

Energise
South 

Crowhurst Community Solar Farm Planning Application Key Points


ENERGISE
SUSSEX COAST

Crowhurst 
PARISH COUNCIL
WARMER CROWHURST
Clean Energy Project

The Site Location

The site is located east of Swainham Lane, Crowhurst, East Sussex, TN38 8EN.

The site comprises 6 fields of various sizes, separated by hedgerows and lines of trees.

Bound to the north and west by the minor road 'Swainham Lane'. To the west by neighbouring fields and to the south by Whitefield Woodland.

The site and its immediate surroundings are rural, it is relatively well concealed and screened by woodland, hedgerows and south sloping topography.

The fields have long been in use for agricultural purposes and are currently used for pasture.

The nearest properties are 3 residential dwellings to the west, with the nearest one being located approximately 50m away. There are 8 residential dwellings to the north in the hamlet of Green Street, the nearest one being approximately 100m north of the site.

Natural England:

The development fulfils the 'four purposes' of Natural England by conserving, enhancing and managing a sustainable development.

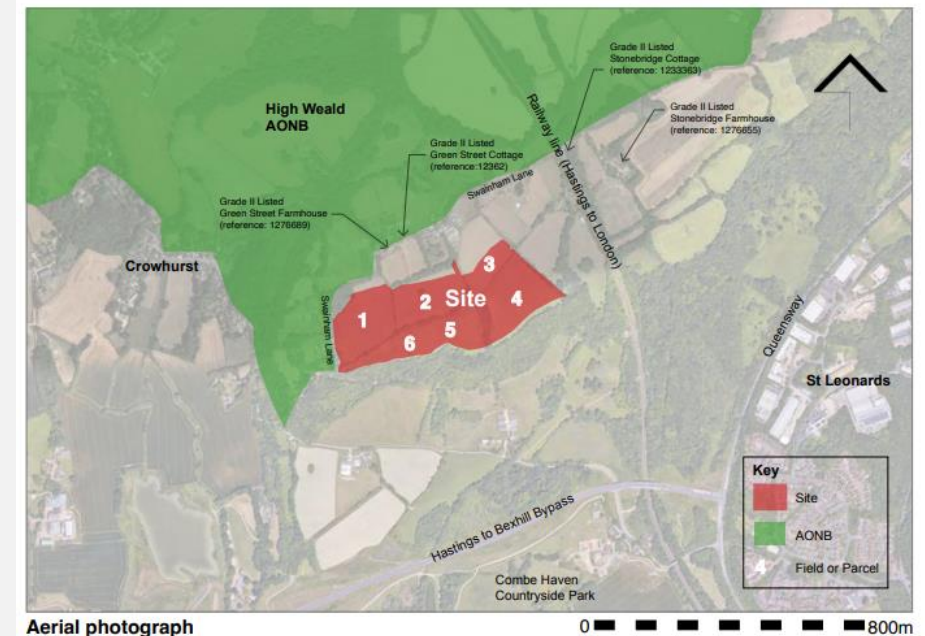
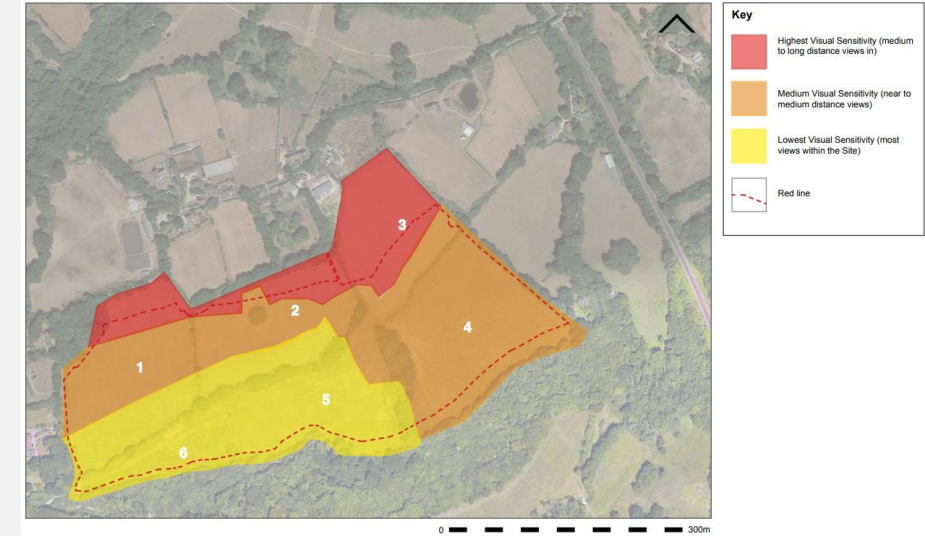
Sites of Special Scientific Interest:

The site has three SSSI's to the east, west and south, but not immediately adjacent. The nearest is Marline Valley just 216m away but separated by the railway line. The second nearest is Combe Valley 695m to the south, across the 'Link Road' and the third is Fore Wood which is over 1.3km away. Using the Impact Risk Zones, it is considered the site will have no adverse environmental impact on these sites.

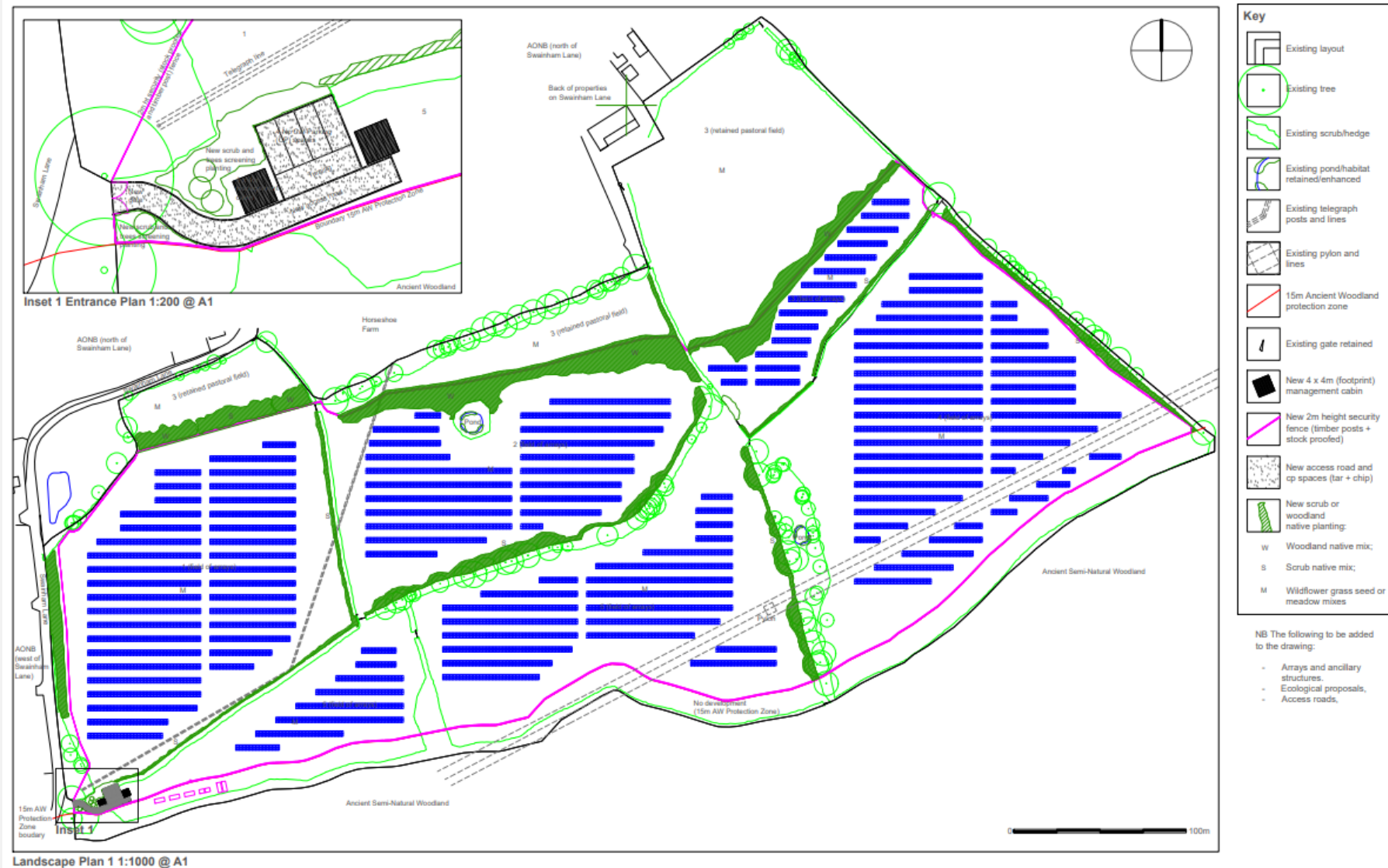
AONB

The site is not within the AONB but sits alongside it. Views from the AONB have been fully considered and mitigated within the Land Visual Impact Assessment.

Figure 17 Visual Sensitivity Plan



The Site Plan



Project Background

This solar farm is being developed by award winning Energise Sussex Coast (ESC) a local 'not for profit' organisation for the benefit of the local community, in partnership with the landowner and in consultation with Warmer Crowhurst Team (a subgroup of Crowhurst Parish Council).

A stage 2 Rural Community Energy Fund grant was secured to take the proposal through the planning process. The project will be 50/50 jointly owned by the Landowner and the Community.



Crowhurst Community actively promote, encourage and monitor the biodiversity in the parish of Crowhurst through the Crowhurst Environment Group events, practical projects and partnerships working alongside wardens and organisations. There are already a number of designated wildlife verges around the village in early stages of recovery, along with a community managed wildlife meadow. This project will link with the Environment Group work and be managed with the village community to create a sustainable wildlife friendly habitat, increase connectivity and encourage and enhance the biodiversity across the site, bringing together working groups and organisations across the community.

The government has committed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 78% by 2035 although many experts say we need to do this even faster. The Warmer Crowhurst project is exploring ways in which the village can reduce its energy demand and switch to cleaner and more affordable alternatives earlier than this date and in line with the village ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.

This community project is looking at the parish in relation to its energy use and the climate crisis, at a local level. Crowhurst is one of the many villages in Rother that are off the gas supply and heavily reliant on oil for central heating. The village is a microcosm of the rest of the country in that it has some of the most energy inefficient housing in Europe.

Electricity generation:

Once operational the solar farm will provide renewable electricity generation feeding into a substation and the wider electricity distribution network, or by a direct wire to local business(es). Managed by a Crowhurst Community Group the project will bring financial benefit to support the village ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030 with a fund created to help those at risk of fuel poverty, paying for energy saving measures for homes at risk.

Project Development

Following community consultation, the following mitigations have been included within the development:

Removal of panels

The number of panels have been reduced by around 25% avoiding the area of highest visual sensitivity and distancing the panels from the residential properties to the north. A wide 5m open space has been included between panel rows to allow more space for biodiversity enhancements.

Setback from field boundaries

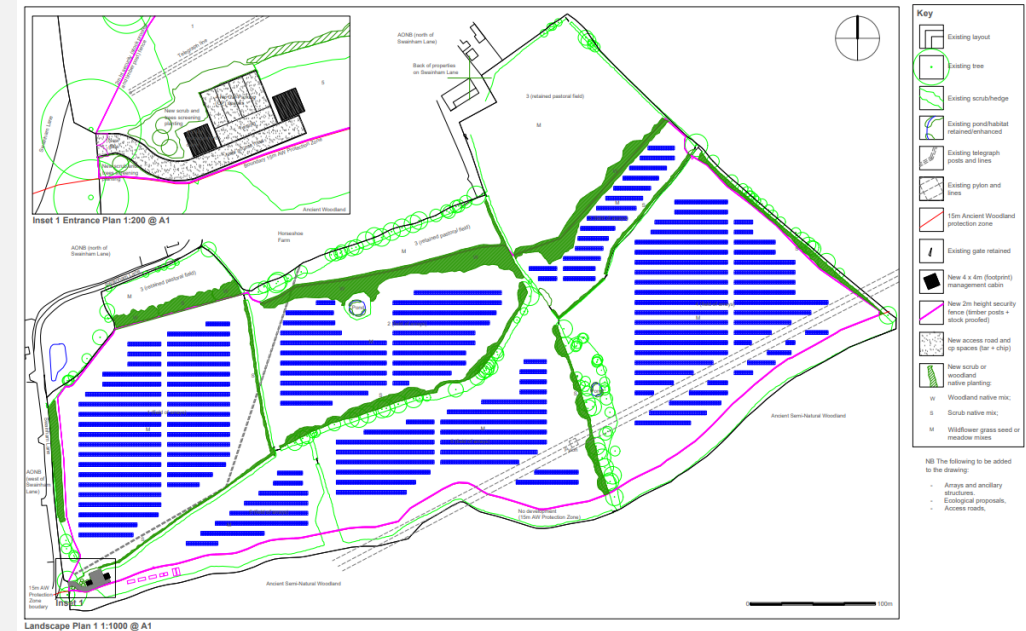
A general setback of 5m minimum from field edges has been included in the layout. A 15m setback/buffer to ancient woodland has been incorporated to the south.

Hedgerow Planting

Existing boundaries will be strengthened along with an additional 1km of substantial new planting both within the site and along the perimeter to increase screening to the residential properties to the north of the site including Horseshoe Farm and Windy Ridge and along Swainham Lane to the west of the site.



Design pre community consultation



Design post community consultation

Project Extent and Infrastructure

The site will generate approx. 6.3MW of renewable energy over 6 fields totalling 12.32 hectares.

Panels will be spaced generously apart allowing for wildflower meadow management and substantial hedgerows.

The solar farm is planned for a 40-year lifetime.

Entrance: The entrance will be planted in a 'dog-leg' to screen views onto the site from Swainham Lane. A small area of hardstanding will be installed to accommodate the construction phase and four parking spaces for ongoing site management.

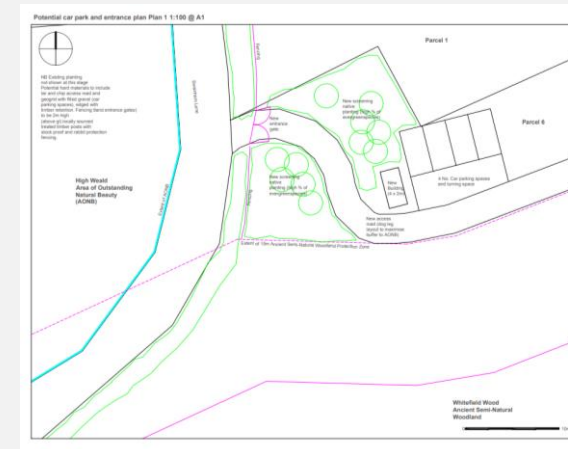
Buildings: Two 4m x 4m site buildings will be constructed near the entrance to house equipment and to enable ongoing site management/enhancement works.

Fencing and security: 2m tall timber post and wire stock fencing will be used, with extensive hedging and screening to be planted. The fencing will allow access to smaller mammals. Carefully positioned CCTV cameras will be installed to face into the land to monitor the site. No permanent lighting is proposed

Solar Panels: Panels will be arranged on simple metal frames facing south to form arrays. The maximum height of the arrays will be 3m above ground level

Inverters and Cables: The development will incorporate string inverters at the end of each row. The inverters will only be operational during daylight hours and the noise will not exceed 45dB (the equivalent of a domestic refrigerator). All inverters, transformers and other noise generating elements have been setback into the site away from residential properties. Cabling will be buried underground to minimise visual impacts.

Construction Phase: The proposed development may be constructed in phases with an initial 200kw of arrays installed in the lower field 6 (site entrance field). This is likely to be followed by 1MW and then the remaining 5MW in the final phase. This will enable the site to develop as grid capacity becomes available. Construction traffic will be managed through a traffic management plan, with access being from the A21, on to the A2690 before turning north into Swainham Lane. No construction traffic will be travelling through the village and no abnormal loads are anticipated.



Land and Habitat Management

Habitats Survey and Biodiversity Management Plan – Key Findings

The site will be well managed in an appropriate manner to conserve and enhance the natural history of the area

Existing site:

Fields are grade 4 'improved' grassland, poor in biodiversity
The site is of low nature conservation importance
Initial surveys identified no evidence of protected animal species
The field margins are considered poor
98% of the whole site biodiversity is within the 2.9km of existing hedgerows

Biodiversity impacts

The site causes no loss of habitat. All hedgerows will be retained or improved
The planned biodiversity measures enhance the natural habitat
Biodiversity Metric returned a 15% gain for hedgerows and 919% gain for habitats on the site.

Improvements/Enhancements

The 2.9km of existing Hedgerows will remain intact and fully protected during the lifetime of the project
Over 1km of new native species hedgerows will be planted
The site will be managed as a wildflower meadow, with a diverse wildflower mix sown to benefit pollinating insects and the land grazed at times to encourage the meadow to develop.
The project will incorporate bird and bat boxes, skylark plots, stag beetle buckets, pond restoration, wildflower meadows, swale, badger flaps, hedgehog homes and scrapes for solitary bees.



Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

The site is currently visible from Swainham Lane through the existing hedgerows, especially where the hedgerow is missing or poorly developed with gaps. Existing hedgerows will be enhanced with native trees and shrubs, including a high proportion of evergreen planting. The existing hedgerows provide a level of natural screening and form the basis of existing biodiversity on the site. Extensive new hedgerows (1km) will be added. Where there is a viewpoint to the sea the screening will be achieved through scrub and grasses to screen the panels at a lower level whilst maintaining sight lines above and beyond to the sea.

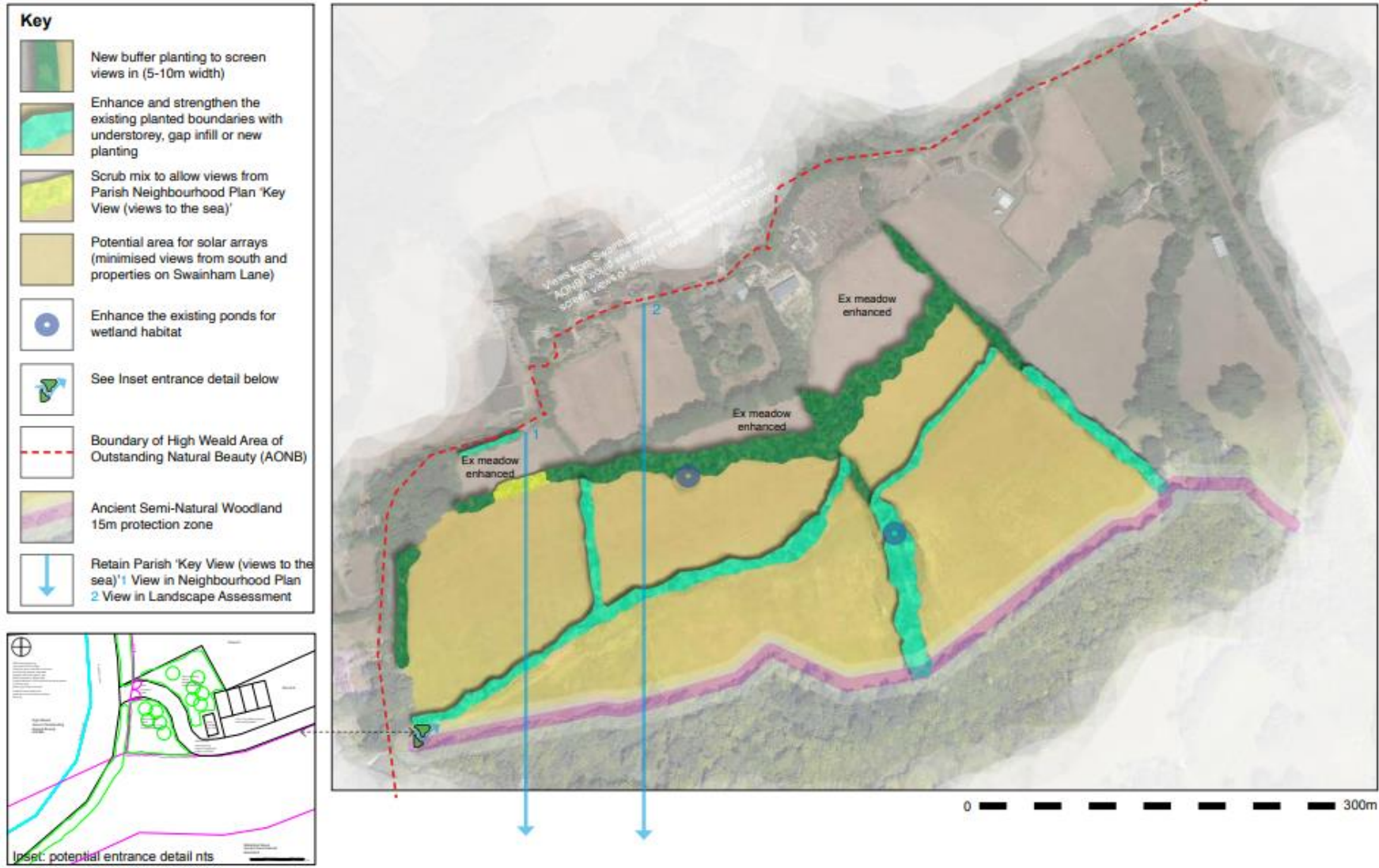
The visual impacts and effects have been thoroughly assessed through the LVIA report:

The design has been put forward to be in line with BRE National Solar Centre Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments 2014 and the High Weald Design Guide 2019. The following points demonstrate this:

- The location is visually discreet
- The design process has been 'Landscape-Led' and iteratively informed.
- The aim of the design is to enhance the existing habitats with new native species, planting and grass seeding, for wooded areas, scrub and meadow/wildflower grass seed mixes.
- The planting would reinforce and strengthen the existing wooded edges and hedges.
- The proposals would avoid development in the 15m Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland Protection Area and minimise impacts on the setting of the Grade II Listed Buildings.
- To minimise visual impacts from long distance visual receptors looking back towards the farm, from the south, the more elevated pastoral areas of parcels 1, 2 and 3 are being retained so that the intervening tall trees would act as a visual screen.
- The central area of the new planting to the northern part of Parcel 1 is proposed as scrub in order to be a height that would not screen the long distance views for westerly key view highlighted by the Parish.
- To use planting to screen views of the solar arrays from views in from Swainham Lane and from the private properties that back on the Site.

The extensive new planting would offer considerable long term benefits. The new development would not be in the AONB and would not influence its character. As such it is judged that the solar farm would be in accordance with the Landscape Planning Policy.

Landscape Plan



Flood Risk and Drainage (FRA)

Summary of study:

The site is a flood zone 1 – with no risk of flooding from Fluvial or coastal events

The development is deemed appropriate

Three new soakaway channels will be incorporated as swales along the base of the site, providing improvement in the site flow rates

The management cabins are of a scale unlikely to warrant a formalised drainage system

The proposed development will not increase the flood risk during construction, operation or decommissioning

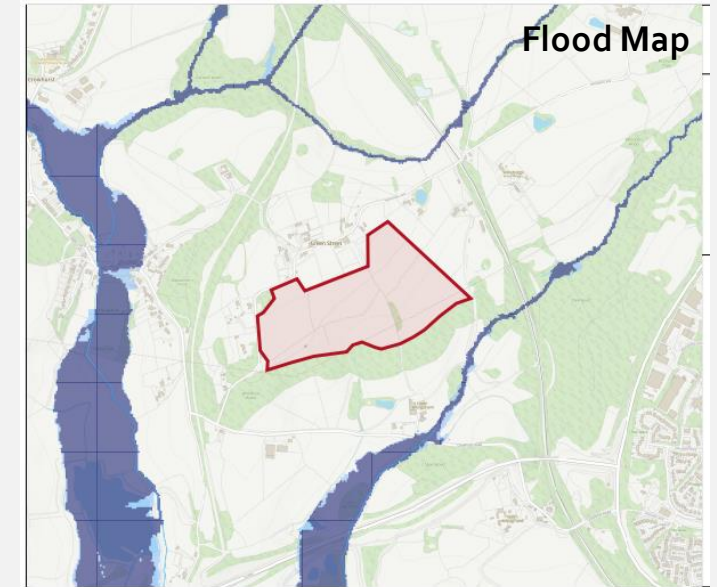
Flood mitigations:

Maintain wide vegetative areas in-between the solar arrays

A robust soil, grass and land management plan to be developed in accordance with the biodiversity plan

Any land compaction during construction to be mitigated by ploughing, harrowing or similar

Swale to be managed to enhance biodiversity and manage any possible site run-off



A project for the Community

Community involvement:

The vision of ESC (the applicant) and Energise South, its local solar co-operative partner, is to produce locally owned electricity that benefits local people and uses all the community profits generated to invest in a sustainable future for Crowhurst and the surrounding area.

The aim is to develop a small and sustainable community owned solar farm blueprint that is adaptable for other villages that have appropriate buildings or land for community solar panels. As a joint project with the landowner 50% of the solar farm profits will be for a Crowhurst Community Benefit Fund.

Liaison Group:

A community liaison group will be established to act as a point of contact and enable discussion between ESC (the applicant), Crowhurst Parish Council, Rother District Council and other local interests.

This community group will act as a point of contact for local residents during construction but also to provide a mechanism for managing the project including habitat management areas in the long term and to act as a basis for the management of the community benefit fund.

Planning consultation period:

An ESC contact point will be made available for further information, with the project details made available on the ESC website. Furthermore, regular updates will be provided in the Crowhurst News. A further public meeting will be held; this will be an informal event with the full details of the project and opportunity for residents to ask questions. A separate meeting will also be held with the residents along Swainham Lane.

The 5 aims of the Community Solar Farm

1. SAVE CARBON:
2. TACKLE THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS:
3. COMMUNITY POWER
4. PROTECT THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT
5. CREATE A RESILIENT LOCAL ECONOMY

