



# Shropshire Council

## Proof of Evidence

Of Tom Hurlstone

Landscape and Visual

Town and County Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

APPEAL BY ECONERGY INTERNATIONAL LTD

***Against the Refusal of Planning Permission by Shropshire Council for:***

***“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.”***

Appeal Reference: **APP/L3245/W/23/3332543**

LPA Reference: **22/04355/FUL**

February 2024

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**Client Name:** Shropshire County Council  
**Document Reference:** 20615101-WAT-XX-XX-RP-N-790001\_P02\_S2  
**Project Number:** WIE20615

## Quality Assurance – Approval Status

This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with  
 Waterman Group's IMS (BS EN ISO 9001: 2015, BS EN ISO 14001: 2015 and BS EN ISO 45001:2018)

Revision	Status	Date	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
P01	Draft	01/02/2024	Tom Hurlstone Senior Associate Director (Landscape)		
P02	S2	06/02/2024	Tom Hurlstone Senior Associate Director (Landscape)	Ruth Jeffs Director	Ruth Jeffs Director

### Comments

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Revision	Status
<i>P<sub>nn</sub></i> Preliminary (shared; non-contractual)	S1 Coordination
<i>C<sub>nn</sub></i> Contractual	S2 Information
	S3 Review & Comment
	S4 Review & Authorize
	S5 Review & Acceptance
	A0, A1, A <sub>n</sub> Authorized & Accepted ( <i>n</i> =work stage if applicable)

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## 1. Introduction

### Personal Details

- 1.1. My name is Tom Hurlstone, I hold an honours degree in Landscape Architecture with Planning and a Master of Landscape Architecture both of which I gained at Sheffield University. I was elected as a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) in 2012.
- 1.2. I am employed a Senior Associate Director at Waterman where I lead the Landscape Architecture and Arboriculture team.
- 1.3. I have over 15 years experience gained with the private sector. Prior to joining Waterman in 2018, I previously worked at Randle Siddeley, fabrik and Atkins.
- 1.4. Throughout my career I have worked on many Landscape and Townscape Visual Impact Assessments and project managed other related disciplines including arboriculture which forms part of Waterman's Landscape service line.
- 1.5. Although I am employed in private practice, I have on several occasions been instructed by local planning authorities to review LVIA/TVIAs undertaken by other consultants.

### Scope of Evidence

- 1.6. I am instructed to present evidence on behalf of Shropshire Council in respect of landscape and visual matters relating to the refusal of planning permission for the installation of a solar farm with associated infrastructure at land to the south of Cliff Hollow, Berrington, Shropshire.
- 1.7. I am familiar with the Landscape Institute's Code of Practice (December 2021). I believe that in addressing the landscape and visual matters relating to this inquiry I have fulfilled my professional responsibilities in accordance with the Code of Practice.
- 1.8. I understand my duty to the inquiry and have complied with and will continue to comply with that duty. I believe that the facts stated within this proof of evidence are correct and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## 2. Purpose and Scope of Evidence

- 2.1. This Proof of Evidence addresses the Council's reasons for refusal on ecological grounds of the planning application 22/04355/FUL at land south of Berrington, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY5 6HA.
- 2.2. The development comprises:

*“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”.*
- 2.3. Following validation of the application on 27th September 2022, the application was refused against the Officer's recommendation for approval at the Shropshire Southern Area Planning Committee on 9th May 2023.
- 2.4. The Decision Notice was issued on 16th May 2023 with the following landscape and visual reason for refusal:

*“The proposed solar farm site would potentially have a visually oppressive effect for users of the publicly maintained highway leading to Cantlop Mill which bisects the site. This is due to the height difference of up to 6m locally between the highway and the top of the proposed arrays. The proposals would also have an adverse effect on existing expansive and high-quality views in the vicinity of the public footpath at Cantlop which is in an elevated position overlooking the site. Other publicly accessible views of a generally pristine rural environment exist from the Berrington Road to the north and the Eaton Mascot Road to the east. Additional field margin planting has been proposed and solar arrays have been pulled back in some margins with the objective of seeking to reduce such views. However, full screening is not physically possible due to the local topography, and it is not certain how effective planting would be as a visual mitigation measure. The proposals therefore have the potential to adversely affect the local landscape and visual amenities from a number of public viewpoints surrounding the site due to the replacement of the current arable fields with solar arrays and associated built infrastructure. This conflicts with Core Strategy Policies CS6, CS17 and SAMDev policy MD12.”*
- 2.5. The Scope of Evidence addresses the landscape grounds for refusal.

### 3. Planning Policy and Guidance

- 3.1. I have set out below a brief summary of the policy context relevant to the appeal proposals where it may have a bearing on a consideration of landscape and visual issues.

#### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 3.2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was last updated in December 2023 and sets out the UK Government's planning policies for England.
- 3.3. Section 15 of the NPPF focuses on opportunities for development to enhance the natural environment.
- 3.4. Paragraph 180 sets out approaches to promoting the natural environment.
- *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
  - *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland; and*
  - *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
- 3.5. Paragraph 181 states;
- *Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.*

#### Shropshire Core Strategy (2006-2026)

- 3.6. The statutory development plan covering the appeal site comprises the Shropshire Core Strategy 2006-2026 (adopted February 2011) and the Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan (adopted December 2015).
- 3.7. Reason for refusal 2 references two development plan policies, CS6: Sustainable Design and Development Principles, CS17: Environmental Networks. It also references SAMDev policy MD12: The Natural Environment.

#### Core Strategy Policy CS6: Sustainable Design

- 3.8. Policy CS6 states;

*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.*

*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;*



- *Makes the most effective use of land and safeguards natural resources including high quality agricultural land, geology, minerals, air, soil and water;*

*Proposals resulting in the loss of existing facilities, services or amenities will be resisted unless provision is made for equivalent or improved provision, or it can be clearly demonstrated that the existing facility, service or amenity is not viable over the long term.*

#### Core Strategy Policy CS17: Environmental Networks

##### 3.9. Policy CS17 states;

*Development will identify, protect, enhance, expand and connect Shropshire's environmental assets, to create a multifunctional network of natural and 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;*
- *Secures financial contributions, in accordance with Policies CS8 and CS9, towards the creation of new, and improvement to existing, environmental sites and corridors, the removal of barriers between sites, and provision for long term management and maintenance. Sites and corridors are identified in the LDF evidence base and will be regularly monitored and updated.*

### Shropshire Council (SAMDev) Plan 2015

#### SAMDev Policy MD12: The Natural Environment

##### 3.10. SamDEV Policy SM12 states;

*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:*

*[...]*

*viii. visual amenity;*

*ix. landscape character and local distinctiveness.*

*will only be permitted if it can be clearly demonstrated that:*

*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.*

*In all cases, a hierarchy of mitigation then compensation measures will be sought.*

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.

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.

## **NPPG Renewable and Low Carbon Energy 2015**

3.11. The NPPG looks at what are the particular planning considerations that relate to large scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms and states;

*The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.*

*Particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider include:*

- *encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;*
- *where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays. See also a speech by the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, the Rt Hon Gregory Barker MP, to the solar PV industry on 25 April 2013 and written ministerial statement on solar energy: protecting the local and global environment made on 25 March 2015.*
- *that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;*
- *the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare (see guidance on landscape assessment) and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;*
- *the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;*
- *the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;*
- *great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;*
- *the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;*
- *the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.*

*The approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large scale solar farms is likely to be the same as assessing the impact of wind turbines. However, in the case of ground-mounted solar*

*panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero.*

## **NPPG Natural Environment (2019)**

### **Landscape**

- 3.12. Within the Landscape section of the NPPG it considers how can planning policies conserve and enhance landscapes and how the character of landscapes can be assessed, and states;

*The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally-designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.*

*Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.*

*[...]*

*To demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment can be used.*

## 4. Landscape & Visual

### Overview of Submitted Landscape Visual Appraisal (LVA)

- 4.1. In preparing my proof of evidence I have undertaken a review of the submitted LVA (as amended February 2023)
- 4.2. I rely primarily on the findings of the LVA and provide further observations as appropriate.
- 4.3. Whilst the methodology adopted in the submitted LVA is not identical to that which I adopt for my own LVA work I consider the methodology to be in accordance with best practice, namely the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Edition 3 (GLVIA 3) published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment. This has not affected the outcome of the appraisal.
- 4.4. However, there are several key weaknesses in the appraisal. The LVA does not appropriately consider the construction effects, nor does it consider the decommissioning and landscape restoration phase. These are all key phases in the scheme.
- 4.5. For the purposes of consistency, I shall adopt the same terminology used in the LVA where necessary to describe sensitivity, magnitude and significance of effects.
- 4.6. The LVA focuses on a 3km study area and I consider this to be appropriate and proportionate to the likely extent of any landscape and visual effects.

### Landscape Effects

- 4.7. The LVA states that the site falls within the Estate Farmlands Character as defined in 'The Shropshire Landscape Typology' (2006).
- 4.8. The key characteristics of the Estate Farmlands Character Area are as follows;
  - *Mixed farming landuse*
  - *Clustered settlement pattern*
  - *Large country houses with associated parklands*
  - *Planned woodland character*
  - *Medium to large scale landscapes with framed views*
- 4.9. The site and the surrounding study area contains good examples of the above. Fields within the locality are used for both arable and pasture. Small villages from a clustered settlement pattern. Large country houses such Eaton Mascott Hall are located in the vicinity of the site. Small planned woodland copses break up the landscape which contain framed views due to the topography of the area.
- 4.10. The LVA concludes '*The sensitivity of the site, local landscape (up to 500m) and the B2: North Wootton LCA. is assessed as medium.*' I concur with this conclusion.
- 4.11. The LVA goes on to assess the impact on landscape character of the site and it's surrounding area and states;

*The development proposals will change the site from agricultural fields to a solar farm. The change in the character to the site itself will inevitably be high for the duration of the solar farm's lifetime due to the development of the solar arrays, fencing and buildings. However, all the field boundaries will remain intact and will be enhanced, and although the solar panels are constructed over the field, all landscape features are retained so that effects are reversible. The change in the character to the site being developed and its*

immediate context will inevitably be **major adverse**. The level of effect is assessed to be **large** at completion and at year 15.

4.12. I again, concur with this conclusion.

## Visual Effects

4.13. The LVA assesses the visual impacts on a number of key visual receptors within the study area of 3km, the are;

- The local residential properties around and near the site.
- Users of the road network near to the site.
- The users of the PRow network close to the site.

### Local Residential Properties

#### *Newmans Hall Cottage*

4.14. The LVA assesses the visual effect on the above receptor and states;

*“At completion there would be oblique partial views of the proposed solar development. The sensitivity of this receptors is high, and the magnitude of change would be **moderate adverse** at completion, resulting in a level of effect of **moderate** at completion. After 15 years the magnitude of change would remain as **moderate adverse**, but the surrounding vegetation would have matured and slightly soften the visual impact of the development. Therefore, there would be a residual level of effect of **moderate** for this property.”*

4.15. I concur with this conclusion.

#### *The Rectory, Berrington*

4.16. The LVA assesses the visual effect on the above receptor and states;

*“At completion and after 15 years there would be partial views of the proposed solar development. Views of the development would slightly soften as the boundary vegetation matures, but views would still be possible. The sensitivity of this receptors is medium, and the magnitude of change would be **moderate adverse** as the proposed development would form a noticeable feature in the landscape readily apparent to the receptor but would not be a dominant feature. Therefore, the at completion and residual level of effect is considered as **moderate**.”*

4.17. I concur with this conclusion.

#### *Properties along the northern edge of Cantlop*

4.18. The LVA assesses the visual effect on the above receptor and states;

*“At completion there would be open views of the proposed solar development from upper storey windows, with partial and glimpsed views from the lower storey windows possible through gaps in the vegetation. The sensitivity of this receptors (upper floors) is medium, and the magnitude of change would be **major adverse** at completion, resulting in a level of effect of **large** at completion. After 15 years the magnitude of change would reduce to **moderate adverse** as vegetation would have matured around the site, softening the visual impact of the development. Therefore, there would be a residual level of effect of **moderate** for these properties.”*

4.19. I concur with this conclusion.

## Users of the road network near to the site

### Cliff Hollow

- 4.20. The LVA assesses the visual effect of the road users above and states;

*“At completion there would be open views of the proposed solar development from the sections of road where gaps in the vegetation occur for field access, and partial views from the higher sections of road as the proposed planting would not have matured at this stage. The sensitivity of this receptor is medium, and the magnitude of change would be **moderate adverse** at completion as the proposed development would form a noticeable feature in the landscape readily apparent to the receptor but would not be a dominant feature. Therefore, the level of effect at completion is considered as **moderate**. After 15 years, the proposed planting in the gaps along the northern boundary and around the site would have matured, screening views into the site (as shown in photomontage viewpoint 1). This would reduce the magnitude of change to slight adverse resulting in a residual level of effect of slight.”*

- 4.21. I concur with this conclusion.

### Unnamed road that connects Cliff Hollow to Cantlop Mill

- 4.22. The LVA assesses the visual effect of the road users above and states;

*“At completion and after 15 years there would be open views of the proposed solar development from the sections of road where gaps in the vegetation occur for field access, and partial views from the higher sections of road, with glimpses possible through vegetation for the remaining length of road. The sensitivity of this receptors is medium, and the magnitude of change would be **major adverse** as the proposed development would form a noticeable dominant feature in the landscape readily apparent to the receptor. Therefore, the residual level of effect is considered as **moderate**.”*

- 4.23. I concur with this conclusion.

### Unnamed road that connects Berrington to Eaton Mascott

- 4.24. The LVA assesses the visual effect of the road users above and states;

*“At completion there would be open views of the proposed solar development from the sections of road where gaps in the vegetation occur for field access, a partial view from the section of road to the south-east corner of the site and glimpsed views where surrounding vegetation thins out. The sensitivity of this receptor is medium, and the magnitude of change would be **moderate adverse** as the proposed development would form a noticeable feature in the landscape readily apparent to the receptor but would not be a dominant feature. Therefore, the level of effect at completion is considered as **moderate**. After 15 years the infill planting of the gaps would have matured and proposed landscape management will allow the boundary hedgerows to grow to a height of 4m, which will reduce the views of the proposed development from this road after 15 years, resulting in a reduced magnitude of change of **minor adverse** and a residual level of effect of **slight**.”*

- 4.25. I concur with this conclusion.



The users of the PRoW network close to the site.

*PRoW 0407/16/1*

4.26. The LVA assesses the visual effect of the users of the above and states;

*“At completion and after 15 years there would be partial views of the proposed solar development as a proportion of the wider view to the west from this PRoW. The sensitivity of this receptors is high, and the magnitude of change would be **moderate adverse** as the proposed development would form a noticeable feature in the landscape readily apparent to the receptor but would not be a dominant feature. Therefore, the at completion and residual level of effect is considered as moderate. Proposed landscape management will allow the boundary hedgerows to grow to a height of 4m, which will reduce the views of the proposed development, as shown in photomontage viewpoint 11. However, due to the proximity of this receptor, the residual level of effect will remain **moderate**. A change in height to the boundary hedgerows may reduce views from other sections of the PRoW.”*

4.27. I concur with this conclusion.

*PRoW 0407/1/1*

4.28. The LVA assesses the visual effect of the users of the above and states;

*“At completion there would be partial views of the proposed solar development from this 200m length of the PRoW, as a proportion of the wider view to the west from this PRoW. The sensitivity of this receptors is high, and the magnitude of change would be **moderate adverse** as the proposed development would form a noticeable feature in the landscape readily apparent to the receptor but would not be a dominant feature. Therefore, at completion the level of effect is considered as moderate. Proposed landscape management will allow the boundary hedgerows to grow to a height of 4m, which will reduce the views of the proposed development from this receptor after 15 years, as represented by photomontage viewpoint 11, which is located on a nearby PRoW. After 15 years the magnitude of change would reduce to **minor adverse**, resulting in a residual level of effect of slight.”*

4.29. I concur with this conclusion.

*PRoW 0407/5R/2*

4.30. The LVA assesses the visual effect of the users of the above and states;

*“At completion there would be open views of the proposed solar development. The sensitivity of this receptors is high, and the magnitude of change would be **major adverse** at completion, resulting in a level of effect of large at completion. After 15 years the magnitude of change would reduce to moderate adverse as vegetation would have matured around the site (as shown in photomontage viewpoint 15), softening the visual impact of the development. Therefore, there would be a residual level of effect of **moderate** for this PRoW.”*

4.31. I concur with this conclusion.

## 5. Reason for Refusal 2: Adverse Visual Impact

5.1. The second reason for refusal concerns Landscape and Visual and states;

***“The proposed solar farm site would potentially have a visually oppressive effect for users of the publicly maintained highway leading to Cantlop Mill which bisects the site. This is due to the height difference of up to 6m locally between the highway and the top of the proposed arrays. The proposals would also have an adverse effect on existing expansive and high-quality views in the vicinity of the public footpath at Cantlop which is in an elevated position overlooking the site. Other publicly accessible views of a generally pristine rural environment exist from the Berrington Road to the north and the Eaton Mascot Road to the east. Additional field margin planting has been proposed and solar arrays have been pulled back in some margins with the objective of seeking to reduce such views. However, full screening is not physically possible due to the local topography, and it is not certain how effective planting would be as a visual mitigation measure. The proposals therefore have the potential to adversely affect the local landscape and visual amenities from a number of public viewpoints surrounding the site due to the replacement of the current arable fields with solar arrays and associated built infrastructure. This conflicts with Core Strategy Policies CS6, CS17 and SAMDev policy MD12.”***

5.2. As stated in the LVA there will be major adverse effect on the landscape character of the site as a result of the development proposals which will change the site from agricultural fields to a solar farm.

5.3. I agree there would be a major adverse effect on the landscape character of the site and therefore the development has the potential to adversely affect the local landscape. The existing rural landscape consisting of agricultural fields would be replaced by solar panels and their associated infrastructure. This would not be in keeping with the existing landscape character. One of the key characteristics of the landscape character is the “*medium to large scale landscape with framed views*”. The introduction of solar panels and infrastructure elements would affect this key characteristic of the local landscape character. As such there would be a detrimental effect on the landscape character of the site and surrounding area.

5.4. The LVA states there would be moderate adverse visual effects on local residential properties, namely Newmans Hall Cottage, The Rectory and properties along the northern edge of Cantlop.

5.5. I am in agreement with the findings of the LVA and therefore the proposals have the potential to adversely affect the visual amenities from several dwellings surrounding the site. Viewpoints 9,10, 14 and 15 best represent the views from these dwellings. From these viewpoints the development would be visible, adversely affecting the view with the introduction of solar panels and their associated infrastructure. Viewpoint 9 shows how partial views of the site would be visible from The Rectory. Viewpoint 10 best represents the view from Newmans Hall Cottage, Viewpoints 14 and 15 best represent the views from the properties along the northern edge of Cantlop. The site is clearly visible from viewpoint 14 and therefore any proposed solar panels and associated infrastructure would be visible in this view. The solar panels are visible in the photomontage produced for viewpoint 15. Even though mitigation planting is proposed this would not develop to screen the view due to topography of the surrounding area, this is shown in the year 15 photomontage for viewpoint 15. Further mitigation planting would not be in keeping with the landscape character of the area where framed views are a key characteristic and as such the development cannot be completely screened.

5.6. Wider existing expansive and high-quality views will be affected by the development. These are mostly from the south and east of the site. These are best represented by the views from the PRoW that surround the site. The LVA assesses views from a number of PRoW surrounding the site, PRoW 0407/1/1, PRoW 0407/16/1 and PRoW 0407/5R/2. Viewpoints 11, 12, 14, 15 and 16 best represent these high-quality views. From these viewpoints the development would be visible. From viewpoint 11 the solar panels would be visible in the middle of the view as shown by the photomontage produced for this



viewpoint. Even with the boundary hedges been allowed to grow to a height of 4m, this would have a very limited effect in screening views of the development as can be seen in the year 15 photomontage view. Viewpoint 12 again shows how the development would be visible with the introduction of solar panels in the centre of the view. The development would form part of the wider view from this location. The boundary hedge management may have some effect on screening the solar panels however they would still be visible in the view. Viewpoints 14, 15 and 16 best represent with views from the PRow to the south of the site from Cantlop. The development would be seen from viewpoint 14. The introduction of solar panels and associated infrastructure would form a key part of this view. Due to topography mitigation planting would not reduce the effect. The development would also be visible from viewpoint 15 with solar panels visible within the view. Again, the mitigation planting would offer little in terms of screening due to the topography of the surrounding area. From viewpoint 16 the solar panels would be visible in the centre of the view with mitigation planting not reducing the visual effects. The result effects would be of moderate or major significance to the views from the PRow surrounding the site.

- 5.7. As discussed in the visual analysis above, although mitigation planting has been proposed this will have limited impact on reducing the visual effects of the development. It is clear from the photomontages produced for viewpoints 11 and 15 that the solar panels would still be visible at year 15. It is therefore evident the proposed planting is not an effective visual mitigation measure for the wider views of the scheme. I would also question some of the mitigation planting for views closer to the site and whether this is in keeping with the local character. Where planting has been used to fill up gaps in the boundary hedging this is not entirely in keeping with the local character where field access points within hedges are a frequent feature. For example, viewpoint 1 shows a large expansive view to the south from a field access along Cliff Hollow. The photomontage produced shows a very dense woodland like buffer strip from this location once the planting has matured at year 15. Not only does this planting remove the view but it also appears to be much higher and out of character with the surrounding field boundary planting in this location.
- 5.8. I am in agreement that the proposals would have an adverse effect on existing expansive and high-quality views in the vicinity of the public footpath at Cantlop which is in an elevated position overlooking the site. I also agree that full screening is not physically possible due to the local topography, and it is not certain how effective planting would be as a visual mitigation measure. I agree the proposals therefore have the potential to adversely affect the local landscape and visual amenities from a number of public viewpoints surrounding the site due to the replacement of the current arable fields with solar arrays and associated built infrastructure.
- 5.9. Core Strategy Policy CS6 sets out sustainable design and development principles, *ensuring that all development protects, restores, conserves and enhances the natural, built and historical environment*. Based on the evidence and findings of the LVA the development would conflict with this, as the proposals do not enhance the natural environment.
- 5.10. Core Strategy Policy CS17 sets out environmental networks principles, *ensuring that all development does not have a significant adverse impact on Shropshire's environmental assets*. The proposed development conflicts with this policy as there will be significant adverse effects as a result of the proposals.
- 5.11. The development proposals conflict with that of SAMDev Policy MD12 where development which are likely to have a significant adverse effect, directly, indirectly or cumulatively should not be permitted if it can be clearly demonstrated that there is no satisfactory alternative means of avoiding such impacts through re-design or by re-locating on an alternative site and the social or economic benefits of the proposal outweigh the harm to the asset.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1. In my proof of evidence I have reviewed the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development drawing on the submitted LVA and observations from my own site visit. I have considered the Council's Reasons for Refusal before undertaking my own analysis of the proposals.
- 6.2. I consider the methodology for the LVA to be in accordance with best practice however it does not appropriately consider the construction effects, nor does it consider the decommissioning and landscape restoration phase. These are all key phases in the scheme.
- 6.3. I agree there would be a major adverse effect on the landscape character of the site and therefore the development has the potential to adversely affect the local landscape. The existing rural landscape consisting of agricultural fields would be replaced by solar panels and their associated infrastructure. This would not be in keeping with the existing landscape character. One of the key characteristics of the landscape character is the "*medium to large scale landscape with framed views*". The introduction of solar panels and infrastructure elements would affect this key characteristic of the local landscape character. As such there would be a detrimental effect on the landscape character of the site and surrounding area.
- 6.4. The LVA states there would be moderate adverse visual effects on local residential properties, namely Newmans Hall Cottage, The Rectory and properties along the northern edge of Cantlop. I am in agreement with the findings of the LVA and therefore the proposals have the potential to adversely affect the visual amenities from several dwellings surrounding the site. The development would be visible, adversely affecting the views with the introduction of solar panels and their associated infrastructure.
- 6.5. I am in agreement that the proposals would have an adverse effect on existing expansive and high-quality views in the vicinity of the public footpath at Cantlop which is in an elevated position overlooking the site. I also agree that full screening is not physically possible due to the local topography, and it is not certain how effective planting would be as a visual mitigation measure. I agree the proposals therefore have the potential to adversely affect the local landscape and visual amenities from a number of public viewpoints surrounding the site due to the replacement of the current arable fields with solar arrays and associated built infrastructure.
- 6.6. The proposals conflict with Core Strategy Policy CS6, CS17 and SAMDev Policy MD12.
- 6.7. For the reasons stated above my view as an expert witness to this inquiry is that on landscape and visual grounds there is reason to refuse planning permission for the proposed development of a solar farm on the appeal site.

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