

# Leaford Solar Farm Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Management Plan

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Site: Leaford Solar Farm

Date: 19/02/2025

Document Ref: 312040/190225/BT/1.0

Issue-2.0

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# Quality Assurance

## Issue Record

Revision	Description	Date	Author	Reviewer	Approver
0.1	Draft for internal review	04/12/2024	BT	SB	SB
0.2	Internal review	05/12/2024	BT	SB	SB
1.0	First draft to client	22/01/2025	BT	SB	SB
2.0	Amendments following client comments	19/02/2025	BT	SC	SC



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Renewable Energy Systems Ltd. (RES) (herein the Applicant) have applied to Stafford Borough Council (SBC) for full planning permission for the construction and operation of Leaford Solar Farm and its associated infrastructure (herein the Proposed Development) (Planning Reference: 24/38719/FUL).

The Proposed Development would comprise the construction and operation of a ground-mounted solar farm of a maximum generation capacity of 30MW with supporting energy infrastructure, associated site works and fencing and security measures. The Proposed Development would be temporary, with an operational phase of up to 40-years, after which the Application Site would be returned to its current condition. The layout of the Proposed Development is illustrated in Appendix A.

The Application site covers an area of 69.21 hectares and is located on land to the northeast of Fulford, between Stallington and Saverley Green, Staffordshire, approximately centred on grid reference 395651, 339248.

Further information on the Proposed Development is contained within the Design and Access Statement and Planning Statement submitted to accompany the planning application.

## 1.2 Scope of Report

Following discussions with SBC case officer Vanessa Blake, Arthian Ltd. (Arthian) has been requested by Renewable Energy Systems Ltd. (RES) to provide a Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Management Plan to accompany the planning application.

The aim of the PRoW Management Plan is to address the way in which the 2no PRoWs crossing the Application Site (Fulford 12 and Fulford 15) would be impacted by the Proposed Development and how the PRoWs would be managed to help ensure they remain safe to use and disruption to users is minimised throughout all phases of the Proposed Development.

Consideration of PRoWs Fulford 26 and Fulford 3 have also been included in this document, where appropriate, although it is noted that both of these PRoWs are located out with the Application Site boundary. In addition to this, the PRoW Management Plan sets out the enhancement measures proposed at the PRoWs by the Applicant.

The remainder of this PROW Management Plan is structured as follows:

- Section 2: Baseline Conditions;
- Section 3: Consultation;
- Section 4: PRoW Design & Mitigation Measures;



- Section 5: PRoW Management Strategy; and
- Section 6: Conclusion.

### 1.3 Planning Policy & Guidance

#### 1.3.1 National Policy

The PRoW Management Plan has been prepared with sight of the National Policy Statement (NPS) for Renewable Energy Infrastructure EN-3 (November 2023)<sup>1</sup>. The NPS states that:

- Paragraph 2.10.41 – *“Public rights of way may need to be temporarily closed or diverted to enable construction, however, applicants should keep, as far as is practicable and safe, all public rights of way that cross the proposed development site open during construction and protect users where a public right of way borders or crosses the site”.*
- Paragraph 2.10.44 – *“Applicants should consider and maximise opportunities to facilitate enhancements to the public rights of way and the inclusion, through site layout and design of access, of new opportunities for the public to access and cross proposed solar development sites (whether via the adoption of new public rights of way or the creation of permissive paths), taking into account, where appropriate, the views of landowners.”*
- Paragraph 2.10.45 – *“Applicants should set out detail on how public rights of way would be managed to ensure they are safe to use in an outline Public Rights of Way Management Plan”*

#### 1.3.2 Local Policy

The PRoW Management Plan has taken into consideration the Local Plan for Stafford Borough (PSB1)<sup>2</sup> and the Local Plan for Stafford Borough: Part 2 2011-2031(PSB2)<sup>3</sup>. Policy N1: Design states that all developments are expected to meet the following criterion in relation to PRoWs:

- *“o. Ensure that places inter-connect using important routes and linkages, including Rights of Way, which are pedestrian, vehicle and cycle friendly, whilst allowing for ease of movement, legibility and permeability through a clearly defined and well-structured public realm.”*

Furthermore, Policy T1: Transport states that development should accord with the following criterion in relation to PRoWs:

- *“d. Encouraging walking and cycling, through links to existing routes, and the provision of facilities such as secure, accessible and sheltered bicycle parking with changing facilities on site. prospective developers should assess the transport impact of new development in accordance with ‘Guidance on*

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2023). National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3). Available online: [NPS EN-3 - Renewable energy infrastructure](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 (2014). Available online: [The Plan for Stafford Borough - Adoption](#)

<sup>3</sup> The Plan for Stafford Borough: Part 2 2011-2031 (2017). Available online: [The Plan for Stafford Borough: Part 2](#)



*Transport Assessment' (DfT/CLG, 2007) and any subsequent revisions. Consideration of the impact on the Highways Agency Strategic Road Network (SRN) should be in accordance with national policy."*



## 2. Baseline Conditions

### 2.1 Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Network

All PRoWs located within or adjacent to the Application Site boundary are shown in Image 2.1 below and also in Appendix B. The PRoWs which pass through or lie within close proximity to the Application Site are presented in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1: PRoW Within or Adjacent to the Application Site**

PRoW Reference	Length	Description	Maintenance Category
Fulford 3	Approx. 965m	Starts at Stallington Hall Lane and ends at St. Nicholas' Church.	Category B
Fulford 12	Approx. 1130m	Starts at Blythe View, Saverley Green and ends at Fulford 13 footpath, east of Fulford Hall Farm.	Category C
Fulford 15	Approx. 600m	Starts at Fulford 13 footpath, Fulford Hall Farm and ends at the field boundary approx. 600 yards south of Leacroft Sprink.	Category C
Fulford 16	Approx. 650m	Starts Fulford 15 Footpath, about 600 yards south of Leacroft Spink and ends at Fulford 26 Footpath, about 300 yards northeast of Leacroft Hall.	Category C
Fulford 26	Approx. 1935m	Starts at the country road at Saverley Green and ends at the Parish boundary about 650 yards east of Longfield Place.	Category B

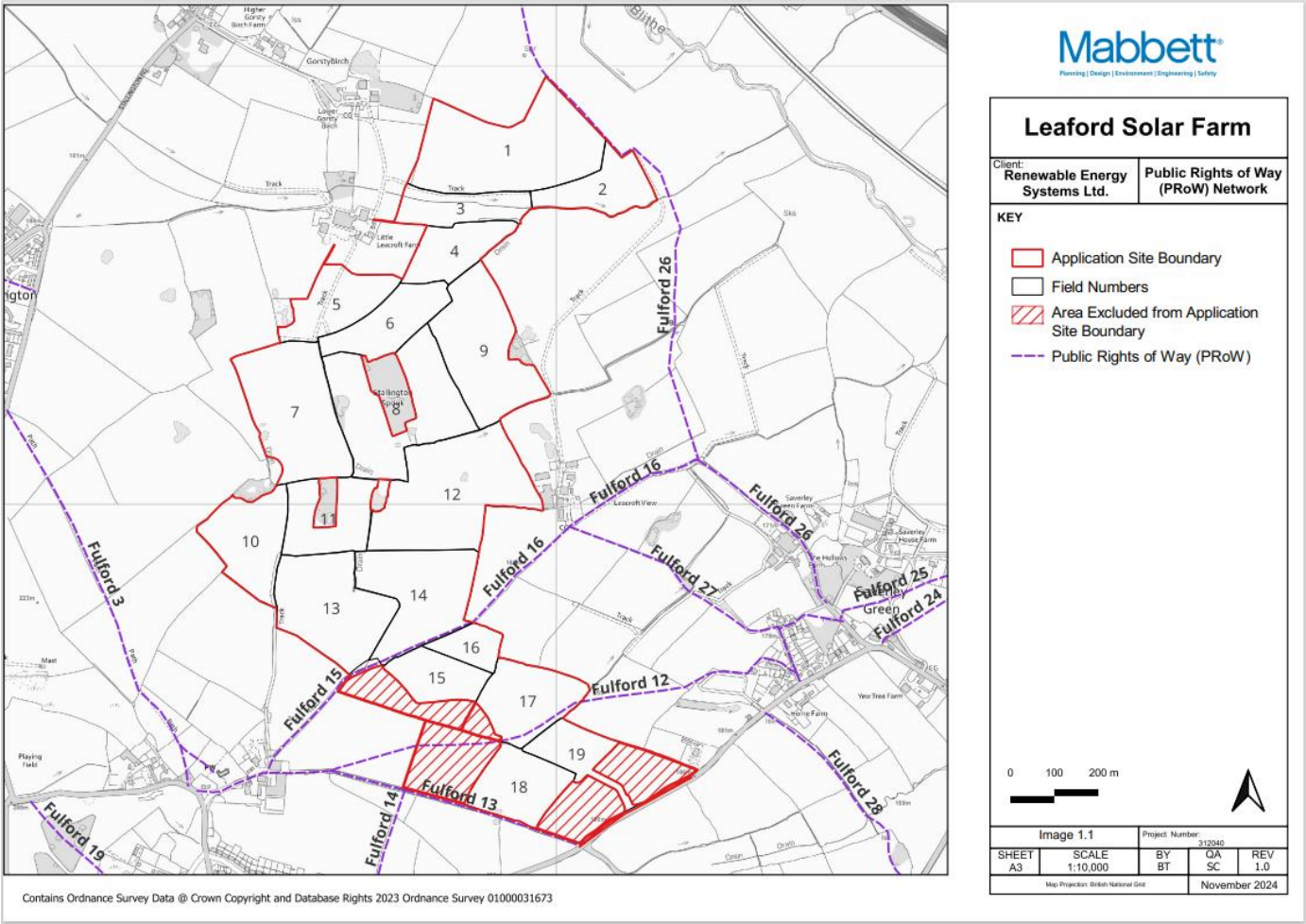
All information on the PRoWs within and adjacent to the Application Site was sought from Staffordshire County Council (SCC) definitive maps in order to inform the design and ensure appropriate setbacks were applied as part of the Proposed Development. On request, SCC provided the Applicant with a copy of the Facsimile Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: Survey of Public Rights of Way for the Parish of Fulford<sup>4</sup>, shown as Appendix C. From the information provided, it can be confirmed that there are two PRoWs within the Application Site boundary; Fulford 12 and Fulford 15, both of which are Maintenance Category C footpaths.

<sup>4</sup> Routes over which public rights of way exist on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018.



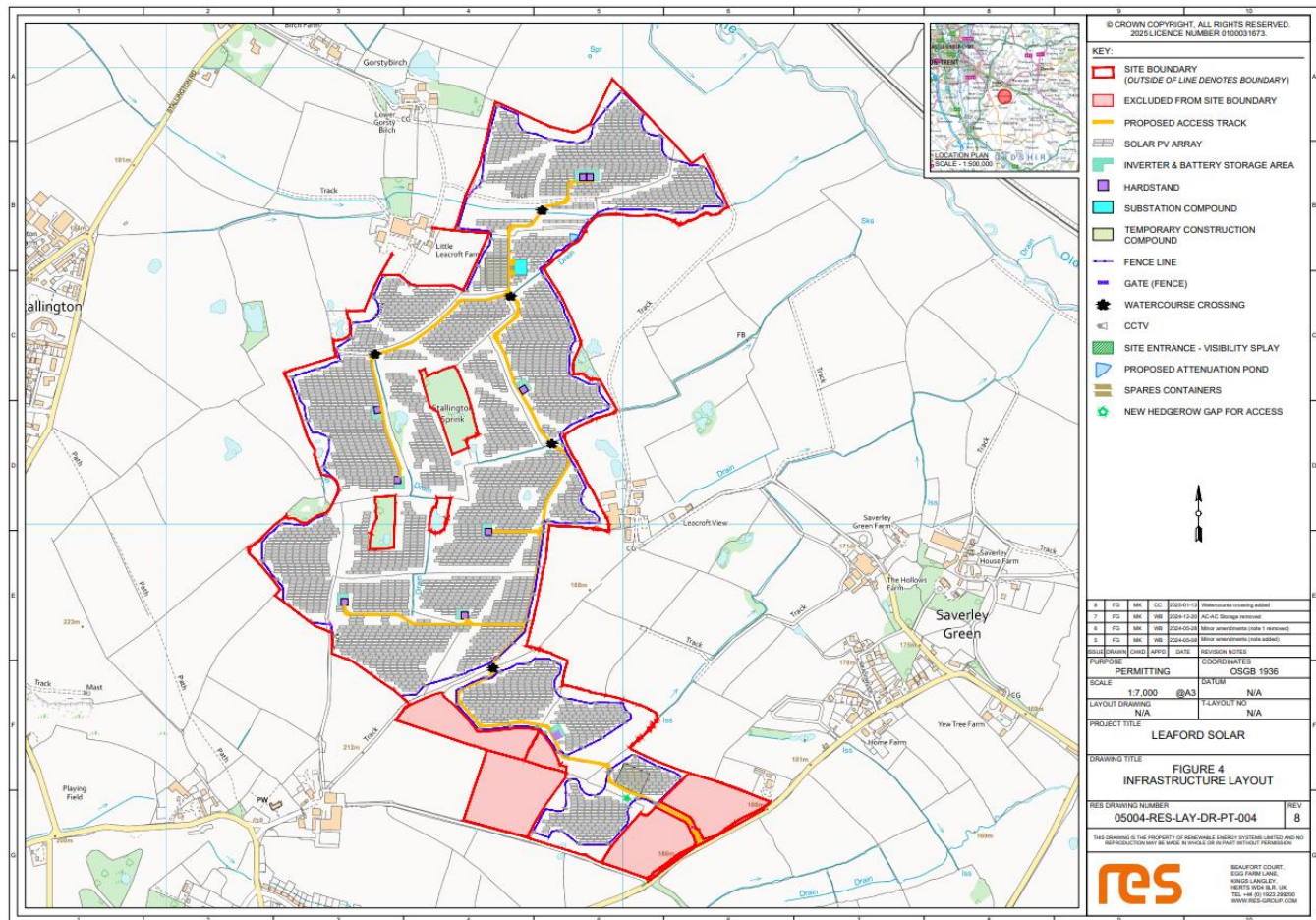


Image 2.1: PRoW Network at Application Site



As shown in Appendix A and Image 2.2 below, the access tracks for the Proposed Development will cross PRoW Fulford 12 and PRoW Fulford 15. Details of how this will be managed can be found in Section 5 below.

### Image 2.2: Site Layout Plan



## 3. Consultation

### 3.1 SCC Rights of Way Officer

The Leaford Solar Farm planning application was validated by SBC on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024. During the consultation period, a response was received from SCC Rights of Way on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024, which stated the following:

*“We are unable to comment on this application as, although the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way for Staffordshire indicates there are rights of way crossing the application site/ adjacent to the application site, they are not shown on any of the main site layout plans. (Although rights of way are depicted within the Landscaping strategy and Design and Access Statement they don’t appear to be shown on the main site layout plans).*

*Please can you respond to the applicant requesting this information be provided so we may in turn, provide an appropriate response to their proposal?”*

A copy of this response can be found in Appendix D.

In response to this, the layout plan has been updated to include the PRoW network as shown in Appendix A.

A meeting with the Applicant, Julie Hall (Definitive Map and Spatial Information Officer) and Paul Rochfort (Rights of Way Team Leader) took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024 in order to discuss the potential improvements the Applicant can make to the 2no PRoWs crossing the Application Site. Suggestions that came from this meeting that could be implement include the following:

- Improved signage/waymarking discs to give users of the PRoW more confidence when walking;
- Cutting foliage back where overgrown; and
- Installing bridleway gates rather than the existing gates for users of the PRoWs.

### 3.2 Ramblers

Following submission and validation of the Leaford Solar Farm planning application, a response was received from the Ramblers on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2024, stating the following:

*“Fulford is at the hub of a network of footpaths, FP 3,12,13, 15,16, 26 and 27. All these paths run through or in the near vicinity of the planned works but are not clearly marked on the site plan.*



*However, the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment states that there would be Major/ Moderate impact of this development on FP 15,16 and possibly FP12 which would not be reduced for 15yrs.*

*I feel that in the absence of further detail regarding the screening and siting of the panels with relation to these paths then Ramblers would object to this blighting of the RoW network.”*

A copy of this response can be found in Appendix E.

As previously mentioned, the layout plan has been updated to include the PRoW network (shown as Appendix A). Further detail regarding the screening and siting of the panels with regard to the PRoW network will be addressed in the following sections of this PRoW Management Plan.

### **3.3 Design Midlands**

Following a site visit undertaken by the case officer and Design Midlands, a response was received on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 2024. With regard to the PRoW network, the following comments were made:

Existing Condition of PRoW:

- *“The PRoW between 14 and 15 and 16 lines a watercourse and is waterlogged, inaccessible and we were unable to use it on the site visit... It is unclear how use of this route will be improved and access resolved. It is important that this is addressed as part of the development.”*
- *“There are a number of areas where water collects preventing walkers or deterring use of the public rights of way. This is particularly apparent at Fulford Hall which though outside the boundary should be recognised as a barrier to improving access to the countryside.”*
- *“The route of the path between the hedgerows of 14 and 15 and is not visible, is boggy, inaccessible and lined by a steep watercourse The panels will be close to the route and whilst the proposals indicate screening It is unclear from the plans how navigation and access will be resolved. The approach to this footpath enhancements and impact of the panels will therefore need exploration and further clarification.”*

Fulford 3 Assessment:

- *“A dramatic and clear panorama over the distant countryside is revealed at the apex of the site [Fulford 3] with far reaching views to the north and east. See below. A number of the fields will be apparent. 1,4, & 9 and Home Farm are in view in the distance.*
- *This viewpoint has not been supplied in the LVIA and should be provided with an assessment of the mitigation or impact from here.”*

Field 17:

- *“The approach here would increase the sense of enclosure and would not be in keeping with the adjoining hedgerows which are single in nature. A double hedgerow here is not considered appropriate here or sit naturally within the immediate context.*
- *On entering from Saverley Green, panels would be in the direct line of view then continuing sideways through the field whilst not in the general line of movement they are would certainly be perceived by walkers.*



- *Not introducing panels in field 17 will retain the open nature of the link between Fulford and Saverley Green. This will allow a route where that development does not split the open nature of the landscape between the east and west.*
- *It is suggested that the solar panels and BESS are removed from field 17.”*

A copy of this response can be found in Appendix F.

Design iterations following this response are discussed in Section 3 below.

### **3.4 Public Consultation**

Consultation was also held with the local community. Details of this can be found in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) submitted alongside the planning application.

With regard to the PRoW network, the following comments were made from the local community:

- *“Please keep the public footpaths and other permissive paths that are used.”*
- *“The proposed Solar Farm is far too near our walking routes and rides and our homes.”*
- *“The position of inverters and storage should be installed away from any PRoW/highway. Sudden noise and continuous levels of noise can be a hazard for equestrians as horses are flight animals, therefore the further away these elements can be located, the better it will be for safety.”*

Design iterations following this response are also discussed in Section 3 below.





## 4. PRoW Design and Mitigation Measures

### 4.1 Introduction

As discussed, 2no PRoWs cross the Leaford Solar Farm Application Site boundary and these PRoWs showcase numerous open views across the local and wider landscape. During the design and consultation period prior to submission of the planning application, the Proposed Development underwent a number of design iterations and took account of feedback received from the local community and British Horse Society (BHS).

### 4.2 Design Iterations

Prior to submitting the planning application with the above noted baseline environmental survey information, consultee feedback and local community feedback, the Proposed Development progressed through a number of design iterations. In relation to the PRoWs within the Application Site, a minimum setback distance of 7.5m was applied, with larger setback distances achieved in some areas. In addition, the design was adapted to take into account the BHS' proposed Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) application for Footpath 15 to be considered as a bridleway.

Regarding PRoW Fulford 26, located adjacent to the east of the Application Site boundary at Field 1, this setback – and more- has been achieved with a setback of approximately 32m noted in some sections to this eastern boundary.

In addition to this, all inverters have been positioned specifically away from PRoWs to further protect the PRoW amenity value.

Following submission of the planning application, Design Midlands was consulted (see Section 3.3 above) and recommended that solar panels and BESS infrastructure was removed from Field 17 due to the reasons mentioned in Section 3.3 above. Following this feedback and consideration of the comments received, the Applicant implemented a further setback from PRoW Fulford 12 in Field 17 of approximately 37m.

### 4.3 PRoW Fulford 3 Assessment

Following comments received from Design Midlands, an additional viewpoint was requested from the apex of PRoW Fulford 3 in order to assess the impact of the Proposed Development from this view as it was noted this location has *“a dramatic and clear panorama over the distant countryside.”*

PRoW Fulford 3 is located approximately 250m to the west of Field 10 of the Application Site at its closest.

The assessment of this additional viewpoint can be found in Appendix I.



4.4 Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP)

In addition to the above, mitigation planting has been proposed at the 2no PRoWs that cross the Application Site to further reduce the landscape and visual impacts. A Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) (version 8.0) was produced and submitted alongside the planning application, detailing the mitigation planting. This can be found as Appendix G and Appendix H. Further information on the Landscape Management Plan is contained within Appendix 2 of the LVIA submitted alongside the planning application.

As noted from Image 3.1 and 3.2 below, there is proposed wildflower seed mix at either side of the PRoW in order to provide users of the PRoW with a more enjoyable and scenic view. Alongside this, existing hedgerows and the proposed native species hedge will be planted and maintained to 3.5m to aid in screening the Proposed Development from users of the PRoW. Proposed areas of grassland and enhanced grassland are noted in both images below which correlate to the enhancements discussed in the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report submitted alongside the planning application.

Image 3.1: LEMP at PRoW Fulford 12

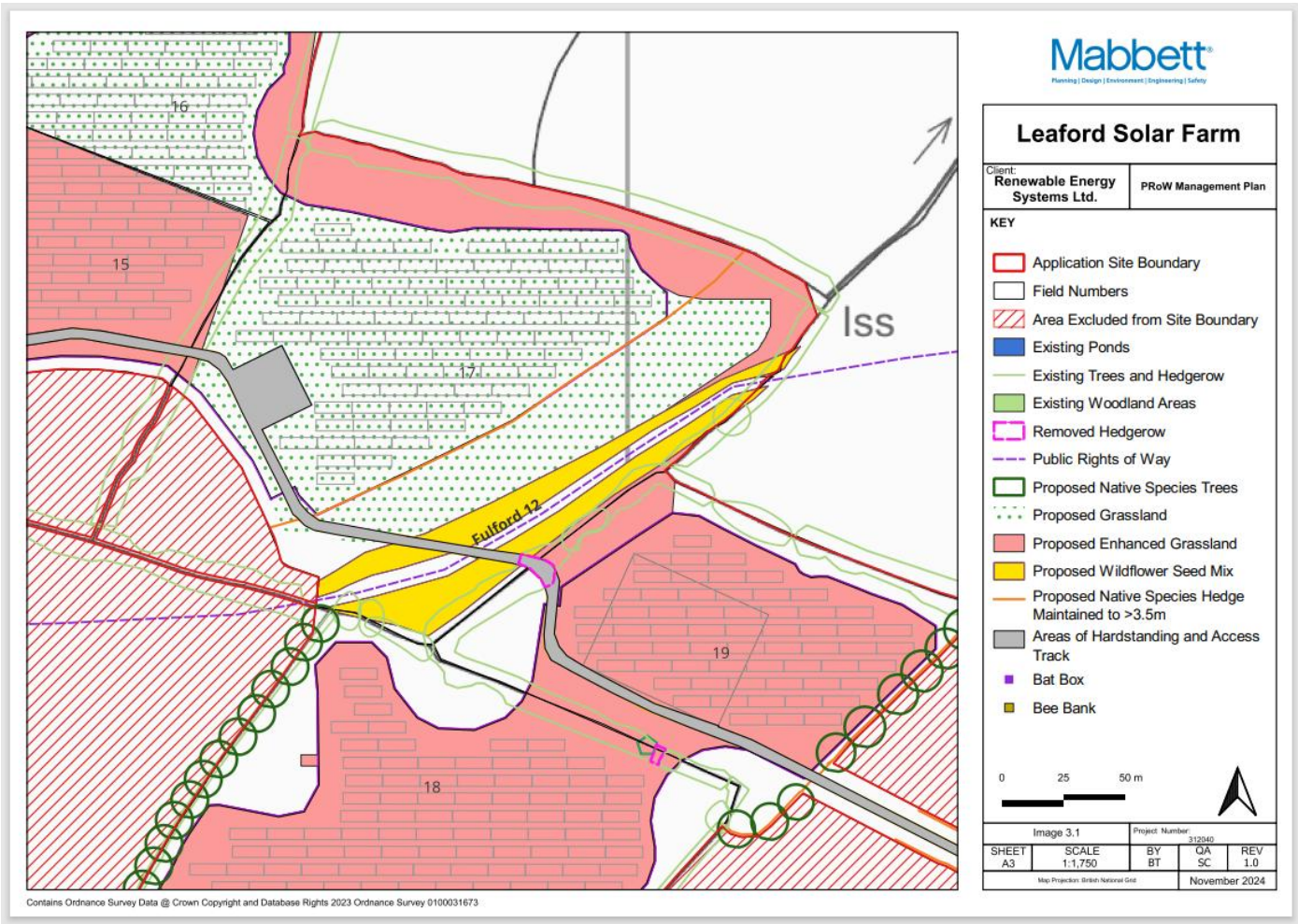


Image 3.2: LEMP at PRoW Fulford 15

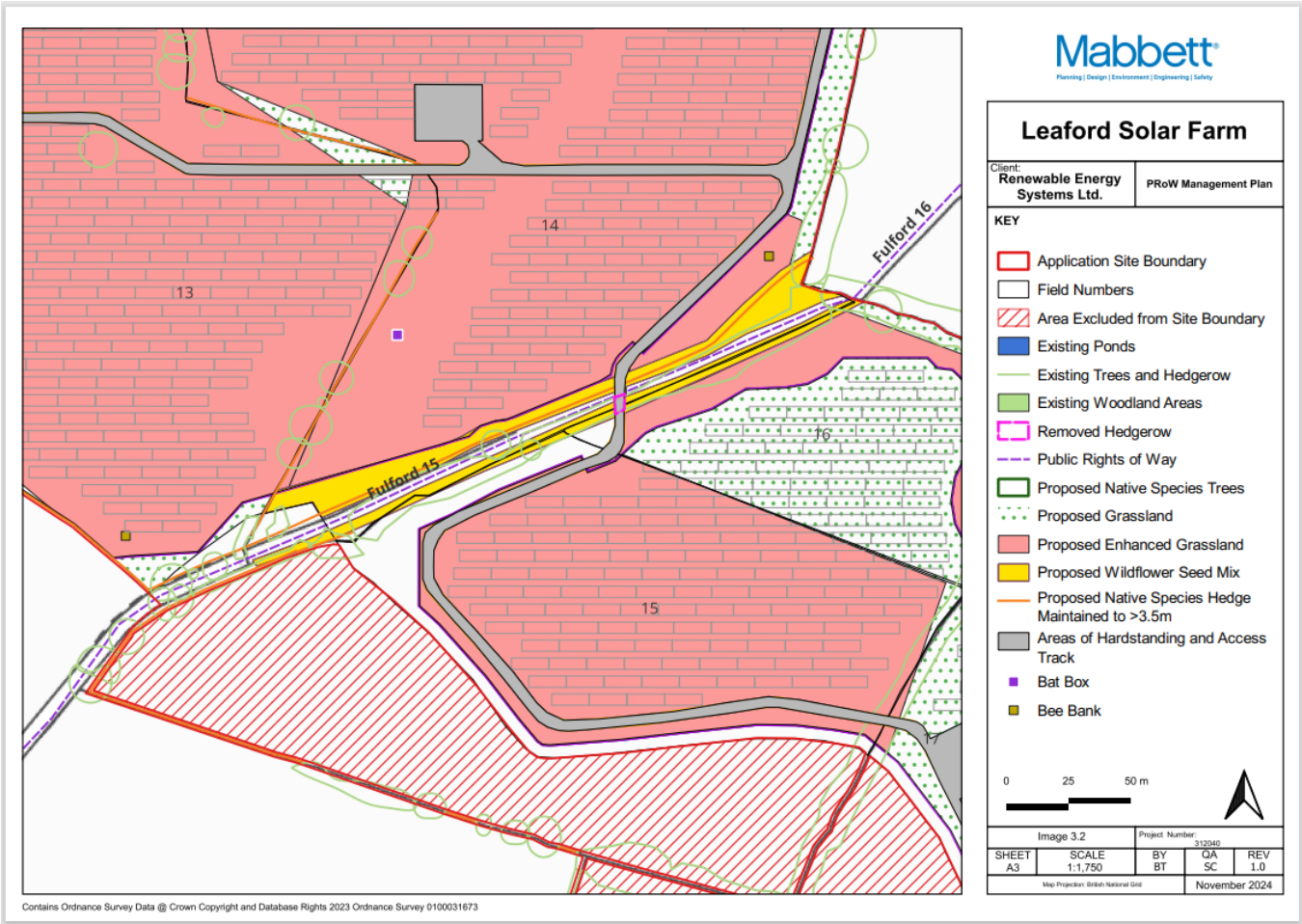
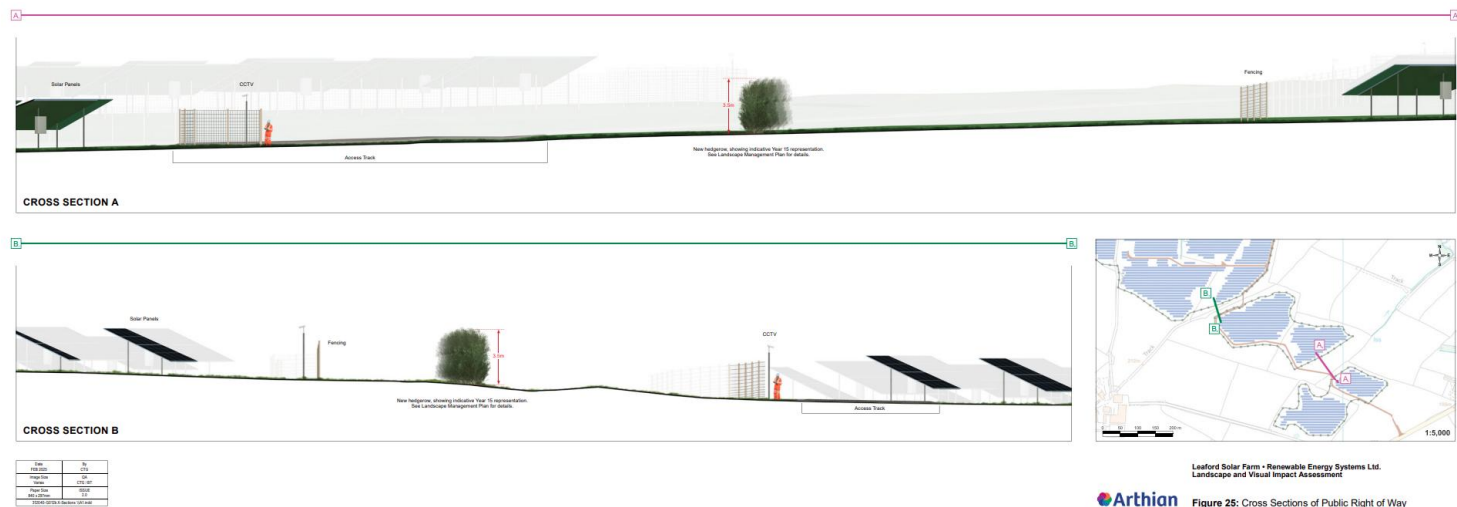


Image 3.3 below and Appendix J portrays the cross-section drawings of the 2x Public Rights of Way crossing the Application Site boundary.

Image 3.3: Cross Sections of Public Right of Way





## 5. PRoW Management Strategy

### 5.1 Introduction

This section of the PRoW Management Plan sets out how the 2no PRoWs that cross the Application Site boundary will be managed.

### 5.2 Construction

The Applicant intends to keep the 2no PRoW that cross the Application Site boundary open during both the construction and operational period of the Proposed Development, with priority given to the users of the PRoW. Should any PRoWs be damaged during the construction phase, the Applicant will be liable to repair the damage and return it to a comparable surface condition.

There will be banksmen where the PRoW is crossed by the access track in order to supervise any manoeuvres. A dedicated person will be appointed for the management of the delivery booking system in order to ensure appropriate management and scheduling of any crossings at the PRoWs.

Site access will be taken from the southern boundary at Saverley Green Road and this access track will run through Fields 19, 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 9, 7, 6, 4, 3 and 1. This access track also crosses both PRoWs that run through the Application Site boundary. The access tracks would be approximately 4m wide with 0.25m shoulders at either side.

All points where the PRoWs cross the Application Site boundary will be appropriately signed, advising the general public of dates and hours of working. Signage will also alert construction vehicles not to cross without a banksmen available. The exact location of the signs providing such information will be agreed with Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Officers.

In addition to this, all drivers of construction vehicles accessing the Proposed Development will be briefed via daily 'toolbox talks' regarding the location of the PRoWs, crossing the PRoWs and the potential for PRoW users to be crossing these during the hours of construction.

### 5.3 Operation

During the operational phase, the Proposed Development will be largely autonomous and not require resident staff. There is anticipated to be around 10-15 LGV trips to the Application Site per year for maintenance. Therefore, it is anticipated that the access tracks would only be used during these times and would utilise the same process as the construction period with the use of banksmen at the PRoW crossings and 'toolbox talks' for maintenance staff with priority always given to users of the PRoW.



For security and safety purposes, the Proposed Development will be closed to the general public via security fencing and a locked gate. The security fence installed around the perimeter of the solar farm will be erected at the start of the construction programme and will remain for the duration of the operation until decommissioning of the solar farm.

The Proposed Development will be enclosed with 2.4m high deer fencing which will be screened from view at the PRoWs by additional planting as discussed in Section 3.4 above.

No furniture, fence, barrier or other structure will be erected on or across the PRoW network without consultation and agreement with Stafford Borough Council/Staffordshire County Council. CCTV will be inward facing and not directly cover any PRoW.



## 6. Conclusion

This Management Plan sets out how the Proposed Development takes account of the PRoW network in the area in order to minimise any potential impact.

It has considered available guidance and information on PRoWs and has been the product of site visits and consultation with the PRoW Officers at Staffordshire SCC, Design Midlands, the Ramblers, the local community and local outdoor recreation groups.

The proposed management measures seek to ensure that PRoWs will remain effectively open to users throughout all stages of the Proposed Development, with safety measures in place to ensure continued safe use of the PRoW. No PRoW is proposed to be diverted and/or stopped up. It should also be noted that PRoW widths are to remain in accordance with or wider than stated in the definitive map supplied by SCC.

The Applicant has proposed a number of additional enhancements across the site which aim to improve the enjoyment of those using the PRoW network including the following:

- Proposed wildflower seed mix at either side of the PRoW in order to provide users of the PRoW with a more enjoyable and scenic view;
- A minimum setback distance of 7.5m was applied to the PRoWs within and adjacent to the Application Site, with larger setback distances achieved in some areas;
- Following feedback received from Design Midlands, the Applicant has implemented a further setback from PRoW Fulford 12 in Field 17 of approximately 37m.
- All inverters have been positioned specifically away from PRoWs to further protect the PRoW amenity value.
- The Applicant intends to keep the 2no PRoW that cross the Application Site boundary open during both the construction and operational period of the Proposed Development, with priority given to the users of the PRoW.
- There will be banksmen where the PRoW is crossed by the access track in order to supervise any manoeuvres and ensure safety at the PRoWs. These safety measures would be implemented during the construction phase and during the operational phase whilst maintenance trips are taking place.

The Applicant would maintain a regular dialogue with the PRoW Officers at SCC throughout the construction period of the Proposed Development in order to ensure the objectives of the PRoW Management Plan are achieved.

