

Euan Brown
Woolf Bond Planning LLP

Via Email



28 January 2024

Dear Euan

**Assessment of Arboricultural Information with Application for Fleet
Solar Farm PV, Stapley Down Farm, Long Sutton, Hampshire**

This assessment has been made on the arboricultural information provided for the application of the solar farm planning REF: 23/02591/FUL | Installation of a 47.5 MW (AC) capacity ground mounted solar photovoltaic farm, new access and associated ancillary works | Land at White Hill Well Hook.

The aim is to identify if the arboricultural aspects have been considered in relation to industry standards and best practice.

I have not visited the site but have only reviewed the arboricultural Impact Assessment provided as part of the application that was provided.

Having reviewed the document it would appear that all relevant trees, groups, woodland and hedgerows have been adequately accounted for in terms of the scheme. Identifying the trees constraints and how they could be directly impacted by construction works to implement the proposed scheme. Relatively few trees will need to be removed given the expanse of the scheme. These have been identified as follows:

9.2. Two high quality stems from G34, three individual moderate quality trees T33 - T35 and two sections of moderate-quality hedgerow H17 and H18 (totaling 30m in length) will need to be removed to allow new access routes. The loss of these trees and sections of hedgerow can be readily mitigated through new planting and the retained trees can be adequately protected during construction activities to sustain their health and longevity.

However, the report states their removal can be mitigated with new planting but does not discuss the amenity impact the loss of these will have from the lane or the wider landscape perspective. The photos provided in the report only show T33 – T35 from a distance and in winter, so their presence is less prominent. No pictures showing the trees and hedgerow from the lane or other angles have been provided. When looking on Google earth it could be considered these features are more prominent and have the potential to develop into more prominent features, especially in the line of Other Limes present that in time will likely develop into a notable feature in the landscape. Could another route for access be considered further along the lane where there is a natural gap? These features have been categorized as high amenity under BS5837:2012 within the report.

These removals are to facilitate a new access road onto Hayley Lane, but no detail has been provided as to how the RPA (Root Protection Area) of adjacent trees will actually be impacted by this construction. The only reference to constructing this is a very generalized statement about a no dig surface not being proposed because the construction of this new road 'SHOULD' be able to avoid the RPA of T32 & T36. More detail would be required to assess how the trees to remain would be impacted and if it is feasible. I suggest it should be explored if access can be created to avoid conflict all together with trees.

The photograph below shows their location.



The photograph below is from the arboricultural report.



T33, T34 & T35 to be felled.

The general constraints of the trees in relation to access across the site indicates the existing tracks will be used and 'no dig, surfaces used appropriately which is considered acceptable. However, no details as to the amount of incursion into the RPA and how this could or could not impact on trees directly or indirectly. The report also comments that there should be sufficient canopy clearance and if pruning works to crown lift to 5m is needed then this is unlikely to be a problem. This will need to be explored further to ensure the impact is minimal and that large pruning wounds that could impact on the tree's health will not be an issue. This same generalized assessment of the proposal follows on to the placement of cables, where the report comments that it should be feasible to avoid the RPA and if not, an arborist consulted for alternative installation methods. Given that this is a full application I would expect that these elements will have been thought through prior and this report includes absolute details of if the RP is impacted or not and what method of installation is to be used. There is the same lack of detail in relation to the tree protection measures, with the report suggesting details can be finalized at a pre commencement stage. This is somewhat too late once planning has been permitted, because if working around the trees cannot be achieved the planning will override and more trees could be lost. The language used in the report for various details is not definite but a vaguer using 'should' rather than 'Will'.

I think the biggest concern I have is that at NO point in the whole document has the potential impact of shadow cast of some of the trees on the proposed layout been identified or discussed. There are numerous areas where significant shadow cast would fall across solar cells, which could impact on their efficiency and potential could result in pressure to have the trees worked on in a harsh manner or felled to alleviate this. I think this element needs to be explored further and the areas where shadow cast will fall and what trees will be the cause of this. It might be worth the local authority considering placing a TPO on these trees so that they do not get removed or harshly pruned at a later date. The following trees are likely to cause notable shadow cast over a notable area of solar cells:

T1 - T5, T12 – T19, T25 – T28, G1 – G4, G9 – G12, G18, H1, H6 – H11, W2, W8, G19, G20, T56, T57, T63, T66, G33 – G36.

Predicted shadow cast arcs should be plotted onto a tree constraint plan to better assess this, then it can be better determined how much this element of the trees constraints could impact on the proposed layout and how this could result in pressure to remove or have the trees pruned.

The current report only identifies a limited number of trees needing to be removed to facilitate the proposal, but it could mean over time more trees will be removed, which would have a notable impact on the landscape setting. Given that this is a full application I feel a certain amount of detail relating to tree constraints, how they could be impacted or how the trees could impact on the proposal and protection methods is lacking. Normally this information would be asked for upfront to demonstrate all aspects had been considered and addressed accordingly.

Depending on the local authorities views on the application there is a possibility it could be approved. If so, there could be an opportunity for community enhancement schemes that are funded by the company involved, these could include greater replanting being asked for, to possibly involve community planting on land closer to the village as a resource and other facilities such as a cabin for a community centre and storage facility for any management tools allotments, allotments, play facilities etc. This could be conditioned as part of a planning condition but would need to be requested by the community to be included if consent is granted.

In summary, the trees have been recorded sufficiently in accordance with the guidance of BS5837:2012 with their constraint plotted sufficiently. However, other details are vaguer in relation to how they will be suitably protected throughout the implementation of the scheme, where cable runs will be placed, if shadow cast will be a factor and increase pressure to have further trees removed etc. I would therefore suggest these queries raised and answers provided to ensure the trees shown to be retained can and will be.

If I can assist on this matter any further or if I can be of any more assistance with anything else, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Andrew Day *HND Arb, M.Arbor.A, C.Env*
Director