EAST STOUR SOLAR FARM

Socio Economic and Sustainability Statement

PREPARED ON BEHALF OF

EDF renewables

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SOCIO ECONOMICS AND SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

SE.1 This Statement considers the socio-economic effects of the proposed East Stour Solar Farm in the context of the recognised global imperative for renewable energy. The assessments within this chapter do not form part of the EIA but the information is material to the consideration of the Planning Application.

SE.2 As discussed within **Chapter 2 - Development Rationale**, the effects of climate change are now being experienced at all levels – global, national, regional and local. Similarly the socio-economic effects of the proposal will also have effects at the global, national, regional and local level.

SE.3 The effects considered are primarily:

- rural diversification and land use;
- electricity generation;
- emissions;
- employment and local businesses;
- tourism;
- public attitudes; and
- community benefits.

SE.4 At the heart of the NPPF (MHCLG, 2021) and indeed the planning system is the Government's aim to achieve sustainable development. The Government describe three dimensions to sustainable development:

- economic (including the provision of infrastructure);
- social (supporting strong vibrant and healthy communities); and
- environmental (including to mitigate and adapt to climate change and moving to a low carbon economy).

SE.5 Within the NPPF is '*a presumption in favour of sustainable development*'. The Planning Statement which accompanies the planning application discusses renewable energy projects in the context of sustainable development, not least due to the socio-economic benefits associated with such schemes.

SE.6 In consideration of planning policy and socio-economic effects for energy projects, the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (DECC, 2011), which is a material consideration for projects determined through the Town and Country Planning Acts, states:

'The Government's wider objectives for energy infrastructure include contributing to sustainable development and ensuring that our energy infrastructure is safe. Sustainable development is relevant not just in terms of addressing climate

change, but because the way energy infrastructure is deployed affects the well-being of society and the economy' and;

'In considering any proposed development, and in particular when weighing its adverse impacts against its benefits, the IPC should take into account: its potential benefits including its contribution to meeting the need for energy infrastructure, job creation and any long-term or wider benefits.'

RURAL DIVERSIFICATION

SE.7 Rural diversification has become an important source of support and income for a large proportion of the UK's farms, allowing farmers to continue to manage the countryside.

SE.8 DEFRA figures (Farm Accounts for England) for 2019/20 (DEFRA, 2021) show that:

- 68% of farm businesses in England had some diversified activity;
- 49% of farm businesses in England have some diversified activity other than letting buildings; and
- diversified activities are slowly increasing, with the 2019/20 figures being 3% higher than the previous.

SE.9 **Table SE.1** provides a summary of income from diversified enterprises as provided by the DEFRA Farm Accounts for England report.

SE.10 Of interest, 33% of farms (18 600 farms) receive income from renewable energy diversification. This equates to an annual income of £94m, representing 7% of the farm income.

SE.11 Solar generation provides an income to some 12 600 farms in England. This will vary from large scale schemes to roof-mounted arrays. Nevertheless, solar energy currently brings £38m of revenue per annum to farms in England, more than tourist accommodation, or sport and recreation.

SE.12 Consistent with these results, a 2019 report by the National Farmers Union (NFU) Mutual found that approximately 29% of already diversified farms chose renewable energy. The case study provided a common reason for choosing to diversify, as illustrated in the following quote:

'The main reason for diversifying is because relying on income based purely on agriculture made us too vulnerable so I wanted to spread the risk and bring some financial stability.'

SE.13 The importance of supporting a prosperous rural economy is highlighted in Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2021):

'Planning policies and decisions should enable:

[...] b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses [...].'

SE.14 In providing a source of diversification this proposal will provide a means to maintain the current and develop the future farming practices, and overall diversify operations ensuring the long term viability of the farm and associated benefits for the local rural economy.

Table SE.1 - *Income from Diversified Enterprises, England 2019/20 (DEFRA, 2021)*

	No. of farms	% of farms	Total Farm Business Income for these farms (£m)	Income of diversified enterprise (£m)	Average enterprise income (£/farm)
Farm Business Income (including diversification)	56 500		2 597		
Farms that engage in:					
Diversified enterprises (all kinds)	38 400	68%	2 048	734	19 100
Letting buildings for non-farming use	25 500	45%	1 650	521	20 400
Processing/retailing of farm produce	5 600	10%	182	50	8 900
Sport and recreation	7 500	13%	444	22	3 000
Tourist accommodation and catering	3 300	6%	180	16	4 800
Solar energy	12 600	22%	897	38	3 100
Other sources of renewable energy	6 000	11%	475	56	9 400
Other diversified activities	6 700	12%	336	30	4 500

SE.15 Income to farms is just one important aspect of farm diversification. Pressure is also coming from the retail sector as suppliers source from low carbon farms to assist with the carbon labelling of their products. Examples of this include Sainsbury's, who have pledged to become carbon neutral by 2040 and as part of this state that they will also work with their suppliers to '*set their own ambitious Net Zero commitments*' (Sainsbury's, 2021).

SE.16 Similarly, Tesco has pledged to be a zero-carbon business by 2050 and zero-carbon in the UK by 2035. Focusing initially on their own operations, this company is also working with their suppliers to do the same. This involves the encouragement of a low carbon strategy down the entire supply chain to the agricultural sector (Tesco, 2021). This is a challenging undertaking. Tesco currently report that 54% of their UK Field-to-Tesco carbon footprint comes from the agricultural sector.

SE.17 To diversify into renewable energy is therefore of material benefit to a farm, through the association of its produce with low carbon energy production.

Optimising Land Use

SE.18 DEFRA Farming Statistics for '*Final crop areas, yields, livestock populations and agricultural workforce at 1 June 2020*' (DEFRA, 2020) finds that the total utilised agricultural area has remained relatively stable, between 17 and 18 million hectares since 2001. In this period the number and scale of ground mounted solar arrays has increased but it can be seen that this does not significantly affect the useable area for agriculture.

SE.19 Of greater interest is the Building Research Establishment publication '*Agricultural Good Practice Guidance for Solar Farms*.' (BRE, 2014a). This finds that:

'The developer, landowner and/or agricultural tenant/licensee may choose to graze livestock at higher stocking densities throughout the year over much of the solar farm, especially where the previous land use suggested higher yields or pasture quality. Between 4 and 8 sheep/hectare may be achievable (or 2-3 sheep/ha on newly-established pasture), similar to stocking rates on conventional grassland, i.e. between about March and November in the southwest.'

SE.20 The BRE also advocate free-range poultry or bee-keeping as productive options, and stress that solar farms may actually enhance the agricultural value of land. In the BRE NSC Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments (BRE, 2014b) the benefits of solar farms on land quality are discussed:

'Soil health is essential for the sustainability of farming in the longer-term and solar farms could play an important role by resting soils through the life of the solar farm. Resting would especially benefit soils that have been exhausted of their nutrients and compacted by farm machinery. Thus, solar farms can provide a means for soil to improve while maintaining production from solar harvesting, and possibly grazing.'

SE.21 In addition the BRE also state:

'establishing permanent grasslands with few or no agricultural inputs on post-arable land should lead to a significant reduction in carbon release from the land.'

SE.22 There is also evidence that soil moisture is better retained on fields with solar panels (Adeh, Selker and Higgins, 2018).

SE.23 In terms of biodiversity, the ecological assessment and landscape and visual impact assessment discuss the extensive enhancements to all habitats on site (arable, hedgerow and trees). The ecological assessment considers that this will ensure that a Biodiversity Net Gain is achieved by the proposed development.

SE.24 As a result of resting the land from intensive agriculture for the life of the proposed East Stour Solar Farm, measurable benefits for biodiversity and soil health could be achieved.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity Consumption and Demand

SE.25 Since around 2005, total electricity consumption has been falling, across sectors, year on year (DBEIS, 2021a). In 2020 approximately 280TWh of electricity was consumed in Great Britain, with approximately 38%

attributed to domestic use. In the domestic sector it is thought that this reduction is down to increased household and appliance efficiencies, as well as higher bills.

SE.26 There are currently approximately 24.7 million dwellings in England (MHCLG, 2021b). Since 2010, the number of new dwellings built each year has steadily increased from approximately 106 720 in 2010 (the lowest since 1946) to approximately 148 630 in 2020 (MHCLG, 2021b).

SE.27 According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2021a) the UK population in mid 2009 was over 62.2 million. The latest population estimate from the ONS states that there are over 67 million people in the UK. The UK population has been steadily increasing since the late 1980 and this trend is expected to continue. The expected increasing population and housing stock can only have an upward influence on the national domestic electricity demand.

SE.28 **Chapter 2 - Development Rationale** discusses the UK's legally binding target, under the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended), to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. It explains how the Sixth Carbon Budget ties in with the Energy White Paper (December 2020), the Government Response to the Future Homes Standard (January 2021) and the 10 Point Green Plan. With all new cars and vans to be fully electric from 2030 and heating in new homes to be non-fossil fuel from 2025, electricity demand is set to increase from approximately 300TWh today to 360TWh in 2030, 460TWh in 2035 and 610TWh in 2050. In addition to this, to produce hydrogen for transport, an additional 120TWh is required in 2050.

UK Electricity Generation

SE.29 UK Energy statistics show that primary energy production in 2020 was 1.5% higher than a year earlier (DBEIS, 2020a). This increase follows a dip in energy production in 2019, the first since 2014, and resumes an overall trend of growth.

SE.30 2020 saw a 29.3% decrease in electricity generation from coal, bringing it to a record low level and accounting for only 0.5% of the total primary energy production. Nuclear electricity also fell by 9.2%. A record high of 44.6% of electricity was supplied by renewables in the second quarter of 2020. This was mainly driven by increased renewable energy production capacity. Gas accounted for 34.4% electricity generation (DBEIS, 2020a).

SE.31 Looking at renewables specifically, the latest DBEIS Energy Trends Report data shows that solar energy forms a relatively small proportion (less than 10%) of overall renewable generation (DBEIS, 2021b).

SE.32 As discussed in **Chapter 2 - Development Rationale**, the UK has a legally binding target to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. To achieve this, additional renewable energy generation will be required.

SE.33 When solar farms are generating electricity, the amount of electricity other power stations need to generate in order to meet demand is reduced. This means that as long as fossil fuels are present in the UK's energy mix, each kWh of electricity produced by solar farms will effectively displace a kWh of electricity that would otherwise have been produced by burning fossil fuels.

Predicted Electricity Generation

SE.34 East Stour Solar Farm will connect directly in to the nearby Sellindge Converter Station Substation National Grid Supply Point (GSP). The GSP is where electricity transported from the National Grid is converted to the Distribution Network voltage for supply across the region. Whilst the site is generating it will supply electricity directly into the network and its serviced consumers.

SE.35 As stated at **Chapter 1 - Introduction** it is predicted that the solar farm at this site would have a potential annual yield of approximately 69 800MWh.

SE.36 In terms of household electricity usage this would be sufficient to offset the equivalent annual energy needs of 17 000 (to 3 S.F) average Ashford Borough homes (as noted in **Chapter 1**).

Energy Prices

SE.37 A report for the Solar Trade Association in 2014 investigated the economic benefits of solar PV installation (CEBR, 2014). Within this it included the relative cost of solar energy compared to more conventional sources. The analysis found that using conservative estimates from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (now DBEIS), large-scale solar becomes cheaper than gas before 2025 and cheaper than wholesale electricity before 2030. This is demonstrated in terms of the Levelised Cost Of Energy (LCOE), which describes the ratio of total lifetime costs (capital and operating) of a specific generator to the total amount of electricity expected to be generated over its lifetime, both expressed in present value terms. This is shown for a range of generation sources in **Plate SE.1**.

SE.38 Whilst it is cited by some that the 'polluter pays principle' is an unnecessary burden to the consumer, in considering the future sustainability of our electricity generation it should be considered appropriate to encourage cleaner energy generation and in the interest of reducing consumer bills.

SE.39 The energy regulator, OFGEM, provides guidance on the components of electricity bills (OFGEM, 2021a). As shown at **Plate SE.2**, the average proportions of elements making up an electricity bill in the UK are: Wholesale costs (29.28%); Network costs (23.37%); Operating costs (16.34%); Environmental and social obligation costs (25.48%); VAT (4.76%); and other direct costs (2.09%).

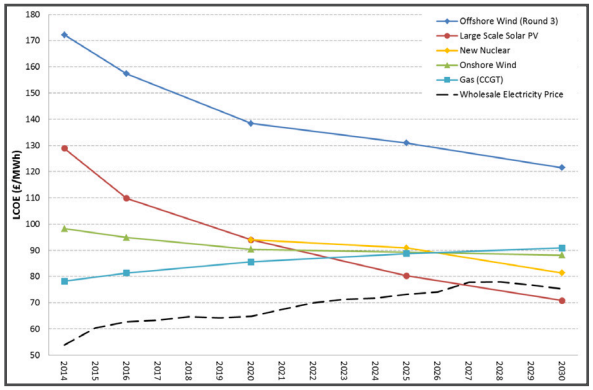

Plate SE.1 - *DECC LCOEs for Selected Technologies (£/MWh, 2014 prices) (Cebr, 2014)*

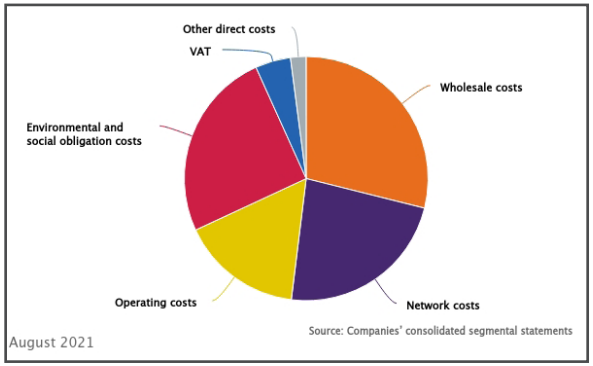

Plate SE.2 - *Breakdown of an Electricity Bill (OFGEM, 2021a)*

SE.40 Clearly with the cost of energy and networks forming the majority of the overall electricity bill (53%), consumers are primarily exposed to fluctuations in the cost of gas over any other component. Increasing renewable generation breaks the link between wholesale gas prices and electricity costs, and consequently the consumer's exposure to these price pressures.

SE.41 Energy bills increased quickly in the UK between 2004-2008 (CCC, 2017). This was due to rising fuel costs, despite generally reduced consumption. Energy bills continued to rise to a peak around 2013, and remained fairly stable to current levels (OFGEM, 2021b).

SE.42 The average UK domestic electricity price (incl. taxes) in the second half of 2020 was above the median EU price. The Price per kilowatt for electricity in the UK during this period was 18.9 pence, which was the 9th highest in Europe (OFGEM, 2021b).

SE.43 In 2017 the Committee on Climate Change published a report '*Energy Prices and Bills - impacts of meeting carbon budgets*' setting out independent analysis of how the UK's carbon budgets and related policies affect energy bills for households. Key findings of this report are:

- *'Household bills in 2016 were below 2008 levels as higher prices resulting from low-carbon policies and network costs were more than offset by reductions in energy use.'*
- *'Bills are about £115 lower in real terms since the Climate Change Act was passed in 2008, having risen around £370 from 2004 to 2008 as international gas prices rose.'*
- *'Meeting the fifth carbon budget, including sourcing 75% of UK generation from low-carbon sources by 2030, will add around a further £85-120 to the annual bill [...] Added to the impact on current bills, this implies that low-carbon policies will add £190-225 in total to the average annual bill in 2030 [...]'*
- *'Households could more than offset this bill impact from energy efficiency improvements between 2016-2030, which would save around £150 on average if prices remain at current levels. The majority (85%) of this saving is available from replacing appliances, lights and boilers at the end of their lives with the latest equivalent models.'*
- *'However, other factors, particularly rising wholesale gas prices, are expected to add over £200 to bills [...] If wholesale prices do rise, the saving from improving energy efficiency would be even larger.'*

SE.44 The CCC reports that low-carbon initiatives add cost to the household energy bill but these costs could be offset with improved energy efficiency measures. The projected impact of low-carbon measures on annual household energy bills is demonstrated in **Plate SE.3 on page 8**.

SE.45 Solar energy is increasingly cost competitive with conventional forms of energy generation. The most recent DBEIS report (2020b) estimates that the cost of solar generation (£44/MWh) will effectively be half the cost of CCGT electricity generation (£85/MWh) for projects commissioned in 2025.

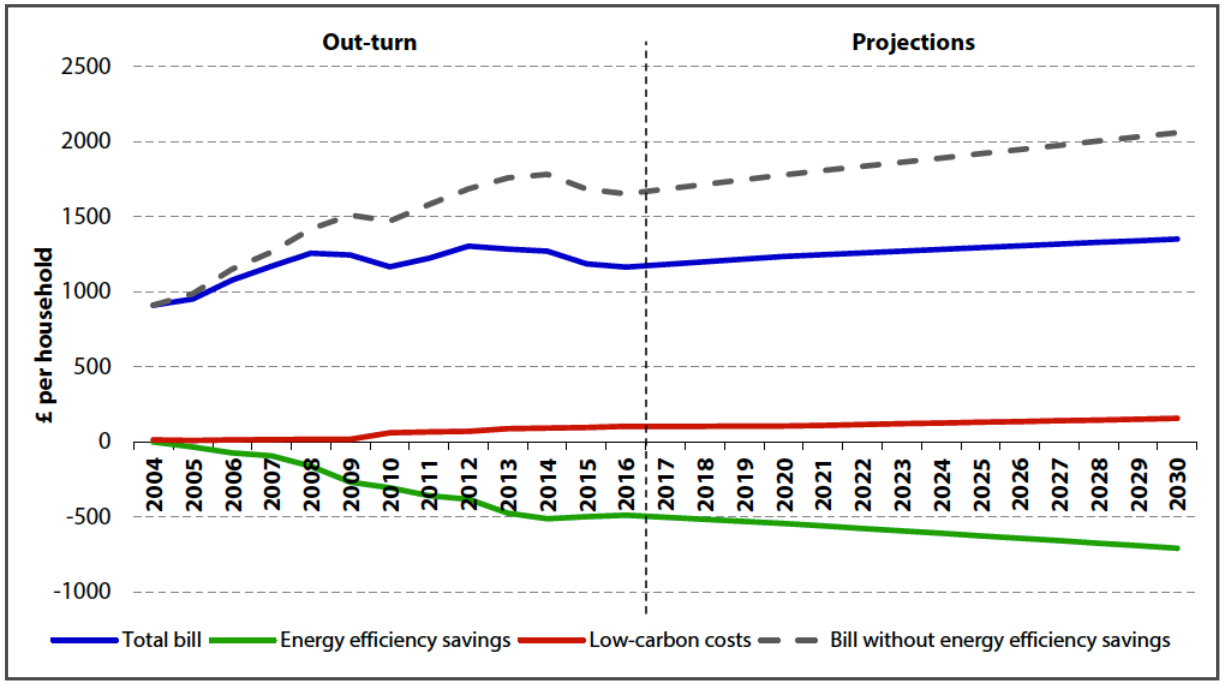

Plate SE.3 - *Annual Energy Bills, Low-Carbon Costs and Energy Savings (2004-2030) (CCC, 2017)*

SE.46 Between 2004-2016 electricity prices rose 61% (CCC, 2017). Although the majority of this rise was down to wholesale and network costs, 40% was attributed to climate policies, which include:

- price support for low carbon generation;
- EU Emissions Trading System allowances;
- UK Carbon Price Support;
- energy efficiency policies aimed at reducing CO_2; and
- upgrades to transmission and distribution networks to accommodate renewable generation, heat pumps and electric vehicles.

SE.47 Until 2016 there were three mechanisms for promoting renewable energy in the UK: the Renewables Obligation, Feed-in Tariffs (for small to medium scale schemes) and Contracts for Difference for larger scale projects. These mechanisms are funded through the electricity retail market and are not supported through the UK Treasury.

SE.48 These mechanisms have successfully stimulated the development of the renewable energy industry without the need for capital development grants.

SE.49 According to National Grid, 2020 was the greenest year on record for Britain's electricity system. Solar power set records for its highest ever level of generation (9.7GW) and its highest share in the electricity generation mix (34%), comfortably providing a third of Britain's electricity supplies on several occasions in May (National Grid, 2021).

SE.50 2021 continues to break records with the all-time lowest carbon intensity electricity generation (the measure of CO_2 emissions per unit of electricity

consumed) being recorded on 5th April 2021. On this day, wind turbines and solar panels were generating 60% of the nation's electricity (The Guardian, 2021).

EMISSIONS

SE.51 It has been predicted that the proposed solar farm will generate an annual average of approximately 69 600 000kWh (net) of electricity (to 3 S.F.).

SE.52 The generation of this electricity will offset electricity generated from other sources. The project is connected in to the National Grid substation and all electricity generated by the site will be transferred to the electricity network. This means that whilst the solar array is generating electricity, it in turn reduces demand on the large fossil fuel power stations.

SE.53 Different organisations have historically made differing assumptions for calculating the emissions offset associated with renewable energy generation, varying in their view of the power generation technology that is actually offset.

SE.54 For carbon dioxide these assumptions range from 860gCO_2/kWh (based upon coal generation) to 355gCO_2/kWh (based upon gas generation).

SE.55 The National Grid itself is dynamic and electricity is sourced from a variety of generators including coal, gas, oil, nuclear and renewable energy. As shown in **Plate SE.4 on page 10** (as also discussed in **Chapter 2 - Development Rationale**), electricity is also imported from overseas.

SE.56 It would therefore be incorrect to base any emissions offset calculation upon a single source of energy, particularly given the shifting energy mix as identified in **Plate SE.4**.

SE.57 A conservative approach is to utilise the UK Government Greenhouse Gas Conversion Factors (DBEIS, 2021c) for company reporting of annual carbon emissions.

SE.58 It is a legal requirement for all UK quoted companies (listed on London Stock Exchange, EEA market, New York Stock Exchange or NASDAQ, unquoted large companies and large LLPs) to report on their global energy use in addition to greenhouse gas emissions.

SE.59 The Government update the Greenhouse Gas Conversion Factors on an annual basis, and these include the average carbon emissions for UK electricity generation and UK transmission and distribution. The Government also require quoted Companies to use these conversion factors to calculate the emissions offset associated with their own renewable energy generators.

SE.60 These conversion factors are therefore entirely appropriate as the basis for calculating the emissions offset associated with this proposal. As they are based upon the mix of generation sources (as shown in **Plate SE.4**) they can be considered conservative as this mix includes for renewable energy sources and renewable energy generation is not used to offset itself.

SE.61 The conversion factors for 2020, published in June 2021, provide the most up to date figures as shown in **Table SE.2**.

Table SE.2 - *2021 GHG Conversion Factors (DBEIS, 2021c)*

	kgCO_2e/kWh
Electricity Generation	0.21233

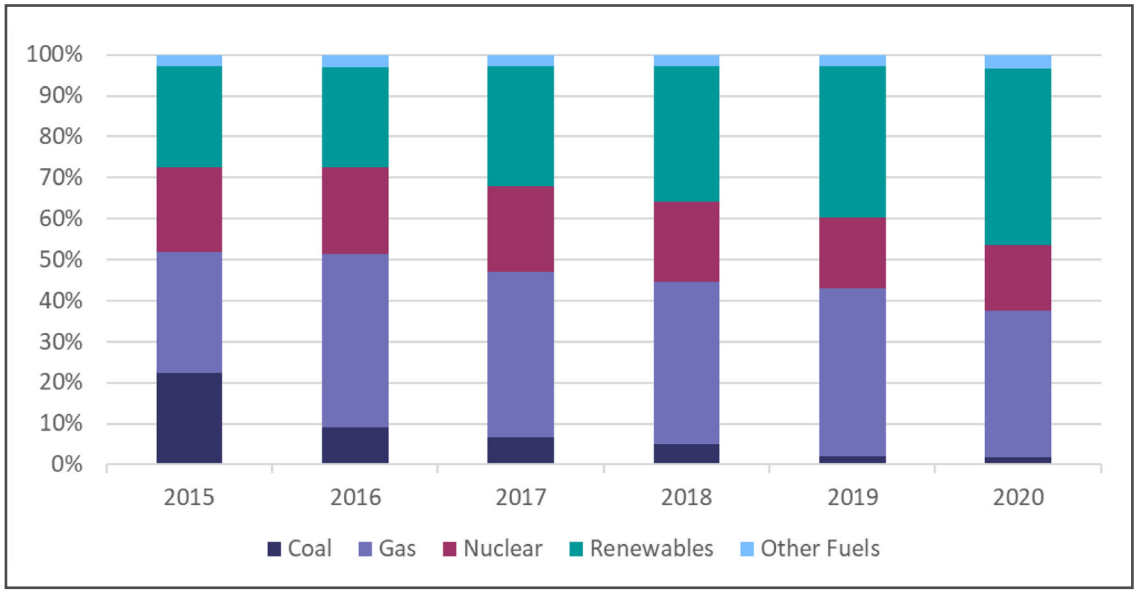

Plate SE.4 - *2015 Electricity Fuel Mix Compared to 2020 Electricity Fuel Mix (Source: Digest of UK Energy Statistics (DBEIS, 2021)*

SE.62 On this basis the electricity produced by the East Stour Solar Farm will offset approximately **14 800 000kgCO_2/ annum or 14 800 tonnes CO_2 per annum** (to 3 S.F.). This can be considered a conservative estimate of the carbon offset by the East Stour Solar Farm.

SE.63 DBEIS report that the CO_2 emissions associated with the average Ashford resident was 1.41 tonnes of CO_2 per annum based upon per capita emissions in 2019 (DBEIS, 2021d). The 14 800 tonnes of CO_2 offset by the solar array would therefore compare to the total equivalent domestic emissions of some 10 500 (to 3 S.F.) average Ashford Borough residents.

SE.64 This project therefore provides a material contribution to the net zero target by 2050 at both National (through the Climate Change Act) and Local level. Whilst Ashford Borough elected not to declare a 'Climate Emergency', the Council has elected to commit to carbon neutrality by 2030.

EMPLOYMENT AND LOCAL BUSINESSES

SE.65 As acknowledged by the Committee on Climate Change (2017), '*the UK low-carbon economy is already estimated to employ hundreds of thousands of people and contribute around 2-3% of GDP*'.

SE.66 Materials and services for the proposal will be sourced, where practical, from suitably qualified local and regional contractors. Further employment roles such as security, maintenance and cleaning will be required during the operational phase of the development.

SE.67 The Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) reports employment by sector in the County (Kent County Council, 2021). The latest data (2021) show that the largest sectors of employment in the county are the health, social, education and retail sectors. This is broadly consistent with the national

average. Hospitality and transport sector employment is similarly in line with national averages. Construction accounts for almost 8% of employment, significantly higher than the national average. There is clearly a skill and service capability within the County relevant to the proposal.

SE.68 Each phase of the development with regard to employment is considered in the following sections.

Development Phase

SE.69 In the preparation of the feasibility, scoping and environmental assessment work for the East Stour Solar Farm, elements of the work have been undertaken by companies from within the south-east region where appropriate. Also local accommodation and services have been used during prolonged visits to the area. This reinforces the importance of the renewable supply chain as an employer in the region.

Construction Phase

SE.70 Should the site be consented, the construction of the East Stour Solar Farm would have the potential to benefit the local economy through the award of construction contracts and associated sub-contracts.

SE.71 It is likely that local companies will be best placed to source construction materials, labour, equipment and services, and will have the skills and capacity to undertake many elements of the construction activities.

SE.72 The Applicant will ensure that local businesses get a chance to win business directly and indirectly from the construction project, by creating a local supplier database.

SE.73 It is intended that the supplier database would cover all elements local businesses could supply to the contractors, such as accommodation, catering and supplies, plant hire, vehicle and equipment hire, concrete and aggregate supply, electricians, power cable suppliers and installers, crane hire and any other services.

SE.74 Suitably qualified and experienced local industry sectors would have the opportunity to be involved in areas of work including:

- civil engineering design;
- geotechnical ground investigations;
- civil works (access track construction, panel installation, substation building, cable trenching);
- onsite electrical network design;
- onsite electrical network installation and commissioning;
- aggregate supply;
- haulage;
- plant hire; and
- ancillary and tertiary sectors relating to supplies, accommodation, catering, etc.

SE.75 The total construction cost for the East Stour Solar Farm is estimated to be approximately £23 to £25 million, of which the Balance of Plant component is expected to be approximately £4.6 million, which is considered to be material.

Operational Phase

SE.76 Business rates from solar farms are retained by the communities in which they are paid.

SE.77 Throughout the 40-year operating life of the East Stour Solar Farm, the general operation of the site, as

explained in **Chapter 6 - Development Proposal,** is carried out through 24-hour remote monitoring with visits to site as appropriate.

SE.78 The solar panels may also be cleaned during quarterly visits to the site, supporting a renewables supply chain.

SE.79 The report noted at **Paragraph SE.37 on page 6** (CEBR, 2014) that rapid growth in the industry propelled the UK into the top ten global markets for installed PV capacity. With political support solar PV deployment of all scales between 2010-2013 was estimated to have attracted £6.4 billion of private sector investment, supporting approximately 14 000-15 000 UK jobs (BRE, 2014c and CEBR, 2014).

SE.80 Due to the Feed-in-Tariff support mechanism ending and withdrawal of political support for renewable energy at the planning stage, it is thought that the number of people employed in the PV sector is now significantly depleted from 2013 levels. However, the evidence shows that there is huge potential for economic growth alongside solar PV installation.

SE.81 As discussed at **Paragraph SE.74 on page 11** there are a range of industries that benefit from solar PV expenditure. Assuming that the majority of equipment (solar panels, inverters and transformers) is imported to the UK, the CEBR analysis estimates that around 45% of the economic investment is directly in the UK. This is higher than UK content ratio for capital expenditure associated with nuclear (44%) and offshore wind (31%).

SE.82 CEBR projections find that employment associated with each MW of installed capacity will gradually fall to around 5.6 full time equivalent jobs per MW by 2030. The report concludes:

'Large-scale solar PV arrays deliver substantial output at low input cost, providing value to the UK economy, and deployments of all scales sustain employment across the nation.'

SE.83 As such, there are material benefits associated with the operational phase of the proposal.

Decommissioning Phase

SE.84 As explained in **Chapter 7 - Construction, Operation and Decommissioning** the decommissioning process is essentially the reverse of the construction process. Similar employment opportunities will likely exist, although over a shorter time, with additional opportunities for the recycling or reconditioning of decommissioned components. As with construction, the benefits associated with this phase are material.

Tertiary Impacts

SE.85 **Paragraph SE.74 on page 11** listed examples of industry sectors within which local companies may have the opportunity to contribute in the construction process. As well as direct contracts, the construction and operational phases will also benefit local business and the economy through the supply chain. Examples of such areas include:

- tools and consumables;
- catering;

- accommodation; and
- other support and service industries.

SE.86 This represents a temporary moderate impact by way of benefits to the local economy which overall is considered to be a material (beneficial) effect.

TOURISM

SE.87 A number of holiday cottages and private short term rentals, such as Airbnb properties, are located within the wider area surrounding the site. There are no specific tourist attractions within close proximity of the proposed site.

SE.88 The visual experience of users of the local public rights of way and the AONB are considered in the LVIA as part of the visual assessment (**Chapter 11**) which includes a full appraisal of potential visual impacts of the proposal and associated mitigation.

SE.89 Whist some visual impacts have been identified, overall, impacts on local tourism are not considered to be significant.

PUBLIC OPINION

SE.90 Solar energy has been utilised in the UK for several decades, from around the late 1970s. The deployment of solar energy has grown markedly in recent years, particularly in respect of larger scale projects of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels for electricity (rather than heat) generation. This is due to the reduction in costs across the solar PV supply chain, and the changing political climate recognising the need for renewable energy generation in the UK.

SE.91 There is currently approximately 13 500MWp of installed solar photovoltaic capacity in the UK (DBEIS, 2021e). UK-wide attitude surveys consistently suggest support for solar farms is widespread.

SE.92 Research into public values, attitudes and acceptability by Butler *et al.* for the UK Energy Research Council in July 2013, found that 61% of those surveyed agree that promoting renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, is a better way of tackling climate change than nuclear power. It was also found that '*Solar energy is highly favourable and positively associated with clean energy futures*'. These findings are part of a wider assessment that gathered information over three phases: firstly, stakeholder interviews, then public workshops, followed by a national online survey.

SE.93 Public opinion surveys are consistent with the quarterly Public Attitude Trackers published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The latest of these reports from December 2021 (DBEIS, 2021f) found strong support for renewable energy:

In Autumn 2021, support for using renewable energy such as wind power, solar energy and biomass to provide electricity, fuel and heat was high at 87%, including 54% of people saying they strongly supported this. [...]. Just 1% of people said they opposed renewable energy.

SE.94 For solar energy specifically, the DBEIS (Wave 37) tracker found that support for solar energy remained high and stable at 84%.

SE.95 RenewableUK (2021) commissioned a YouGov Poll to explore public attitudes to renewable energy in light of the Government suggestion of a

'green recovery' from the economic downturn as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic measures. This poll found that people overwhelmingly support the prioritisation of renewable energy investment, considerably more than any other aspect of the 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. Five times as many people support the prioritisation of renewable energy than any other part of the 10 Point Plan (45% v 9%), as shown at **Plate SE.5 on page 15**.

Pre-Application Public Consultation

SE.96 The Applicant consulted with the local community and stakeholders across two rounds of public consultation. These public consultations have taken account of the ongoing SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and guidance provided by the Government. The first round of consultation during summer 2021 was carried out remotely with a limited number of small, in-person meetings. The second round of consultation in winter 2021 adopted a mix of in-person events and information made available online through a virtual public exhibition. A copy of the documents sent to the development neighbours is contained at **Appendix 5.3**.

SE.97 To ensure that the public could take part in the consultation, over 2,800 addresses in the area around the proposed Scheme were mailed at the outset of each consultation providing information on the proposals and invitations to the consultation events.

SE.98 The responses received through the consultation platform, printed feedback forms, virtual and personal exhibition events and follow up representation are discussed in **Chapter 5 - Environmental Impact Assessment**.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

SE.99 As identified in Wave 37 of the Public Attitudes Energy Tracker (DBEIS, 2021f), 75% of those surveyed in March 2021 believed that renewable energy developments should provide direct benefit to the communities in which they are located.

SE.100 In addition to the environmental and economic benefits of the project identified in previous sections, if approved, the solar farm development will bring further significant benefit to the local community, including (whilst not a planning consideration) a community fund established by EDF R to support local social, environmental and community initiatives.

SE.101 A Government White Paper entitled 'Local growth: realising every place's potential' (HM Government, 2010) ensures that the Business Rates that would be paid by the solar farm stay within the local area, creating further benefit to the local community:

'The Government recognises that communities hosting renewable energy installations play a vital role in meeting a national need for secure, clean energy, and believes that it is right that these communities should be rewarded for the contribution such installations make to ensure the UK has a secure supply of energy and reduces CO_2 emissions from energy. We will therefore ensure that those local communities that host renewable energy projects are rewarded by allowing them to keep the business rates they generate.'

SE.102 National public opinion remains consistent with overwhelming support for renewables. This is further demonstrated by Renewable UK's 2021 assessment which identified key priorities for government investment, with renewable energy identified as the principal desired focus.

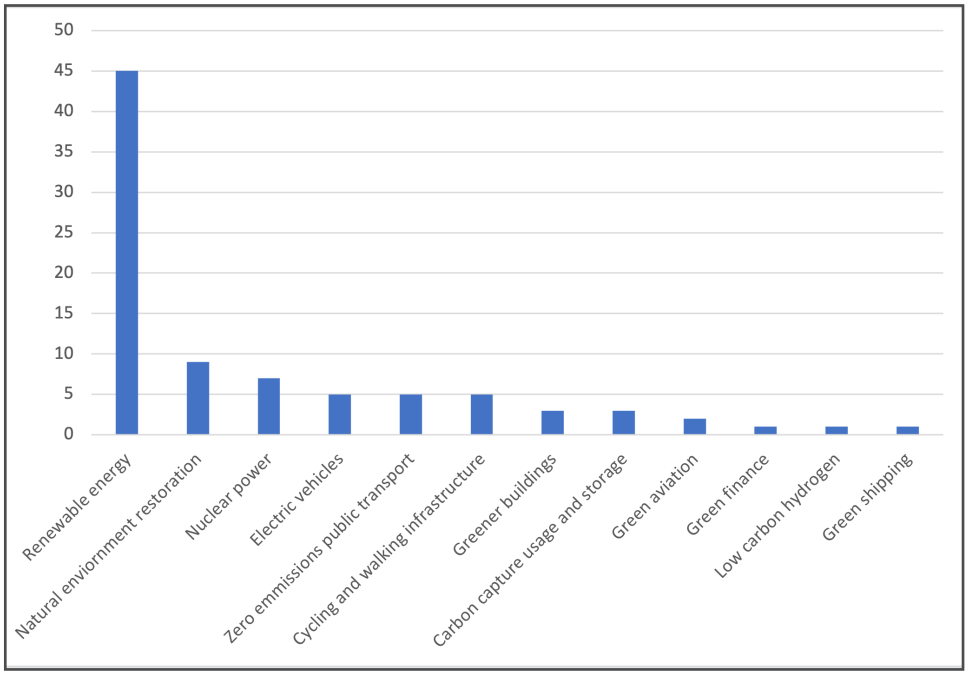

Plate SE.5 - *Percentage of Public Who Consider Each Respective 'Green Sector' as their First Priority for Government Investment (Renewable UK, 2021)*

CONCLUSION

SE.103 This Statement has considered the anticipated socio-economic impacts associated with the proposed East Stour Solar Farm. Material economic and environmental benefits have been identified at both the National and Local level.

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