



SWINDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMITTEE REPORT

Item Number: 6

Application Number: S/25/0809/RACH

Ward: Blunsdon and Highworth

Parish: Blunsdon Parish Council

Proposal: Erection of a temporary synthetic fuel facility, solar array and associated Infrastructure.

Site Location: Land Off Little Rose Lane, Swindon

Case Officer: Ralph Chakadya

Agent:

Mr Jake Locke
The Old Dairy
Yanworth
Cheltenham
GL54 3LQ

Applicant

Rivan Industries Ltd
Rivan Industries Ltd
Unit 4
Admiral Hyson Industrial Estate
London
SE16 3PA
United Kingdom

Background

1. This application has been brought to Planning Committee for determination at the request of Blunsdon Parish Council and Councillor Nick Gardner.

Summary of Recommendation

2. Planning permission be GRANTED subject to conditions.

Proposals

3. Permission is being sought for a temporary synthetic fuel facility and associated plant and equipment, including solar PV array. The synthetic fuel facility will consist of 22 no. 40ft shipping containers, with a generation capacity of up to 3,630 MWh per year.
4. Ancillary plant and infrastructure will include the following:

- 15MWdc Solar Array, using 650W mono facial solar panels.
- Solar panel mounting structure with a ground clearance of up to 1400mm.
- One medium sized 40,000L flexible water tank per synthetic fuel generator (11 in total) to provide water for the production of Hydrogen gas, this will store 40,000L of water and will be 10.4 x 8.85m.
- Eleven 13m diameter by 4.3m high gas storage domes
- Control and storage rooms
- Security fencing – maximum 2m tall steel mesh fencing around site compound; and deer-proof stock fencing around solar + RNG areas.
- Pole mounted CCTV cameras, up to 3m tall

5. Rivan's synthetic fuel generator combines three core technologies:
 - A calcium-looping Direct Air Capture (DAC) system to supply carbon dioxide (CO₂)
 - An alkaline water electrolyser to split hydrogen (H₂) from water.
 - A sabatier reactor to produce methane (CH₄) from carbon dioxide (CO₂) and Hydrogen (H₂) inputs.
6. Together, the system produces 99.9% pure synthetic natural gas, methane, which acts as a carbon neutral drop-in replacement for fossil alternatives. Synthetic fuel is a clean, renewable gas made by combining carbon dioxide captured from the air with hydrogen split from water using solar power.
7. The processes require an external energy source and will be powered by the associated solar PV array, which will have an installed capacity of up to 15MWdc and will be used solely for the production of synthetic fuel.
8. Gas produced will enter the national gas grid network via an on-site Grid Entry Unit (GEU). This will be connected to Wales & West Utilities' gas distribution network via a new pipeline connection to the existing network which crosses underneath Starwell Lane to the south.
9. The proposed temporary development would be operational for a period of 30 years. Once the operational period has concluded, the site will be decommissioned; all equipment will be removed from the site and the land will be restored.
10. Access to the site is obtained via Starwell Lane which connects to Broad Blunsdon via Front Lane.
11. Further details were submitted in response to landscape and noise issues raised by consultees. Further consultations were carried out with residents following the submission of the revised details. Concerns were raised regarding archaeology matters at the site prompting the need for archaeology trial trenching works on the site and submission of the findings for assessment by the Council's Archaeologist prior to the determination of the application.

Site and surroundings

12. The application site comprises an arable agricultural field circa 13ha located enclosed by hedgerow boundaries and treeline to the north. The Site is located approximately 800m north of the village of Blunsdon and 1.8km of the Parish of Blunsdon St Andrew.
13. There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the site boundary. However, there are PRoWs in close vicinity to the Site:
 - *There is a bridleway (reference: BL12) along Great Rose Way routing in a west to east alignment along the northern boundary of the proposed development.*
 - *A public footpath connecting Lower Village to Bridleway B12 and Wiltshire Bridleways 17 and 18 routing in a south to north direction approximately 250m east of the proposed development.*
14. The site is classified as part of Grade 3 Agricultural Land and is within the open countryside.

15. There is a Significant Unscheduled Archaeological Feature covering the southern section of the Site.

Relevant planning history

16. S/EIA/24/1113- EIA Screening Opinion issued by SBC on 17th September 2024 confirmed that the proposed development is not EIA development. The application submission now includes gas storage domes and water storage tanks that were previously not included with the Screening Opinion submission. The additions are as a result of the evolving operational requirements of the facility with the gas storage domes necessary to temporarily store small quantities of gas during production phase and the water tanks have been introduced to support process efficiency and ensure adequate water supply for operational needs. The applicant has submitted a comparison of the potential impacts arising from the EIA Screening Opinion version of the proposals and the current Full Planning application concluding there is no material change to the baseline impacts assessed in the EIA Screening Opinion application. The additions have been fully assessed within the accompanying environmental documentation submitted as part of the full planning application and it is the Local Planning Authority's (LPA) view that there are no known changes to the environmental conditions on the ground that would require changes to the baseline of the assessment that concluded the development is not EIA development. When also taking into account the time period between the screening opinion and submission of this planning application the LPA is satisfied that all potential environmental effects of the project have been taken into account and the development is not EIA development.

Representations

17. Representations were received from 76 addresses. Some residents submitted more than a single representation as the application was reconsulted twice due to the submission of additional details resulting in a total of 195 submitted representations. The comments received can be summarised as follows:

- Unacceptable harm to the rural landscape and setting of Blunsdon
- Industrialisation of the countryside
- Highway safety and capacity
- Potential public safety concerns from gas storage
- Fire safety concerns
- Explosive risk
- Noise pollution
- Equipment drawings are shown as illustrative
- Proposals not carbon neutral as suggested
- Consultation process on the application by the Council is flawed
- Misleading public consultation by the applicant prior to application submission
- Technology not yet fully proven
- Need to delay determination until publication of the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan by energy grid agency the National Energy System Operator (NESO)

18. Blunsdon Parish Council: Object to the proposals and would require the application to be referred to the Planning Committee should planning officers disagree with the objections. The Parish Council conclude that the proposal is unsustainable, carries significant and unmitigated risks, and

fails to comply with local and national planning policies. They recommend that the developer undertake a series of major actions to address widespread concerns before the application can be reconsidered. The issues raised can be summarised as follows:

(a) Significant Safety Risks:

- Road Safety: The proposal would introduce HGV traffic to narrow, single-track rural lanes used by walkers, cyclists, horse riders, and children, creating an unacceptable hazard.
- Gas Safety: The storage of pressurized hydrogen and methane near homes and stables is a major concern. The Council notes a lack of published risk assessments, safety plans, or evacuation procedures, which they state violates safety regulations (DSEAR - dangerous substances and explosive atmospheres). The Parish Council cite a real-world hydrogen tank explosion to underscore this risk.

(b) Major Environmental and Heritage Harm:

- The development would cause a loss of biodiversity, potentially harming protected species like badgers and bats, with incomplete ecological surveys provided.
- It would have a negative visual impact on the landscape, particularly from heritage viewpoints like Castle Hill, and threatens archaeologically sensitive areas (including newly discovered "Highworth Circles") with no full evaluation completed.
- The use of 13ha of productive greenfield land is opposed when brownfield alternatives may exist.

(c) Unproven and Misleading Proposal:

- The technology is described as experimental and unproven at this scale, with no independent review of its financial or technical viability.
- The Parish Council accuses the consultation process of being misleading, with key facts omitted or contradicted (e.g., residents were initially told no gas would be stored).
- "Temporary" designation (30 years) remains contentious and arguably misleading.

(d) Non-Compliance with Planning Policy:

- The document argues the proposal directly conflicts with multiple policies in the Blunsdon Neighbourhood Plan and Swindon Borough Local Plan (Policy SD1, SD2, SD3 etc.), which protect the countryside, promote safe access, and require developments to enhance the local environment—none of which, in the Parish Council's view, this application achieves. The Parish Council states the project fails to meet the core principles of sustainable development.

(e) Recommended Actions for the Developer to address public concerns include:

- Publish full, compliant risk and safety assessments (DSEAR).
- Disclose all completed ecological and archaeological surveys.
- Host a second, proper round of public consultation with accurate data.
- Commit to concrete traffic mitigation and road safety improvements.
- Provide an independent review of the project's viability.
- Justify why a greenfield site was chosen over brownfield alternatives.

In essence, the Parish Council views the proposal as a high-risk, poorly planned industrial development that is inappropriate for a rural location and fails to meet the standards of sustainable development.

19. Councillor Nick Gardiner: Request that planning application S/25/0809 be referred to Planning Committee due to significant public concern and the presence of material planning issues including:

- Unacceptable harm to the rural landscape and setting of Blunsdon
- Potential public safety concerns from gas storage
- Industrialisation of open countryside
- Inconsistency with adopted local policies on landscape, rural development, and highway safety

Consultees

20. Environment Agency: No objection subject to an informative on permitting regulations. We do note that it involves the production of hydrogen by electrolysis and then subsequently the production of methane/hydrocarbons by chemical reaction. These processes are Listed Activities under Schedule 1, Section 4.1 Part A(1)(a) and Section 4.2 Part A(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations. It is recommended the applicant contact the Environment Agency to discuss issues likely to be raised

21. Swindon Borough Council Drainage: No objection subject to conditions.

22. Swindon Borough Council Local Highways Authority: No objection subject to conditions.

23. Swindon Borough Council Landscape: (*summary comments*) Object due to visual impact of the proposals.

24. Swindon Borough Council Ecologist: No objection subject to conditions following the submission of revised and additional details.

25. Swindon Borough Council Archaeology: No objection subject to conditions following archaeological surveys and submission of an Archaeological Evaluation Report.

26. Swindon Borough Council Environmental Health (Pollution): No objection subject to conditions.

27. Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Rescue: No objection.

28. Health and Safety Executive: No comment. This application does not fall within the Consultation Distance Zones of either a Major Hazard Site or Major Accident Hazard Pipeline.

29. National Gas Transmission: There are no National Gas Transmission assets within the Swindon Borough so National Gas would not provide representations to this application.

30. National Grid: There are no National Grid Electricity Transmission assets affected by the proposal.

Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

Development Plan

31. [Adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 \(adopted on the 26th April 2015\)](#)

- Policy SD1 (Sustainable Development Principles)
- Policy SD2 (The Sustainable Development Strategy)
- Policy DE1 (High Quality Design)
- Policy EC1 (Economic Growth through Existing Business and Inward Investment)
- Policy EN1 (Green Infrastructure Network)
- Policy EN4 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)
- Policy EN5 (Landscape Character and Historical Landscape)
- Policy EN6 (Flood Risk)
- Policy EN7 (Pollution)
- Policy EN9 (Contaminated Land)
- Policy EN10 (Historic Environment & Heritage Assets)
- Policy IN1 (Infrastructure Provision)
- Policy IN4 (Low Carb & Renewable Energy)
- Policy TR1 (Sustainable Transport Networks)
- Policy TR2 (Transport and Development)

Other relevant planning policy and guidance

32. [Blunsdon Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2026](#)

33. Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/SPG)

- [Swindon Borough Councils Parking Standards \(2021\)](#)
- [The Swindon Plan 2024-2027' \(July 2024\)](#)
- [Net Zero Emissions Action Plan \(March 2023\)](#)
- [Swindon Borough Landscape Character Areas SPD \(2004\)](#)

34. National Policies

- [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) \(2024\)](#)
- [Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\)](#)

35. All policies, guidance and the Framework can be read in full online.

Discussion

Principle of the development:

36. The application site is outside of the Swindon Urban Settlement Boundary as identified on the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan Proposals Map. Therefore, the site falls within the countryside, and the development would be assessed according to local and national policies that relate to development in the open countryside.

37. Policy SD1 sets out the sustainable development principles under the Swindon Borough Local Plan (SBLP). The Development Strategy is clearly defined in SBLP Policy SD2 and encompasses residential and economic development. It directs most development to Swindon's urban centre

and allocated strategic sites. Development in rural areas is supported primarily at Highworth and Wroughton, which represent the most accessible rural settlements. As such, economic development is supported within the rural settlement boundaries defined on the policies map.

38. Support for development in the countryside, outside of the rural settlement boundaries, is limited to express exceptions in SBLP Policy SD2. These include allocations in a Neighbourhood Plan (NP); some expansion of tourism and visitor facilities; or where other Development Plan policies specifically permit it.
39. The application site lies outside of the urban settlement boundary for Swindon. Neither does the proposal fall within the exceptions listed in SBLP Policy SD2. It therefore follows that the development would be in conflict with the sustainable development strategy in the SBLP and, as such would be a departure from the adopted Development Plan. In this regard, the principle of the development is therefore contrary to the borough's sustainable development strategy that seeks to focus development within established settlement boundaries and to allocated sites.
40. In addition, the proposed development would be contrary to Policy 3 of the Blunsdon NP which highlights that '*outside the defined settlement boundaries development will be strictly controlled in accordance with policies in the Development Plan*'
41. Conflict with SBLP Policy SD2 and the Policy 3 of the NP is identified in terms of development in the countryside. This policy conflict will need to be weighed in the planning balance. This assessment is made in the Planning balance section of this report.

Climate change:

42. SBLP Policy IN4 (Low Carbon and Renewable Energy) is applicable to this application. The policy states that appropriate renewable energy infrastructure which has benefits for local communities and the local economy will be supported. SBLP Policy IN4 highlights that local sources of renewable energy currently meet less than 1% of Swindon Borough's current energy demand. The development of local and more sustainable sources of energy and associated infrastructure is therefore a priority to support a long-term low carbon growth and secure energy future for Swindon Borough, whilst addressing wider climate change issues. Swindon Borough Council ('SBC') declared a climate emergency in July 2022 and has produced a Net Zero Emissions Action Plan (March 2023) that includes supporting solar infrastructure. In addition, SBC also produced the Swindon Plan 2024-2027 which sets out the Council's long-term priorities to improve the quality of life for Borough residents and includes a number of themes and objectives, notably the need to 'Build a Greener Swindon' leading the way towards a net zero borough by 2050. In 'Building a Greener Swindon', the Council aims to significantly reduce carbon emissions and transition to a net zero economy, which includes decarbonising transportation and energy production alongside collaborating with stakeholders.
43. Previously the site was part of sites included within the Swindon's Low Carbon Development Orders 2015 granting outline permission for solar arrays and solar farms. Whilst the Local Development Order (LDO) for the site referenced as Site 27 (Land north of Lower Blunsdon (Newlands)) has since expired as it had a five-year term limit, the LDO is a material consideration as it further reinforces the suitability of the site for renewable energy use.

44. NPPF paragraph 161 highlights that the planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and take full account of all climate impacts including overheating, water scarcity, storm and flood risks and coastal change. This also include the need for the planning system to support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate by supporting renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. Paragraph 168 (a) and (b) goes on to say that when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should:

- "a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the proposal's contribution to a net zero future;*
- b) recognise that small-scale and community-led projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions;".*

45. The United Kingdom (UK) has pledged to be net zero for carbon production by 2050. In their submission, the applicant highlights that the facility will develop clean energy using synthetic fuel technology that captures 6,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere per year and combines it with green hydrogen to produce carbon-neutral methane that is an exact substitute for fossil natural gas. It is chemically identical to fossil natural gas but created without drilling or fracking. Essentially the process turns air, water and sunlight into usable energy that is injected directly into the local gas network helping the UK to move away from fossil fuels.

46. The proposed development will make a direct contribution towards meeting the environmental and sustainable energy objectives contained within the SBLP (2026) and the NPPF (2024). The development of local and more sustainable sources of energy is a priority to support a long-term low carbon growth and secure energy future for Swindon Borough, whilst addressing wider climate change issues. The proposed development is therefore set to play an important role in the transfer of energy supplies from fossil fuels to renewables. Supporting the transition to renewable energy, the development will contribute to the economic benefits associated with the renewable sector including employment opportunities, reducing the economic impacts associated with climate change and the medium to long term reduction in energy costs associated with renewable energy. The proposal has the substantive benefit of reducing CO₂ in line with central government objective of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. There are benefits from the proposed facility that directly support the local and national strategies of aiming for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

47. In this regard, it is considered that the proposed development accords with SBLP Policy IN4 and is also supported by the NPPF and Government energy policy generally.

Alternative sites:

48. There is no requirement in local or national policy for an Alternative Sites Assessment (ASA), as each application is assessed on its own merits. However, the applicant submits that the site was selected following a detailed site search that prioritised proximity to an existing gas distribution pipeline, planning history of the site, minimal visual sensitivity, and limited ecological or heritage constraints. The land is relatively flat, well screened by mature hedgerows, and located away from residential clusters, reducing potential amenity impacts. Crucially, the site sits above an

intermediate pressure gas main operated by Wales & West Utilities, enabling efficient injection of synthetic fuel without the need for disruptive infrastructure works. All works relating to the grid connection from the facility to the gas distribution network will be progressed by the applicant in conjunction with the distribution network operator. As already highlighted above, previously the site was part of sites included within the Swindon's Low Carbon Development Orders (LDO) 2015 granting outline permission for solar arrays and solar farms. Whereas the LDO has since expired as it was valid for 5 years, it remains a material consideration in the context of this application.

Referenced as Site 27 (Land north of Lower Blunsdon (Newlands)), the previous Local Development Order further reinforces the suitability of the site for renewable energy use.

49. When considering all the necessary requirements to facilitate the development of the facility, location of the site and other material consideration that include previous allocation of the site for renewable energy use, it is officers view the selection of this site to accommodate the proposed development is considered reasonable.

Loss of Agricultural land:

50. The proposal will result in temporary cessation of farming of Grade 3b agricultural land (moderate quality agricultural land). Natural England's guidance is that they need to be consulted on an application involving the development of more than 20ha of best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Ministers have previously expressed their view that poorer quality agricultural land should be used for renewable energy schemes in preference to BMV land and Natural England guidance states that planning decisions should avoid the unnecessary loss of BMV agricultural land. Whereas the site area is less than 20ha to require consultation with Natural England, justification for the temporary loss of this grade 3b that is not classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land agricultural land is considered to carry very limited weight in the planning balance given the public benefits in terms of direct support to the local and national strategies of aiming for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Landscape and Visual Impact:

51. SBLP Policy EN5 covers landscape character and seeks to protect, conserve and where possible enhance the intrinsic character, diversity and local distinctiveness of landscape within Swindon Borough.

52. NP Policy 10 seeks to ensure that all new development does not adversely affect key distinctive views particularly views surrounding listed buildings, the conservation areas and key landscape features.

53. NPPF paragraph 187 states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (inter alia) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services including trees and woodland.

54. The site and the surrounding landscape are not covered by any landscape specific statutory designations. However, according to the Natural England countrywide landscape character assessment the site lies within Landscape Character Area 108/12A: Upper Thames Open Clay Valley comprising low-lying, rural landscape featuring heavy clay soils. The Swindon Borough

Landscape Character Areas SPD (2004) also identifies the area to be within the Thames Vale character area that is characterised by extensive views across the Midvale Ridge and Highworth as well as large fields with hedgerow. The site forms part of arable flat field with a gentle slope from the southern edge. The land is made up of agricultural land with large mature hedgerows and trees along all boundaries.

55. The submitted Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) identifies the most sensitive receptors to the proposed development will be the surrounding nearby network of PRoWs and private residences on the outskirts of Blunsdon, Seven Bridges and Lower Park Farm. The LVIA has been updated to accurately depict the height of the solar arrays and include hedgerow planting near the entrance to enhance screening of the proposed development from long views from Blunsdon village.
56. The Council's Landscape Officer has assessed the proposals and has raised concerns regarding the principle of the development highlighting the visual impact and harms to character of the local landscape in this area as a result of the introduction of 11 domes at maximum 4.33m high, 11 bladder flexible water tanks (1.5m high), 22 shipping containers (2.6m high) and associated solar arrays maximum 1.5m high on this predominantly agricultural field.
57. The development would be visible from the elevated Blunsdon village and Castles Hill and some of the PRoW around the site. Localised visibility of the proposals would be mitigated by the boundary treatment of the site that comprise high hedges and trees on all sides. Additional planting is proposed to the south of the site to mitigate the impact of long views from Blunsdon village.
58. It is acknowledged the proposed development would have some adverse landscape and visual effects and there would be some conflict with NP Policy 10, SBLP Policy EN5 and paragraph 187 of the NPPF due to the harm identified. The proposed development would change the current open nature of the site and the open views across it resulting in adverse visual effects from the site having a more urbanised character.
59. However, it should be noted that the site comprises an agricultural field that is not designated nor does it form part of any valued landscape. A material consideration is also the fact that the site was previously granted a Local Development Order for a solar farm, meaning the principle of similar development on the site was considered acceptable. This, however, does not negate the identified harm and therefore the adverse landscape and visual effects will need to be weighed in terms of the overall benefits of renewable energy.
60. The proposed development will deliver significant public benefits by providing sustainable energy sources that support long-term low-carbon growth and energy security at both local and national levels, while addressing climate change. It will play a key role in transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy, generating economic advantages such as job creation, reduced climate-related economic impacts, and lower energy costs over time. On balance, in this instance the identified benefits are considered to outweigh the identified adverse landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

Heritage and Archaeology:

61. Where a development proposal affects a conservation area, section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('PLBCA') requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas.

62. Policy EN10 of the Local Plan seeks to ensure proposals conserve and enhance the heritage significance of Swindon's heritage assets and reflects the statutory duties of the PLBCA. Archaeological sites should be preserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

63. The NPPF states that the historic environment contributes to the role of sustainable development by contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment. Paragraph 212 of the NPPF states that "When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation". Paragraphs 214 – 215 of the NPPF deal with levels of harm caused by development in relation to designated heritage assets with the former dealing with cases of 'substantial harm' where Local Planning Authorities should refuse permission unless in case of substantial public benefits or all of a number of set criteria are met. The latter (paragraph 215) deals with cases of 'less than substantial harm' to designated heritage assets and requires that in such cases this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

64. The application site is circa 800m from the edge of the Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area. As the Conservation is elevated, views will look down across this development from a distance resulting in a minor impact on the setting of the Conservation Area. The applicant has submitted a Heritage Statement that confirms views to the north fall within the setting of the Conservation Area and given the separation distance the development would '*cause a slight adverse impact to an asset of medium significance, resulting in a slight adverse effect to the way in which setting can contribute to the significance of the heritage asset*'. The Council's Conservation Officer agrees with the submitted Heritage Statement that the harm caused will be 'less than substantial' and place it at the low to medium end of this category of harm. The Conservation Officer added that if a new hedgerow was to be planted to the south of the development in the existing field to screen the development, the harm could be reduced further. The applicant has agreed to plant the hedging and revised plans were submitted showing the planting that will be secured by condition.

65. A Scheduled Monument known as Bury Croft hillfort and scheduled as *Hillfort and Lynchets on Castle Hill* (NHLE 1016324) is located c. 1.6km southeast of the development area. Views towards the Site area from Castle Hill form part of the wider setting to the monument and make a meaningful contribution to significance. Given the separation distance and the intervening hedging and trees between the site and the scheduled monument, it is considered the conclusions of the submitted Heritage Statement that the identified level of harm would be a slight adverse impact on an asset of high significance, and hence on the lower end of less than substantial harm.

66. Due to the identified harm, the proposed development would be in conflict with NP Policy 10, SBLP Policy EN10 and the NPPF. Whilst the identified harm to the setting of the Conservation Area and the scheduled monument Castle Hill is on the lower end of less than substantial, paragraph 215 of the NPPF requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

67. The proposed development will deliver significant public benefits by providing sustainable energy sources that support long-term low-carbon growth and energy security at both local and national levels, while addressing climate change. It will play a key role in transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy, generating economic advantages such as job creation, reduced climate-related economic impacts, and lower energy costs over time. These benefits are considered to outweigh the minor harm to the setting of the Conservation Area.

Archaeology

68. Following initial concerns raised by the Council's Archaeologist and residents regarding archaeology matters that include the presence of Highworth circles on the site, full archaeological trial trenching evaluation was carried to establish the extend of the site's archaeological value. A full Archaeological Evaluation report was produced and submitted to the Local Planning Authority following full archaeological trial trenching at the site. The results of the archaeological trial trenching evaluation sufficiently characterised the archaeological potential of the application area. In response to the findings of the trial trenching report, the Council's Archaeologist withdrew their previous objection and advised that a programme of Archaeological Strip, Map and Record (SMR) Excavation is undertaken to mitigate the effects of development on the archaeological resource. The SMR programme should comprise four areas targeting the archaeological features identified in T3, T9, T20 and where the proposed access track is in proximity to geophysical anomaly 4 and T24. An appropriate condition to secure the programme of Archaeological Strip, Map and Record Excavation will be added.

69. In addition, the areas to be excluded from development should be set out in an Archaeological Management Plan (AMP) that establishes a methodology for protecting them prior to and during the developmental and operational phases of the site. An appropriate condition will be added to secure the AMP.

70. Overall, with the appropriate conditions in place it is considered the proposed development is acceptable in archaeology terms.

Highways matters:

71. The primary highway matters of interest in this case relate to traffic generation, site access and traffic management. The applicant has submitted details that include a Transport Statement in support of the application. Whist residents have highlighted concerns regarding highway matters, the submitted Transport Statement that provides a detailed study of the site and the surrounding highway network has been reviewed by the Local Highway Authority who deemed its principles acceptable.

72. The Transport Statement reviews the critical elements of carriageway widths leading to the site, particularly Meads Lane and Starwell Lane, and especially the section of Starwell Lane north of Little Rose Lane up to the site access. Traffic generation is assessed and determined at approximately 10-15 two-way hourly flows and low speeds (averaging approx. 26mph) compared to the posted national speed restriction. The proposed development is anticipated to generate negligible traffic (approx. 2-4 two-way movements per month for maintenance visits) once fully operational, although construction traffic will be more significant over an initial 6-months period. The Transport Statement assesses the construction traffic generation for that period at approx. 1-

2 deliveries per day (2-4 two-way vehicle movements per day), with peaks of approximately 8 two-way vehicle movements per day during critical phases of construction.

73. Overall, the Local Highway Authority concluded the Transport Statement is considered to be a reasonable reflection of the anticipated highway impact, subject to the proposed improvements to Starwell Lane and the site access. The improvements indicated on the Proposed Site Access Arrangements within Appendix D of the TS are considered necessary to facilitate HGV access for the construction phase as a minimum and shall be subject to a Section 278 highway agreement prior to any on-site works commencing. An appropriate informative will be added.

74. Whilst a Construction Traffic Management Plan has been submitted, it is considered just a framework and therefore more specific details will be required once construction phasing details are known. Therefore, an appropriate condition will be added requiring the submission of a final more detailed Construction Traffic Management Plan. This should cover the highway improvement works phase required prior to on-site construction works commencing, including the highway condition surveys and potential subsequent remedial works.

75. On the matter of impact on PRoWs, whilst there is none that cross the application site, there are a number of PRoWs in the vicinity of the site. The development should not impact these PRoWs and an appropriate informative will be added advising the applicant that any works that may affect these PRoWs would require engagement of the Council's PRoW officer.

Health and Safety:

76. Concerns have been raised by residents regarding fire risk and general safety as a result of the facility. The application site is located in the middle of agricultural fields with the nearest dwellings to the south and west of the development site that are a substantial distance from the site, as well as the recently granted temporary worker accommodation at Little Rose Farm (S/OUT/23/1499) to the south side of the development. The village of Blunsdon is circa 800m away. The site is therefore well separated from residential buildings meaning the risk of a fire affecting the neighbouring premises would be minimal.

77. Regardless, the applicant has submitted Outline Safety Management Plan details highlighting the safety approach to aspects from gas handling and chemical storage to site access and emergency response. The Plan is designed to align with UK regulations and international standards that include Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002, Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations (DSEAR) 2002, Pressure Systems Safety Regulations (PSSR) 2000, Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (CDM) 2015 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. In addition, the submitted plan highlights that where necessary, the applicant will ensure compliance with other statutory obligations and secure permits from relevant environmental, utility, and safety authorities. There is also the need to insure the facility against any risks. All this provides an acceptable level of comfort in terms of the health and safety concerns raised.

78. Furthermore, regarding Health and Safety issues, consultation has also been undertaken with the Council's Environmental Health Officer, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE); Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, Environment Agency (EA) and National Gas. As already highlighted above the Environmental Health Officer recommended appropriate conditions with regards to amenity.

The EA did not object to the proposals highlighting production of methane/hydrocarbons by chemical reaction processes are Listed Activities under Schedule 1, Section 4.1 Part A(1)(a) and Section 4.2 Part A(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations and therefore the applicant should be aware they may require an Environmental Permit or License. Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service recommended compliance with Building Regulations requirements. HSE advised the proposals does not fall within any HSE consultation zones and did not need to be consulted.

79. Overall, subject to an appropriate condition securing the Outline Safety Management Plan details and informatics on the need for separate permits/licenses the proposal is considered acceptable in health and safety terms.

Residential Amenity

80. The applicant submitted a Noise Impact Assessment Report by Aca Acoustics and a further addendum to provide evidence that noise emissions from the development will not be detrimental to the amenity of nearby noise-sensitive properties and complies with the relevant policies. The most noise-sensitive residential receptors (NSR) have been assessed as dwellings to the south and west of the development site that are a substantial distance from the site, and the recently granted temporary worker accommodation at Little Rose Farm (S/OUT/23/1499) to the south side of the development. Whilst the permitted temporary worker dwelling is yet to be built, an addendum to the original noise assessment was submitted to address potential noise impact as the dwelling will become the closest noise-sensitive property to the proposed renewable natural gas and solar array development. The Council's Environmental Health Officer has assessed the submitted noise assessment details and concluded the development is suitable within this location subject to appropriate conditions. The conditions include the need for BS 4142 type noise assessment to be undertaken that considers plant noise as the final specific details of the equipment to be installed is unknown. Where the rating level of any noise source exceeds 5dB below the background level (LA90), as determined by a BS 4142:2014 assessment, a scheme of noise mitigation should be implemented and maintained. Additional conditions include the need for a Construction Environmental Management Plan to mitigate impact of the development during construction phase in terms of noise, dust and waste pollution, as well as a condition to control working hours. With such conditions in place, the development is considered not to be detrimental to the amenity of nearby noise-sensitive properties and complies with the relevant policies.

Drainage:

81. The site lies within Flood Zone 1 that is not considered to be at risk of flooding. The planning application includes a Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy – Little Rose Lane Energy Park, Ashton, May 2025 and further clarification details were submitted following initial concerns raised by the Council's Drainage Officer. The Drainage Officer has no objection to the principles presented in the flood risk assessment about the drainage design and given the fact that the achievement of a sustainable drainage design would be feasible for the site, appropriate conditions would suffice requiring the submission of a surface water drainage scheme for the site, in accordance with the principles presented in 'Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy – Little Rose Lane Energy Park, Ashton, May 2025 and a surface water drainage maintenance scheme.

82. During operation, it is submitted that there will be no waste output from the process or harmful by-products, with only the Rivan module requiring a trickle water source (no more than 500ml/hour) to feed the H2 electrolyser. This will be provided via 40,000l flexible water storage tanks topped up with rainwater or, as a last resort in the event that rainwater is unavailable, water purchased by Rivan and delivered to the Site. As such there will therefore be no impact on local watercourses.

Biodiversity:

83. SBLP Policy EN4 seeks to ensure development 'avoids direct and indirect negative impacts upon biodiversity and geodiversity sites as identified on the Policies Map. In addition, 'all development, where appropriate shall protect and enhance biodiversity and provide net local diversity gain. Where this is demonstrably not achievable, mitigation and compensation will be agreed'.

84. Details of the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) have been assessed by the Councils Ecologist and are considered reasonable and acceptable. In terms of designated sites, the submitted PEA identifies the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation (SAC) that is 4.3km to the west of the site and due to the intervening distance is not considered to be impacted by the development. The same applies to the non-statutory designated sites of Water Eaton Copse and Ashmead Brake that are approximately 2km from the site.

85. The Council's Ecologist agrees with the PEA submissions that the site comprising cultivated arable land is considered to be of limited nature conservation value and therefore the loss of this habitat is not considered to be a constraint to the proposed development. With regards to bats, seasonal night-time bat walkover surveys and static detector surveys were carried out that showed the arable habitats that dominated the site offered limited value to bats. However, the boundary hedgerows and trees provided potential foraging resources for bats. In terms of birds breeding, the surveys carried revealed the site is of negligible importance. The same applies to badgers, dormice and Great Crested Newts (GCN). However, the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal made recommendations regarding the need to protect mature trees and hedgerows; bats; birds; dormouse; amphibians; and hedgehogs during construction. As such the Council's Ecologist recommended an appropriate condition requiring the submission of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP: Biodiversity) will be added. In addition, a condition requiring the submission of a lighting strategy has been recommended by the Council's Ecologist and the condition is considered appropriate to ensure any proposed lighting will not impact upon ecological networks and/or sensitive features.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):

86. The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition "(the biodiversity gain condition") that development may not begin unless:

- I. *of which within Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and*
- II. *The planning authority has approved the plan;*

of which within not less than 10% biodiversity net gain can be demonstrated.

87. The Council's Ecologist assessed the submitted details concluding the BNG report and metric, are reasonable and acceptable. Habitat and hedgerow units have been assessed. There is a net gain of 16.75 (62.75%) habitat units (with low-medium distinctiveness) and 2.09 hedgerow units (13.08%) (with medium distinctiveness). The BNG exceeds the minimum 10% requirement and is therefore considered acceptable. An informative would be added to any grant of planning permission reminding the applicant of the requirement to deliver BNG accordingly.

88. Overall, whilst concerns have been raised by the Blunsdon Parish Council and residents regarding the potential impact on biodiversity, it is considered the development is acceptable as demonstrated by the submitted PEA that has been assessed by the Council's Ecologist with its recommendations secured by conditions. In addition, the development will achieve biodiversity net gain that exceeds the minimum 10% threshold and thereby complying with local and national policies. Further concerns were raised by a resident regarding potential impact to wildlife from noise generated by the facility. In response and in consultation with the Council's Ecologist the applicant provided an addendum to the noise report that demonstrates that the development would not result in a significant level of noise pollution affecting wildlife.

Restoration:

89. The application proposal is for a temporary facility with a designed operational lifespan of up to 30 years. Whilst concerns have been raised regarding the length of the temporary period, it is not unusual for such periods to be deemed temporary as it compares with similar temporary periods for solar farms (up to 40 years). In this instance it aligns with the expected operational lifespan of the equipment and that of the associated solar PV system. A condition limiting the life of the planning permission to 30 years would be added. Following cessation of gas generation at the site, and as part of the contractual obligations with the landowner, the installation would be decommissioned, and all plant and machinery would be removed from site. The restoration of the site to its existing land use would also be conditioned.

Representations:

90. Most of the issues raised have been addressed within the above report. Concerns have been raised regarding the number of identified Highworth circles that are of archaeological importance. However, the applicant has clarified that the apparent discrepancy arises from the scope of supporting reports submitted. The ecology report focuses solely on features within the site boundary and hence identifies a smaller number of circles, whereas the heritage report considers Highworth circles within a broader radius and hence more circles identified.

91. The Parish Council queried whether the technology is proven. In response the applicant clarified the technology uses proven industrial processes: electrolysis, methanation, and limestone cycling to create synthetic methane. The applicant also completed pilot testing of the 100kW version of the system at Wroughton Airfield.

92. Regarding the Local Planning Authority consultation process concerns raised by residents during the determination of the application, it should be noted national and local guidance in determining applications allows for submission of further details and reconsulting residents where it is deemed necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms. As such residents

have been reconsulted where it has been deemed necessary and have been afforded the chance to make further representations on the proposals.

93. With regard to public consultation prior to the submission of the application and allegations of misleading the public, it is noted that whilst it is encouraged for applicants to carry out public consultations prior to submitting planning applications, the Local Planning Authority has no control over the process and is duty bound to consider planning applications as submitted.
94. Representations have been made suggesting the proposal should wait for the publication of the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan by energy grid agency the National Energy System Operator (NESO). The plan is yet to be published and there is no justification to withhold determination of planning application for that reason.

Planning Balance

95. The development would be in conflict with the sustainable development strategy in the SBLP that seeks to focus development within established settlement boundaries and to allocated sites. The assessment of the proposals has identified that the development would result in some landscape and visual harm, less than substantial harm to the setting of the Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area and Scheduled Monument at Castle Hill, and the temporary loss of the Grade 3 agricultural land.
96. The public benefits accruing from the development include sustainable sources of energy, which is a priority in terms of supporting long-term low carbon growth and secure energy future at local and national level, whilst addressing wider climate change issues. The proposed development is therefore set to play an important role in the transfer of energy supplies from fossil fuels to renewables. Supporting the transition to renewable energy, the development will contribute to the economic benefits associated with the renewable sector including employment opportunities, reducing the economic impacts associated with climate change and the medium to long term reduction in energy costs associated with renewable energy. In this instance the identified public benefits are considered to outweigh the identified visual landscape harm, the less than substantial harm to the setting of the Conservation Area and Scheduled Monument, and the temporary loss of Grade 3 agricultural land.
97. The proposal has the substantive benefit of reducing CO2 emissions in line with central government objective of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. The benefits of the proposed development that directly support the local and national strategies of aiming for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 should be given significant weight.
98. The proposal therefore makes a positive contribution to the supply of renewable energy. SBLP Policy IN4 is supportive of renewable energy development. National planning and energy policy are also supportive generally of renewable energy generation. This benefit of the proposal should be given significant weight.
99. In this instance the application site has no designation protection and therefore substantial weight should be accorded to the public benefits of mitigating climate change and provision of sustainable energy to warrant approval.

Conclusion

100. Overall, the significant benefits of the proposed facility that directly support the local and national strategies of aiming for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, reducing the economic impacts associated with climate change and the medium to long term reduction in energy costs associated with renewable energy, contributing to the economic benefits associated with the renewable sector including employment opportunities as well as the moderate biodiversity net gain benefits, are factors clearly in the public interest and would on balance outweigh the disadvantages of locating the development in the countryside, the less than substantial harm to the Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area and Castle Hill, the identified landscape and visual harm, and the temporary loss of grade 3 agricultural land. The planning balance weighs in favour of granting planning permission subject to the imposition of planning conditions.

Conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 (1) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

2. This approval shall be in respect of the following plans and documents:

- CALR-766091A Site Location Plan
- CALR-766-02 I Site Layout Proposed Drawings
- CALR-766-03B 40ft Shipping Containers Plans and Elevations Proposed Drawings
- CALR-766-04B 20ft Shipping Containers Plans and Elevations Proposed Drawings
- CALR-766-05A CCTV & Fence Details Proposed Drawings
- CALR-766-06B 40000L Bladder Flexible Water Tank Proposed Drawings
- CALR-766-07B 13m Gas Storage Dome Proposed Drawings
- UK-TT-001-3 Solar Array Profiles Proposed Drawings
- Q038_1A Swept Path Analysis Transport Supporting Drawings
- Q038_6 Site Access Arrangements Transport Supporting Drawings
- Q038_7 Site Access swept Path Transport Supporting Drawings
- Q038 HGV Route Transport Supporting Drawings
- Q038 Traffic Management Transport Supporting Drawings
- 2430-01.1A Tree Protection Plan – North Arboriculture Supporting Documents
- 2430-01-2A Tree Protection Plan - South Arboriculture Supporting Documents
- 2430 Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- 1735 Archaeological Evaluation Report
- Statement of Community Involvement SCI Rivan (June 2025)
- EBD 4629 EcIA Report
- EBD 4629 BNG Report
- EBD Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation
- OSMP02 Outline Safety Management Plan
- 1686 Heritage Impact Assessment Part 1 and Part 2
- 4240317_UAVREP_001 UXO Non-Intrusive Survey Report
- Q038-DOC01 Transport Assessment
- Q038-DOC2 Construction Traffic Management Plan
- KRS.0871.001.001.D Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy
- 3364-4-4-4-LV-0001-S4-P5 LVIA Report
- 250216-R001A Noise Impact Assessment
- 250216-R003 Noise Impact Assessment Addendum
- JL-766-PS Planning, Design and Access Statement
- 250205.AC.02 Agricultural Land Classification Report

Reason: To define the scope of the development hereby permitted, in accordance with section 72 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

3. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted (excluding archaeological investigation and site access works), full details of the permitted plant/containers and any acoustic mitigation measures shall be submitted and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of amenity

4. Prior to the commencement of any development or phase, including site clearance or preparation, a comprehensive Construction Environmental and Management Plan (CEMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved plan shall be implemented in full throughout the construction period.

The CEMP shall incorporate the following elements:

- a) Environmental Protection & Pollution Control
 - Measures to mitigate construction and operational noise, vibration, dust, smoke, fumes, and debris (including compliance with BS 5228).
 - Pollution prevention methods for hazardous materials and contamination.
 - A Pollution Prevention Plan for watercourses (using CIRIA C532 guidance).
 - Procedures for remediation if measures are ineffective.
- b) Waste & Materials Management
 - Scheme for recycling/disposal of construction waste.
 - Transport arrangements for waste during development and subsequent site use.
 - On-site maintenance and repair of plant, equipment, and machinery.
 - Loading/unloading and storage arrangements for plant and materials.
- c) Traffic & Highway Management
 - Construction vehicle routes, timings, and delivery management plan (type, number, frequency, and hours).
 - specify the point of construction access and access route to the site
 - set out arrangements for the loading and unloading of plant and materials;
 - set out arrangements for the storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development;
 - Parking arrangements for operatives and visitors.
 - Wheel washing and vehicle wash-down procedures.
 - Highway Condition Surveys before and after construction, with remedial plans for any damage.
 - Contact details for the site manager and a procedure for liaison with local residents and the Local Planning Authority

Reason: To safeguard environmental quality and highway safety, and to minimize impacts on local amenity during construction.

5. No external construction works, deliveries, external running of plant and equipment or internal works audible outside the site boundary shall take place on the site other than between the hours of 07:30 to 18:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 to 13:00 on Saturday. There shall be no such working Sundays, Public or Bank Holidays without the prior written consent of the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interests of amenity

6. Within 3 months of the first use of the development hereby permitted, a BS 4142 type noise assessment shall be undertaken that considers plant noise. Where the rating level of any noise source exceeds 5dB below the background level (LA90), as determined by a BS 4142:2014 assessment, a scheme of noise mitigation should be implemented and maintained.

Reason: In the interests of amenity

7. No works shall commence on the development site (other than archaeological works and those required by this condition) hereby permitted until full details of the Starwell Lane highway improvements in broad accordance with the Proposed Site Access Arrangements plan, drwg no. Q038_06, have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, implemented in accordance with the approved plans and opened to the public.

Reason: To reduce potential highway impact by ensuring that there is a satisfactory access to the development and at the commencement and duration of construction works.

8. Prior to the occupation of the development hereby permitted, the vehicular access shall be laid out and constructed in accordance with the Proposed Site Access Arrangements, drwg no. Q038_06, with any gates situated at least 5m back from the carriageway edge of the public road and hung so as not to open outwards towards the public highway, and with the area of driveway within at least 5m of the carriageway edge of the public road surfaced in bound material, and shall be maintained thereafter.

Reason: To reduce potential highway impact by ensuring the access is suitably laid out and constructed.

9. The development hereby permitted shall not be first brought into use until the vehicular parking and turning facilities have been provided in accordance with the Site Layout, drwg no. CALR/766/02 Rev I, and those facilities shall be maintained available for those purposes thereafter.

Reason: To reduce potential highway impact by ensuring that adequate parking and manoeuvring facilities are available within the site.

10. No works shall take place until a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP: Biodiversity) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The CEMP (Biodiversity) shall include the following:

- a) Summary of potentially damaging activities
- b) Identification of "biodiversity protection zones"
- c) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction (these may be provided as a set of method statements)
- d) The location and timing of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features.
- e) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.
- f) Responsible persons and lines of communication.

- g) The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) or similarly competent person.

- h) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs.

The CEMP must also include the following specific plans / documents:

Pollution Prevention Plan for the watercourse (using good practice guidance such as CIRIA C532).

The approved CEMP: Biodiversity shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity.

11. No works (excluding archaeological investigation and site access works) are to commence unless a detailed lighting scheme, developed in accordance with established guidance (e.g. Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals (2023) Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night), has been drafted and agreed with the council. The Sensitive Lighting Strategy will demonstrate that the proposed lighting will not impact upon ecological networks and/or sensitive features. Thereafter the agreed lighting scheme shall be implemented, subject to any variations approved in writing by the planning authority. All external lighting shall be installed strictly in accordance with the specifications and locations set out within the Lighting Strategy.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity.

12. A Hedgerow and Tree Protection Plan detailing measures for the protection of trees and hedgerows during the works will be submitted to and approved by the LPA prior to the commencement of works on site, including site clearance and delivery of materials. Hedgerow and tree protection measures will include temporary fencing for the protection of hedgerows in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations. Any alternative fencing type or position not in accordance with BS 5837:2012 will be agreed in writing by the LPA prior to the start of development.

The root protection fencing will define the works exclusion zone around hedgerows and trees. Activities liable to be harmful to hedgerows and trees are prohibited within this exclusion zone, unless agreed in writing with the LPA. The approved hedgerow and tree protection measures will remain in place until the completion of development or unless otherwise agreed in writing with the LPA.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity and amenity.

13. All soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. The works shall be carried out prior to the use of the facility or in accordance with the programme (phasing) agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The approved planting and landscaping scheme shall be implemented in the first planting season unless agreed otherwise with the LPA. Any tree or shrub planted in accordance with the approved landscaping scheme which, within a period of five years from the date of planting, is removed, dies, or becomes seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced during the next planting season with another of the same size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved planting and landscaping scheme shall be retained and maintained for the operational lifetime of the development.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and maintaining the character of this designated landscape character area

14. A Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan must be provided to the LPA prior to the commencement of works on-site (excluding archaeological investigation and site access works). It must include the following items that will be installed post development:

- 2no bat boxes and new habitat creation
- 2no bird boxes and new habitat creation
- Compensatory habitat planting of trees and hedgerow in relation to habitat loss and breeding bird habitats.
- Inclusion of species-rich, low-maintenance grassland is included within the landscape designed to provide a high diversity of native grasses and wildflowers to benefit invertebrates.
- 1.no log piles for reptiles, and planting areas of native shrubs, to provide sheltering opportunities
- Small holes within fences (and other mechanisms) for hedgehogs' mobility.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity.

15. Development shall not begin (excluding archaeological investigation and site access works) until a surface water drainage scheme for the site, in accordance with the approved drainage strategy 'Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy – Little Rose Lane Energy Park, Ashton, May 2025', has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details before the development is completed. The scheme shall include, but not be limited to:

- Evidence that the proposed flows from the site will discharge at or below greenfield runoff rates, or as close as practical for any areas that have been previously developed;
- Details of how the drainage scheme has incorporated SuDS techniques to manage water quantity and maintain water quality in accordance with best practice guidance including the latest SuDS Manual C753;
- Detailed drainage plan showing the location of the proposed SuDS and drainage network with exceedance flow routes clearly identified;
- Details to demonstrate the SuDS Scheme has been designed in accordance with best practice guidance including the latest SuDS Manual C753;
- General arrangement, which should be coordinated with the landscape proposals and the masterplan;
- Manhole Schedules;
- Detailed drainage calculations for all rainfall events up to and including the 1 in 100 year plus climate change to demonstrate that all SuDS features and the drainage network can cater for the critical storm event for its lifetime;
- Details of how the scheme shall be maintained and managed after completion;
- Any drainage systems offered for adoption will be designed to Design and Construction Guidance (previously Sewers for Adoption) and/or SBC standards as part of the detailed design and relevant technical approval processes.

Reason: To ensure that adequate surface water drainage on the site

16. Development shall not be occupied until a surface water drainage maintenance scheme for the site, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall subsequently be maintained in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that adequate surface water drainage on the site

17. No development (excluding site access works) shall commence within the area indicated by application S/25/0809 until:

- a) A written programme of archaeological investigation, which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and
- b) The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.'

18. Notwithstanding the approved layout CALR-766-02 I, no development (excluding site access works) shall commence within the area indicated by application S/25/0809 until:

- a) An Archaeological Management Plan (AMP), setting out how the archaeological exclusion zones are to be scoped out of the development and then protected from impacts during the developmental and operational phases of the proposals, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority

Reason: To enable the protection of any matters of archaeological interest.'

19. The development hereby approved shall be operated in full compliance with the approved Outline Safety Management Plan.

Reason: To ensure the safe operation of the facility and to mitigate any potential risks

20. The use of the land for the facility shall cease no later than 30 years from the date of first export of gas. The date of first export shall be notified in writing to the Local Planning Authority within one month of commencement.

Within 12 months of cessation of use, or by the end of the 31st year following the date of first export, whichever is sooner, all elements of the development, shall be removed from the site. The land shall then be restored to agricultural use in accordance with a Decommissioning Method Statement, the details of which shall first be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard the amenity of the area and ensure the long-term protection of the open countryside.

Informatics

Biodiversity Gain Plan

1. The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition “(the biodiversity gain condition”) that development may not begin unless:
 - (a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and
 - (b) the planning authority has approved the plan.

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if one is required in respect of this permission would be Swindon Borough Council.

There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply. For further information on exempt developments please refer to:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-exempt-developments>

Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because none of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements are considered to apply.

Irreplaceable habitat

If the onsite habitat includes irreplaceable habitat (within the meaning of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024) there are additional requirements for the content and approval of Biodiversity Gain Plans.

The Biodiversity Gain Plan must include, in addition to information about steps taken or to be taken to minimise any adverse effect of the development on the habitat, information on arrangements for compensation for any impact the development has on the biodiversity of the irreplaceable habitat.

The planning authority can only approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if satisfied that the adverse effect of the development on the biodiversity of the irreplaceable habitat is minimised and appropriate arrangements have been made for the purpose of compensating for any impact which do not include the use of biodiversity credits.

2. The applicant should be made aware that they may require an Environmental Permit or Licence from the Environment Agency as the development involves the production of hydrogen by electrolysis and then subsequently the production of methane/hydrocarbons by chemical reaction. These processes are Listed Activities under Schedule 1, Section 4.1 Part A(1)(a) and Section 4.2 Part A(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations. For details visit <https://www.gov.uk/topic/environmental-management/environmental-permits>
3. The proposed development will require works to be carried out on the public highway and the Applicant/Developer is required to enter into a legally binding Highway Works Agreement

(including an appropriate bond) with the Local Highway Authority before commencing works on the development.

4. The applicant is informed that, to conform to the terms of Section 163 of the Highways Act 1980, surface water should not be allowed to drain directly from the site onto any highway, and the Local Highway Authority will require adequate safeguards to be incorporated into the development to ensure that such a situation does not arise.
5. The grant of planning permission does not permit any changes, alterations, obstructions, diversions, closures or additional use by motor vehicles of any public rights of way affected by the proposal, the developer is required to contact the Council's public rights of way team for permission prior to undertaking any works. No action should be taken to disturb the path surface, without prior consent from the Public Rights of Way team as Highway Authority, obstruct the path or in any way prevent or deter public use without the necessary temporary closure or Diversion Order having been made, confirmed and an acceptable alternative route provided.
6. The applicant is made aware that under the protection of Badgers Act (1992), it is illegal to kill, injure, take or cruelly ill-treat a badger, or damage, destroy or obstruct access to a badger sett, or disturb a badger whilst it is occupying a sett. If any construction work using heavy machinery is required to be completed within 30 metres of the sett, lighter machinery within 20 metres or hand tools within 10 metres, a licence will be required from Natural England. Further information and contact details for Natural England can be found on <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>.
7. The applicant is advised that Great Crested Newts are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and have European Protection under the Conservation Regulations (1994). The European protection afforded to this species means that a licence may be required from the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions for the works you propose. Further information and contact details for Natural England can be found on <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>.
8. With regards to conditions 17 and 18, the AMP is to be prepared by qualified archaeologists following the standards and guidelines of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIIfA). The costs of this work are to be borne by the applicant.