

Advice Note

Project: Fleet Solar Farm **Date:** Jan 18th 2024
Client: Long Sutton Solar Farm Action Group (LSSFAG) c/o Woolf Bond **Ref:** 163-NT-01

Background

This note summarises a desk-top review of the Landscape & Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) – ref. 21161 – prepared by Lawrence Associates and submitted in support of the planning application (23/02591/FUL) for the installation of a photovoltaic solar farm on fields belonging to Ford Farm at Upton Grey (the ‘Site’).

The note reviews:

- The assessment methodology applied in the LVIA; and
- The scale and direction of the landscape and visual effects predicted in the LVIA.

The objective is to advise whether the assessment of landscape and visual effects in the LVIA is robust and realistic, whilst acknowledging that predicted adverse landscape and visual effects may carry limited weight in the planning balance for the decision maker since the proposals are for renewable energy, and are not intended to be permanent.

Summary of conclusions of LVIA

The submitted LVIA states that visual impacts would be mitigated as far as possible and rights of way accommodated, using both inherent and designed mitigation measures, as recommended in best practice guidance for solar farms, and concludes that the proposals are acceptable for the proposed location, albeit with some adverse landscape and visual effects.

Review of LVIA

Summary

Overall, the LVIA is not well-structured, is over-long and does not refer to the photomontages to support its conclusions. However, the LVIA:

- appears to be comprehensive and robust; and
- does identify adverse landscape and visual effects, which is realistic and proportionate for proposals of this scale; it is considered unlikely that the effects predicted in the LVIA have been under-estimated.

LVIA Methodology

- The methodology applied in the LVIA follows best practice as detailed in Landscape Institute and IEMA Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (third edition) (GLVIA3)
- The LVIA assesses the significance of the effects – this is not required in a ‘stand-alone’ appraisal for a non-ES scheme
- The LVIA assesses effects on heritage and ecological receptors, as well as on landscape and visual receptors. This is beyond the scope of an LVIA and the assessment of effects on listed buildings and the Long Sutton Conservation Area in the LVIA should be disregarded – the submitted desk-top heritage assessment reviews these matters

- The Accurate Visual Representations which accompany the application have been prepared following best practice guidance as provided in LI Technical Guidance Note 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals (although the LIVIA does not explicitly refer to them)

Baseline

- The selection of potential landscape and visual receptors appears comprehensive
- The baseline appraisal of the Site and its context seems detailed and comprehensive
- The assessment of receptors' value appears realistic, albeit that the assessment of the Site's value refers to Box 5.1 of GLVIA3, rather than to the criteria provided in the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 'Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations', and does not refer to the findings of an arboricultural assessment

Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects

- The LVIA does not conclude that any of the effects would be beneficial
- Adverse landscape effects are identified for:
 - Landscape Character Area (LCA) 8c North East Hampshire open Downs: Moderate
 - LCA 15 Hart Downs: Moderate - minor
 - The site: Major - moderate, reducing to moderate-minor
- Adverse visual effects are identified for:
 - Views from Wood Hill Lane east of the site: Drivers – Medium-small, reducing to negligible; Recreational users – Large, reducing to small
 - Views from Wood Hill Lane 365m north of the site: Drivers – Medium-small, reducing to negligible; Recreational users – Large, reducing to small
 - Views from footpath 148/8/3 crossing the site: Large
 - Views from footpath 178/54/1 crossing the site: Large
 - Views from footpath 148/8/1: Large
 - Views from footpath 148/8/1 crossing the site: Large
 - Views from footpath 148/1/1 400m south of the site: Medium-large
 - Views from footpath 148/1/1 240m south of the site: Large
 - Views from footpath 148/3/1 crossing the site: Large reducing to negligible
 - Views from footpath 148/3/1 1.1km south of the site: Small, reducing to negligible
 - Views from Ford Lane: Large, reducing to small
 - Views from White Hill: Small-negligible
 - Views from The Street: Residents – Small reducing to negligible: Drivers – Negligible
 - Views from Little Dean Lane: Large, reducing to medium
 - Views from B3349: Medium, reducing to negligible
 - Views from Gaston Lane: Medium-large, reducing to negligible
- The application includes a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP), meaning that the landscape mitigation relied on should be deliverable and long-term
- The photomontages do not appear to include the proposed fencing, however since the fence is specified at 2.2m high – so not taller than the arrays – it is unlikely that the fencing would increase visibility of the scheme