

## **Beechtree Junction Solar Farm, Land between the M1 and A414, southwest of St Albans**

**Application Reference: 5/2025/1132**

### **Applicant Update Following Submission Of Additional Information**

In June 2025 Exagen Beechtree Junction Limited (the Applicant) submitted a planning application to St Albans City and District Council ('the Council') for the construction, operation, and subsequent decommissioning of a ground mounted solar farm, with associated infrastructure, access and landscaping known as Beechtree Junction Solar Farm ('the Development') on land between the M1 and A414, southwest of St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL2 3NN ('the Site'). The application reference is 5/2025/1132 and it was validated on 4th July 2025. A single main round of consultation has been undertaken to date. This document summaries the amendments to the Development that have been made and how the issues raised by consultees have been addressed.

### **Summary Of Design Amendments**

A number of minor amendments have been made to the design of the Development in response to comments received to date and additional assessments undertaken. These changes are set out in more detail in the document entitled Applicant Response to Consultee Comments, along with a list of new and amended plans, drawings and reports, but in summary include:

- The bellmouth of Access 6 onto Potterscrouch Lane (the widened junction area) has been relocated approximately 3 metres to the east to avoid incursion into the Root Protection Area of a group of nearby trees.
- The previously proposed off-site area for skylark habitat has been removed. Further assessment has confirmed that enough suitable habitat for skylarks can be provided within the application site itself, meaning the additional off-site land is no longer required. The application site is the area outlined by the red line boundary on the plans.
- The specification of the perimeter fencing and gates has been amended from deer fencing to security-compliant fencing and gates in consultation with Hertfordshire Constabulary.

### **Consultation Responses Concerning Aviation**

Consultation responses raised concerns in relation to aviation safety and the potential interaction between the Development and operations at Plaistows Airfield. These concerns relate to the availability of suitable areas for emergency landing in the event of Engine Failure After Take-Off (EFATO) potential reflections of sunlight from the panels (known as glint and glare), the potential for

increased bird nesting, turbulence, heat effects (sometimes referred to as thermal plumes) and emergency access.

In response, an Aviation Assessment has been prepared by Wind Farm Aviation Safeguarding Ltd. The assessment confirms that the Development accords with relevant aviation safeguarding policy, regulation and guidance. In relation to emergency landing considerations, including EFATO, the assessment explains that the land surrounding Plaistows Airfield is already constrained by existing features such as trees, powerlines and infrastructure, which limit available options for forced landings. Within this context, the Development has been designed to retain a clear area free from solar panels aligned with the extended runway centreline. The assessment also states that:

- The Development will not increase bird activity above that which already exists in the surrounding farmland, hedges and wooded areas;
- There is no recorded evidence in the public domain to indicate that turbulence from solar panels exists to the extent that aircraft operations have been affected;
- There is no recorded evidence in the public domain to indicate that thermal plumes from solar panels exist to the extent that aircraft operations have been affected;
- Designated emergency vehicle access gates will be provided, with keys or access codes available where gates are locked; and
- Solar developments located close to airfields are increasingly common in the UK and that there are no recorded instances of the types of operational or safety issues cited in the objections. It notes that many airfields, including those used for microlight, light aircraft and general aviation training, operate in close proximity to solar developments without any apparent adverse effects on aviation activity.

With regard to glint and glare, this has been assessed within the updated Glint and Glare Assessment prepared by Metrica Environmental Consulting Ltd. The assessment was updated in response to consultation feedback relating to Plaistows Airfield and includes flight path modelling, consideration of typical aircraft approach paths at different angles (known as glide slopes), and assessment of how aircraft approach and move around the airfield during take-off and landing for Runways 30 and 33 in the event of EFATO. The results confirm that, following the incorporation of embedded mitigation in the form of textured glass coating on some of the solar panel arrays, glint and glare effects are limited to very low-level reflections (described as 'green glare') that may be briefly visible but are not considered hazardous across all assessed flight paths and scenarios. This corresponds to a low potential for temporary after image and is considered acceptable in accordance with established aviation guidance. No yellow or red glare is predicted. The use of textured panels has been specifically designed to diffuse reflected sunlight and reduce the potential for glare affecting aircraft.

Overall, the technical evidence demonstrates that the concerns raised by aviation consultees have been appropriately assessed and addressed, and that the Development would not adversely affect the safe operation of Plaistows Airfield.

### **Landscape Officer Herts LEADS (Landscape Ecology Archaeology Design Sustainability)**

Herts Landscape Planning Advisory Service confirms that the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken in accordance with relevant guidance and, in general, supports the assessment of landscape and visual effects.

In relation to landscape effects, the officer agrees with the conclusions of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that the development would result in minor adverse effects in the short term, with effects reducing over time and in some cases becoming beneficial as the proposed new planting, such as hedgerows and trees designed to reduce visual effects, matures. The proposed landscape strategy, including the retention and reinforcement of existing hedgerows and woodland, the creation of new hedgerows and tree belts, and the reinstatement of historic field boundaries, is supported in principle and is considered capable of providing both mitigation and enhancement to the landscape.

Some additional plans, long sections and visualisations were requested by the officer and these have been included recent submission. Updated comments are expected from the officer in light of the provision of this additional requested information.

### **Ecology Officer**

Hertfordshire LEADS, acting in an advisory capacity on ecological matters, provided a consultation response confirming that the application can be determined subject to conditions and informatives. No objection is raised to the Development. The officer confirms that sufficient information has been submitted at the pre-determination stage and that no further information is required prior to determination of the planning application.

### **Lead Local Flood Authority Hertfordshire**

Hertfordshire County Council, in its role as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), provided a detailed consultation response dated 12 September 2025 setting out a number of points where further clarification and supporting information would assist in confirming the acceptability of the proposed drainage strategy and approach to flood risk management. The LLFA confirmed that the site is at low risk of flooding and that several elements of the strategy were acceptable.

The additional information requested and now provided enables the drainage strategy and flood risk approach to be fully understood and assessed. The technical note which has been submitted has been shared informally with the LLFA who have confirmed their agreement with it.

### **Local Highways Authority - Hertfordshire County Council**

Hertfordshire County Council, in its role as Local Highway Authority, provided a consultation response dated 29 August 2025 setting out a number of matters where further information and clarification

would assist in confirming that the surrounding rural highway network can safely accommodate the construction traffic associated with the Development. The response acknowledges that several of the proposed access points are capable of achieving appropriate visibility and can accommodate construction vehicles. The points raised by the Highway Authority primarily relate to the need for additional detail in respect of the operation of the construction phase and the suitability of the local road network.

In response, a detailed Highways Technical Note has been prepared by Evoke Transport Planning, supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment Addendum prepared by Lanpro, which together address each of the matters raised by the Highway Authority. The Technical Note confirms that all proposed access points can achieve the required visibility standards and safely accommodate construction vehicles, including 16.5 metre Heavy Goods Vehicles.

The additional information provided enables the highway impacts of the development to be fully understood and assessed.

#### **Police - Hertfordshire Constabulary**

Hertfordshire Constabulary provided a consultation response in relation to the Development. In particular, the response noted that the proposed use of deer fencing may not provide the level of security typically sought for this type of development and suggested that more robust fencing solutions could be considered. The response also highlighted the importance of ensuring that solar farm developments incorporate suitable security measures to reduce the risk of unauthorised access and potential theft.

Following this, a meeting was held between the Applicant and Hertfordshire Constabulary on. At this meeting, the Designing Out Crime Officer advised that the proposed fencing and gates should be upgraded to provide an appropriate level of security, recommending welded mesh fencing and gates. In response, the perimeter fencing for the Development has been amended so that all fences and gates meet this requirement. On this basis, the proposed security measures accord with the requirements of Hertfordshire Constabulary.

#### **Design and Conservation Officer**

The Design and Conservation Officer and the Applicant take different views on the extent of harm to the setting of nearby heritage assets. Both conclude that the Development would result in less than substantial harm, but they differ on where that harm sits within that range.

The Design and Conservation Officer considers that the harm would lie towards the upper end of the less than substantial spectrum. This conclusion is based on a broad approach to setting, in which the wider agricultural landscape is treated as contributing to the significance of the heritage assets without clearly identifying which parts of that landscape are important, or the extent to which the

application site itself makes a meaningful contribution. It also appears to rely on the presence of change across a large area, rather than demonstrating how that change would affect the ability to understand or appreciate the specific elements that give the assets their significance.

The Applicant, supported by the Heritage Statement, considers that the harm would lie at the lower end of the less than substantial spectrum. The Heritage Statement identifies that the primary contributors to significance are the historic built form of the hamlet, its layout and its immediate surroundings, and finds that the application site forms part of a wider setting which makes a more limited and indirect contribution to that significance. On that basis, it concludes that the key elements which underpin the significance of the heritage assets would remain largely preserved.

The Applicant also considers that the officer's assessment does not clearly identify which parts of the wider setting make a meaningful contribution to significance, and does not demonstrate how the proposed changes would affect the ability to understand or appreciate the heritage assets. As a result, it is not considered that there is a clear or evidenced basis for placing the identified harm towards the upper end of the less than substantial range.

Despite this difference in professional judgement, the Design and Conservation Officer does not recommend refusal on heritage grounds. Instead, the identified harm is to be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme through the planning balance, in accordance with national policy. On the Applicant's assessment, the lower level of harm identified would carry less weight in that balance.

### **Archaeology Officer Hertfordshire Place Services**

The Council's archaeological advisors identified that the site has some potential for buried archaeological remains.

Additional survey work has since been carried out by the Applicant's consultants using aerial imagery and other remote sensing data, which indicates that any remains are limited and dispersed.

An Archaeological Management Strategy has been prepared by the Applicant's consultants in consultation with the Council's archaeological advisors. This sets out how any remains will be investigated during the development process, and how any important findings would be recorded or protected if necessary. The approach includes further investigation, such as trial trenching, to be secured through planning conditions.

On this basis, the Council's archaeological advisors are satisfied that archaeology can be appropriately managed as part of the Development.

### **Conclusion**

The matters raised through the consultation process have been addressed through targeted amendments to the Development and the submission of further supporting information. Where matters remain, these are capable of being secured through planning conditions or obligations. On this basis, the Development has been refined in response to consultation and is supported by a robust

and proportionate evidence base, enabling the Local Planning Authority to proceed to determine the planning application.

### Summary of Updated Plans and Documents

The table below lists the plans and supporting documents that have been updated or newly submitted in response to consultation comments, together with their authors and a brief note explaining whether each document is new or has been updated.

No.	Document name	Prepared by	Notes
1	Site Location Plan Full Site	Exagen	Replaces Site Location Plan LYG01A-EXG-00-00-D-K002-P03
2	Site Location Plan Part 2	Exagen	Replaces Site Location Plan Part 2 LYG01A-EXG-00-00-D-K002-P03
3	Site Location Plan Part 3	Exagen	Replaces Site Location Plan Part 3 LYG01A-EXG-00-00-D-K002-P03
4	Site Layout Plan Part 1	Exagen	Replaces LYG01A-EXG-04-00-D-K001-P03.02
5	Landscape Mitigation Plan	Lanpro	Replaces 4452-LAN-XX-XX-DR-L-1001 Rev P02
6	Paladin Fence, CCTV and Access Elevations	Exagen	Replaces Solar Farm Deer Fence and CCTV Elevations and Palisade Fence and Access Elevations
7	Long Section D-D1 Part 1 and 2	Lanpro	New drawing requested by the Council's landscape officer
8	Long Section D-D1 Part 3 and 4	Lanpro	New drawing requested by the Council's landscape officer
9	Short Sections Section A-A1, B-B1 and C-C1	Lanpro	New drawing requested by the Council's landscape officer
10	Glint and Glare Assessment Beechtree Junction Solar Farm Version 4.0	Metrica Environmental Consulting Ltd	Updated with respect to the aviation assessment, replacing Version 1.0 (June 2025)

No.	Document name	Prepared by	Notes
11	Skylark Mitigation Technical Note for Beechtree Junction Solar Farm	Lanpro	New document
12	Highways Technical Note Beechtree Junction Solar Farm	Evoke Transport Planning	New document provided in response to comments from Hertfordshire County Council as local highway authority
13	Technical Note 1 Resolving LLFA Holding Objection to St Albans City and District Council Planning Application Number 5/2025/1132	Motion	New document provided in response to comments from the Lead Local Flood Authority
14	Assessment of Airborne and Spaceborne Remote Sensing Data	Air Photo Services Ltd	New document provided in response to archaeology comments from Place Services
15	Archaeological Management Strategy Beechtree Junction Solar Farm, Potters Crouch	Lanpro	New document provided in response to archaeology comments from Place Services
16	Arboricultural Impact Assessment Addendum Beechtree Junction Solar Farm	Lanpro	New document provided in response to arboricultural comments from Hertfordshire County Council Highways
17	Aviation Assessment Plaistows Airfield Objections	Wind Farm Aviation Safeguarding Ltd	New document provided in response to aviation safety comments
18	Landscape and Visual Appraisal Appendix C Figure 12 Illustrative Photomontages	Lanpro	Updated document superseding June 2025 version with additional viewpoints and seasonal photography
19	Applicant Response to Consultee Comments	Exagen	New document