

**Solar Farm, Berrington, Shrewsbury
Application 22/04355/FUL**

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

A review for Shropshire Council

by

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October 2022

Executive summary

1.1 This is a review of a landscape and visual appraisal (LVA) prepared in support of a planning application for a proposed solar farm development at Berrington, Shropshire.

1.2 The methodology for the LVA is generally clear, proportionate and compliant with the best practice set out in GLVIA3. It is appropriate for the nature of the proposed development and scale of likely effects, and subject to inclusion of information on cumulative effects, is capable of producing reliable results.

1.3 Subject to inclusion of information on cumulative effects, the proposed development complies with Local Plan policies CS6, CS8, CS17, MD2 and MD12.

1.4 Subject to the submission of full details, the landscape mitigation strategy is capable of reducing adverse visual effects and delivering beneficial landscape effects.

1.5 We have made 1 recommendation relating to the LVA which we consider should be addressed prior to determination of the application, and 1 recommendation relating to landscape conditions.

Introduction

2.1 ESP Ltd were commissioned by Shropshire Council in October 2022 to carry out a review of a landscape and visual appraisal (LVA)¹ submitted by the applicant in support of a planning application for a proposed solar farm development at Berrington, Shropshire.²

Quality Assessment Review Brief

3.1 Shropshire Council required technical support on the landscape and visual implications of the proposed scheme. The intention was not to replicate or undertake an additional LVA at this stage.

3.2 The scope of this review is to advise whether:

- The LVA has been carried out in an appropriate manner in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA)³ and supporting technical guidance;
- The proposed development complies with Council's Local Plan policies on landscape and visual amenity;
- Regard has been given in the LVA to the content of the Council's pre-application advice;
- The mitigation proposed is appropriate in addressing any predicted adverse impacts; and
- The findings of the LVA are reliable and can be supported.

3.1 The Council provided pre-application advice for this development via a screening opinion (22/00006/SCR) on the 15 December 2021. The advice included that a planning application for the proposed development would need to be accompanied by Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal, and that the proposed development would not indicate the need for EIA.

¹ *Landscape and Visual Appraisal, Berrington Solar Farm, Berrington, Shropshire. RSK ADAS Ltd, May 2022*

² *Erection of an up to 30 MW Solar PV Array, comprising ground mounted solar PV panels, vehicular access, internal access tracks, landscaping and associated infrastructure, including security fencing, CCTV, client storage containers and grid connection infrastructure, including substation buildings and off-site cabling. Proposed Solar Farm to The West Of Berrington Shrewsbury Shropshire. Application 22/04355/FUL*

³ *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition, Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, Routledge 2013*

Methodology

4.1 The LVA submitted by the applicant was reviewed in detail, both the written text and the illustrative material provided in support of the text – maps, plans and viewpoint photographs. Other related documents, including the Planning, Design & Access Statement, the proposal drawings, the Landscape Masterplan and the Biodiversity Management Plan were reviewed as part of this exercise.

4.2 In addition to the assessment of the LVA for compliance with the best practice set out in GLVIA3, regard has been given in this review to the content of the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note on Visual representation of development proposals⁴ (TGN 06/19); Reviewing Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs)⁵; and the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note on Assessing landscape value outside national designations 02/21 (TGN 02/21)⁶

Brief Description of the Proposed Development

5.1 This proposal comprises the following:

- Solar photovoltaic (PV) array, with a total export capacity of up to 30 MW
- Boundary Fencing
- Customer Sub-Stations
- MV Power Stations
- Fencing and CCTV Cameras
- Landscaping Works
- Internal Access Tracks
- Welfare Units
- Compound Area/Track Type 1
- Waterless Toilet
- Britcabs x 3

⁴ *Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19. The Landscape Institute, 17 September 2019*

⁵ *Reviewing Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs), Technical Guidance Note 1/20. The Landscape Institute, 10 January 2020*

⁶ *Assessing landscape value outside national designations Technical Guidance Note 02/21. The Landscape Institute, 26 May 2021*

- Set Down Area
- Landscape mitigation and biodiversity enhancements

5.2 It is noted that that the construction phase of the development is expected to take place over a relatively short period and the operational lifespan would be 40 years. The LVA therefore considers the proposed development to be temporary but long term. The landscape enhancement measures would be permanent and would continue to deliver beneficial effects after decommissioning of the solar farm.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - methodology

6.1 Appendix 4 to the LVA sets out a methodology for the assessment of landscape and visual effects which takes account of GLVIA3 and other guidance documents, including Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Notes. This methodology assesses the effects by identifying susceptibility, value, sensitivity, magnitude and overall level of effect.

6.2 The methodology takes into account TGN 06/19 regarding the visual representation of development proposals in terms of capture and presentation of photographic images.

6.3 The methodology is silent on the approach to cumulative effects, which we consider to be a notable omission given the growth in solar energy developments in the County.

6.4 Apart from the absence of information on cumulative effects, the LVA methodology is clear, proportionate and compliant with the best practice set out in GLVIA3 and, if applied consistently to the assessment of effects, may be expected to produce reliable results.

Landscape effects

7.1 A detailed study area of 3km is used for the assessment of landscape and visual effects, informed by preparation of a digital ZTV and field study. Given the nature of the proposed development and the surrounding landscape, this study area would appear appropriate.

7.2 The landscape baseline is clearly described. The LVA details the National Character Area within the study area for context but given the size of NCA character areas and that of the proposed development does not take it forward for assessment. With reference to the

Shropshire Landscape Typology, it notes that the majority of the study falls within the *Estate Farmlands* LCT, which is taken forward for assessment. We agree with this approach to the assessment of landscape character effects.

7.3 Assessments are made of the site and study area's landscape value, susceptibility and overall sensitivity and we agree with the judgements made, although the applicable landscape character area is referred to as *B2: North Wootton LCA*, which would appear to be from a landscape character study elsewhere in the country. Landscape character receptors are identified as the character of the site and surrounding area, and of the *Estate Farmlands LCT*, and assessments of landscape effects are provided for both.

7.4 A range of landscape receptors is identified for assessment of effects:

- Trees/scrub/hedgerows
- Topography
- Land use

7.5 The assessments of landscape effects are appropriately carried out and we agree with the judgements made. The assessments are summarised in Section 12 *Conclusions and Recommendations* of this review.

Visual effects

8.1 A range of receptor types, locations and orientations have been identified following the production of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (SZTV), site survey and following consultation with local people. Potential visual receptor locations and their intervisibility with the site are reviewed, with 21 locations taken forward for assessment of visual effects. Receptor types include users of public rights of way, roads and residents. This is an appropriate sample for an assessment of visual effects.

8.2 Photographs (Type 1) have been taken and presented in accordance with Technical Guidance Note 06/19. The site is identified on the photographs as are key landscape features/points of reference.

8.3 Assessments are made of visual sensitivity and magnitude of change, with reference to the criteria set out in the methodology, and overall degree of effect, however, no information is provided on judgements of susceptibility and value as set out in the LVA methodology.

8.4 Assessment of effects is undertaken by receptor type and at the stages of completion and at completion plus 15 years with mitigation in place and operating.

8.5 We agree with the judgements made on visual effects, which are summarised in in Section 12 *Conclusions and Recommendations* of this review.

Mitigation measures

9.1 Mitigation measures are included in the form of the following:

- Retention of existing hedgerows and trees.
- Retention of existing waterbodies.
- Enhancement of existing features on site to benefit biodiversity net gain.
- Proposed hedgerow planting to mitigate for any losses and enhance connectivity.
- Landscape management adaptations to increase overall height of hedgerows.
- Proposed species rich grassland.

9.2 Details of these are shown on drawing 1051487-ADAS-XX-XX-DR-L-8001 Landscape Masterplan, which subject to submission of full landscape implementation and aftercare details, are appropriate in providing reductions in the adverse levels of visual effects, and in providing landscape benefits.

Cumulative effects

10.1 In accordance with the LVA methodology, no assessments of cumulative landscape and visual effects has been undertaken.

Policy Compliance

11.1 We have assessed the contents of the LVA and the proposed development against Local Plan policy relevant to the scope of this review, as below;

Policy

Core Strategy DPD 2006-2026

CS6 Sustainable Design & Development

To create sustainable places, development will be designed to a high quality using sustainable design principles, to achieve an inclusive and accessible environment which respects and enhances local distinctiveness and which mitigates and adapts to climate change. This will be achieved by.....ensuring that all development;

- Protects, restores, conserves and enhances the natural, built and historic environment and is appropriate in scale, density, pattern and design taking into account the local context and character, and those features which contribute to local character, having regard to national and local design guidance, landscape character assessments and ecological strategies where appropriate;
- Is designed to a high quality, consistent with national good practice standards, including appropriate landscaping and car parking provision and taking account of site characteristics such as land stability and ground contamination;

CS8 Facilities, Services and Infrastructure Provision

The development of sustainable places in Shropshire with safe and healthy communities where residents enjoy a high quality of life will be assisted by:

- Positively encouraging infrastructure, where this has no significant adverse impact on recognised environmental assets, that mitigates and adapts to climate change, including decentralised, low carbon and renewable energy generation, and working closely with network providers to ensure provision of necessary energy distribution networks

CS17 Environmental Networks

Development will identify, protect, enhance, expand and connect Shropshire's environmental assets, to create a multifunctional network of natural and

Compliance

The Shropshire Landscape Typology has been used to assess effects on landscape character and the mitigation proposed has the potential to contribute to local distinctiveness and is predicted to lead to permanent beneficial landscape effects. Although adverse landscape character effects are predicted at site and study area level, these effects are fully reversible.

Subject to submission of information on cumulative effects, the proposed development complies with Policy CS6

The proposal will contribute to addressing climate change. Adverse landscape character and visual effects are reversible and moderate adverse visual effects are restricted to locations in close proximity to the site.

Subject to submission of information on cumulative effects, the proposed development complies with Policy CS8

Policy

historic resources. This will be achieved by ensuring that all development:

- Protects and enhances the diversity, high quality and local character of Shropshire's natural, built and historic environment, and does not adversely affect the visual, ecological, geological, heritage or recreational values and functions of these assets, their immediate surroundings or their connecting corridors;
- Contributes to local distinctiveness, having regard to the quality of Shropshire's environment, including landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets, such as the Shropshire Hills AONB, the Meres and Mosses and the World Heritage Sites at Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal and Ironbridge Gorge;
- Does not have a significant adverse impact on Shropshire's environmental assets and does not create barriers or sever links between dependant sites

Compliance

There would be no impact on Shropshire's designated landscape assets. The proposals would not create barriers or sever links between dependant sites. The landscape proposals have the potential to enhance green infrastructure connectivity

Subject to submission of information on cumulative effects, the proposed development complies with Policy CS17.

SamDEV Plan 2006-2026

MD2 Sustainable Design

Further to Policy CS6, for a development proposal to be considered acceptable it is required to:

1. Respond positively to local design aspirations, wherever possible, both in terms of visual appearance and how a place functions, as set out in Community Led Plans, Town or Village Design Statements, Neighbourhood Plans and Place Plans.
2. Contribute to and respect locally distinctive or valued character and existing amenity value by:
 - i. Responding appropriately to the form and layout of existing development and the way it functions, including mixture of uses, streetscape, building heights and lines, scale, density, plot sizes and local patterns of movement; and

The proposals have been prepared with regard to the landscape character of the site and its locality and the landscape mitigation will add to local distinctiveness in the long term

Subject to submission of information on cumulative effects, the proposed development complies with Policy MD2

Policy	Compliance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">ii. Reflecting locally characteristic architectural design and details, such as building materials, form, colour and texture of detailing, taking account of their scale and proportion; andiii. Protecting, conserving and enhancing the historic context and character of heritage assets, their significance and setting, in accordance with MD13; andiv. Enhancing, incorporating or recreating natural assets in accordance with MD12. <p>3. Embrace opportunities for contemporary design solutions, which take reference from and reinforce distinctive local characteristics to create a positive sense of place, but avoid reproducing these characteristics in an incoherent and detrimental style.</p> <p>5. Consider design of landscaping and open space holistically as part of the whole development to provide safe, useable and well-connected outdoor spaces which respond to and reinforce the character and context within which it is set, in accordance with Policy CS17 and MD12 and MD13</p>	

MD12 The Natural Environment

In accordance with Policies CS6, CS17 and through applying the guidance in the Natural Environment SPD, the avoidance of harm to Shropshire’s natural assets and their conservation, enhancement and restoration will be achieved by:

- 2. Ensuring that proposals which are likely to have a significant adverse effect, directly, indirectly or cumulatively, on any of the following:
 - i. the special qualities of the Shropshire Hills AONB;
 - ii. locally designated biodiversity and geological sites;
 - iii. priority species;
 - iv. priority habitats
 - v. important woodlands, trees and hedges;
 - vi. ecological networks

The proposals have the potential to make a positive contribution to the natural environment and do not have a significant adverse impact on Shropshire’s designated landscape assets.

Subject to submission of information on cumulative effects, the proposed development complies with Policy MD12

Policy	Compliance
vii. geological assets; viii. visual amenity; ix. landscape character and local distinctiveness.	<p>will only be permitted if it can be clearly demonstrated that:</p> <p>a) there is no satisfactory alternative means of avoiding such impacts through re-design or by re-locating on an alternative site and; b) the social or economic benefits of the proposal outweigh the harm to the asset.</p> <p>In all cases, a hierarchy of mitigation then compensation measures will be sought.</p> <p>3. Encouraging development which appropriately conserves, enhances, connects, restores or recreates natural assets, particularly where this improves the extent or value of those assets which are recognised as being in poor condition.</p> <p>4. Supporting proposals which contribute positively to the special characteristics and local distinctiveness of an area, particularly in the Shropshire Hills AONB, Nature Improvement Areas, Priority Areas for Action or areas and sites where development affects biodiversity or geodiversity interests at a landscape scale, including across administrative boundaries.</p>

Conclusions and Recommendations

12.1 With the exception of cumulative effects, the LVA methodology is clear, proportionate and compliant with the best practice set out in GLVIA3 and we agree with the judgements that it makes on landscape and visual effects. These are summarised below;

Receptor	Nature of effect at completion	Nature of effect at completion + 15 years
Landscape Receptors		
Trees/scrub/hedgerows	Slight beneficial	Slight beneficial
Topography	Neutral	Neutral
Land Use	Neutral	Neutral
Character of the site and its surrounding area	Large adverse	Large adverse

Receptor	Nature of effect at completion	Nature of effect at completion + 15 years
Character of The Estate Farmlands LCT	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Visual Receptors		
Public rights of way		
PRoW 0407/3R/1 south east of the site	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
PRoW 0413/54/1 south of the site	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
PRoW 0413/52/1 south-east of the site	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Other PRoW within the study area	Neutral	Neutral
Residential properties		
Newmans Hall Cottage	Moderate adverse	Moderate adverse
The Rectory, Berrington	Moderate adverse	Moderate adverse
Properties along the northern edge of Cantlop 1 & 2 Smithy Cottages	Large adverse	Moderate adverse
Berrington Manor, The Wain House, The Mill	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
The New Barn	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Berrington House	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Remaining properties in Berrington	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Cantlop Mill	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Remaining properties in Cantlop	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Eaton Mascott	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Other properties in the study area	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Roads		
Cliff Hollow	Moderate adverse	Slight adverse
Unnamed road Cliff Hollow to Cantlop Mill	Moderate adverse	Moderate adverse
Unnamed road Berrington to Eaton Mascott	Moderate adverse	Slight adverse
Unnamed road A458 to Cantlop	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Unnamed Road through Cantlop	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Unnamed Road Cantlop to Condover	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Unnamed Road through Boreton	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
Other roads and lanes within the study area	Slight adverse	Slight adverse

12.2 At a site level, the proposed landscape enhancements will lead to beneficial landscape effects due to the extra hedgerows, trees and the management of existing hedgerows. Although not measured in the LVA, the proposed species rich meadows will also give rise to landscape and biodiversity benefits. It should be noted that these beneficial effects will endure on a permanent basis beyond the life of the solar farm itself.

12.3 *Large adverse* landscape character effects are predicted at a site level. These may be predicted at a site level for any proposed solar energy development and this site is no exception in that respect. At a wider LCT level, a *Slight adverse* effect is predicted in the long term, and although long term, this effect is temporary and will return to no effect upon decommissioning of the development.

12.4 The nature of the landscape in the vicinity of the study area is such that, beyond Berrington, views to the north are screened by the rising landform and vegetation. To the east, views of the site are screened by the intervening vegetation and landform, and where local views are possible, this is only of the western field parcel. To the west, views of the site are screened by the intervening vegetation and landform, and where local views are possible, this is only of the eastern field parcel. To the south there are local views of the site across the open landscape from the rising ground.

12.5 Where views of the site are available from the road network (either passing through the site or in the vicinity), they are in many locations from field openings or filtered through hedgerows, and the predicted levels of visual effects should therefore be seen as 'worst case'. Moderate adverse effects are predicted in the long term from a number of properties, with the remainder reducing to *Slight adverse* over time with mitigation in place and working effectively.

12.6 Subject to the submission of information on cumulative effects, the proposed development has the potential to comply with Local Plan policies CS6, CS8, CS17, MD2 and MD12.

12.7 The Council's pre-application/screening opinion recommended the submission of an LVIA and this has been undertaken.

12.8 The mitigation proposals are appropriate and capable of reducing adverse effects, subject to submission of details on specification and aftercare.

12.9 We therefore recommend that the LVA be amended prior to determination of the application to include a methodology for and assessment of cumulative landscape and visual effects.

12.10 We also recommend that should the application be approved, a pre-commencement condition be imposed requiring the submission of landscape details and a 10 year management and maintenance plan.