Green Belt.

3.1.4 There would be no permanent impacts on openness and there would be no impacts on the permanence of the Green Belt.

3.1.5 I have considered all negative impacts of the Proposed Development by virtue of being 'any other harm'. I have reviewed the planning application documents and the evidence prepared by others, and I conclude that except for short-term landscape and visual harm, harm would not be significant.

3.1.6 Having completed a balancing exercise I believe there are clear and demonstrable considerations that weigh in support of the Proposed Development. In my view, these considerations, either individually in terms of need for renewable energy and addressing the challenge of climate change and providing energy security, or cumulatively taking account of the other factors, clearly outweigh the temporary harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt, and other harm, and in doing so demonstrably constitute very special circumstances.



#### **4.0 ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1.1 In my evidence I have assessed the Proposed Development against the extant development plan policies. I have also appraised the Proposed Development against the material planning considerations which I find are most relevant.

4.1.2 Based upon the assessment set out within my evidence, I believe that the Proposed Development accords with the Development Plan when taken as a whole. Furthermore, all other material planning considerations provide no basis for determining the Planning Application other than in accordance with the Development Plan; indeed, they reinforce the logic of doing so.

#### **5.0 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND THE PLANNING BALANCE**

5.1.1 The benefits of the Proposed Development are, in my view, very clear and very significant. The Proposed Development would assist in delivering the need for renewable energy development in the context of the legally binding net zero target established by the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 and would contribute to energy security.

5.1.2 I consider that the planning balance clearly weighs in favour of the Proposed Development. The application accords with the Development Plan taken as a whole, and other material considerations lend further support for it. Consequently, I believe that planning permission should be granted.

