



**STEPHENSON
HALLIDAY**

Planning, Landscape & Environment
an **RSK** company

Proposed solar farm on land west of Berrington

Landscape Appeal Summary by
Daniel Leaver CMLI

Prepared for:

Econergy International Ltd

5th February 2024

LPA Planning Application Ref: 22/04355/FUL
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 My name is Daniel Leaver and I am Associate Director of Landscape Planning with Stephenson Halliday environmental planning and landscape architecture consultants, an RSK Group company. I hold a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree from the University of London (1986) and Postgraduate, Bachelor of Landscape Design (1992) from the University of Manchester. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.

I have been instructed to provide a Proof of Evidence on behalf of Eenergy International Ltd (the 'Appellant') in respect of landscape and visual matters concerning the proposed solar farm development on land to the west of Berrington. I am familiar with appeal site and matters pertaining to it with regard to landscape and visual issues.

2 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE & APPROACH

2.1.1 In Section 2 of my proof, I set out the scope of evidence and approach on the issues I consider to be most relevant for the decision maker relating to landscape and visual matters. The overall aim of my evidence has been given to demonstrate that the proposal can be accommodated with limited impacts on landscape and visual receptors within the local area of the site.

2.1.2 I have reviewed the information submitted as part of the original planning application by the Appellant, including the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) and have prepared my own review of the pertinent sections.

3 REASONS FOR REFUSAL

3.1.1 In section 3 of my proof, I set out the specific landscape and visual reasons for refusal.

3.1.2 The Council refused planning permission with a single reason for refusal in relation to landscape and visual matters that suggested that the levels of adverse visual effects would cause sufficient harm as to be "**visually oppressive**" for users of the highway that bisects the site and that there would be "**an adverse effect on existing expansive and high-quality views in the vicinity of the public footpath at Cantlop**". In addition, it is stated that it is uncertain as to how the proposed landscape planting would mitigate the adverse effects experienced by people viewing the proposed development from the local road network.

- 3.1.3 My proof specifically addresses the single reason for refusal in so much as it concerns the effects of the appeal proposals on the visual amenity of people in the vicinity of the public right of way (PRoW) 0407/5R/2 at Cantlop and for people using the local publicly maintained roads that run adjacent to the site.

4 BACKGROUND TO THE APPEAL

- 4.1.1 In Section 4 of my proof, I consider the background to the appeal and representations of relevance to landscape and visual matters.
- 4.1.2 No objections are recorded from Berrington Parish Council or Shropshire Council Officers with respect to landscape and visual matters and it is noted that in the committee report confirmed that the conclusions and methodology of the LVA were supported by the Council's landscape consultant.
- 4.1.3 It is noted that Councillor Wild objected to the appeal proposals with respect to the photomontages submitted as part of the LVA and the 'catastrophic' impact on visual amenity of residents, walkers and visitors. The main issues of concern to objectors were summarized at para.4.14 of the committee report as follows:
- "Visual impact: Site will be visible for 12 months of the year from Cantlop. A tarmac, council-maintained lane runs N/S through the centre of the proposed development. It is used by a significant number of walkers, equestrians and cyclists. Loss of views. Users off this PRoW will find motorised solar panels looming up to five metres above them as they walk down the lane."*
- 4.1.4 The letters of support were summarized in the same document at para. 4.15 as follows:
- "Visual amenity: Only a few views of the application site from the right of way, generally above the eyeline of walkers. Some properties in Cantlop will be affected and mitigation measures should provide screening. The site is not highly visible from the AONB."*
- 4.1.5 Rule 6 Party, Flour not Power, submitted a Statement of Case (SoC) in response to the refusal of planning permission which was essentially a repetition of the Council's Reason for Refusal.
- 4.1.6 The LVA for the proposed scheme was undertaken by ADAS in May 2022 and I am in agreement with Planning Officer's Report that the methodology is in accordance with best

practice and that the assessment of overall levels of effects potentially resulting from the appeal proposals are reasonable.

5 DESIGN PROPOSALS AND LANDSCAPE MITIGATION MEASURES

- 5.1.1 In Section 5 of my proof, I set out how the siting and design of the appeal proposals have carefully considered landscape and visual impacts such that mitigation is integral to the development. The design will enhance the existing landscape structure of the appeal site and provide enhanced connectivity within the landscape and a greater variety of valued landscape elements as well as screening.
- 5.1.2 On decommissioning an enhanced landscape will be retained that is characteristic of the local Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Type (LCT).

6 CONSIDERATION OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

- 6.1.1 In Section 6 of my proof, I have undertaken a review of the landscape effects of the appeal proposals based on the Stephenson Halliday methodology.
- 6.1.2 I have assessed the sensitivity of the site and local landscape character area to development of the type proposed to be Medium which is the same as that assessed within the ADAS LVA.
- 6.1.3 I have assessed the short-term construction activity would result in Moderate adverse effects to the field of the site reducing to Moderate/Minor adverse within the local Estate Farmlands LCT. Upon completion, the development would result in Major/Moderate adverse permanent effects within the site, whilst effects to the local LCA would be Moderate adverse on reducing to Moderate/Minor adverse in the long term. Effects within the wider Estate Farmlands LCT, beyond a maximum 0.5 km of the site, would be Negligible due to screening by intervening landform and vegetation.
- 6.1.4 It is therefore my professional opinion that there would be no permanent effects to the local landscape, outside of the appeal site itself, that would be greater than Moderate/Minor adverse.

7 REVIEW OF VISUAL EFFECTS

- 7.1.1 In Section 7 of my proof, I have undertaken a review of the visual effects of the appeal proposals based on the Stephenson Halliday methodology.
- 7.1.2 I have judged the sensitivity of all visual receptors to be High/Medium, which is a half level lower than that described in the ADAS LVA, albeit the overall judgements are of a very similar order which can be considered a small difference in professional opinion.
- 7.1.3 I have undertaken my own assessment of effects upon the visual receptors considered to be of greatest sensitivity to the appeal proposals. In my opinion, the development would not result in any permanent effects greater than Moderate Adverse, with permanent effects of at most Moderate adverse from the footpath to the west of Cantlop. Other publicly accessible receptors using the local road network, including those views on the public access road to Cantlop Mill described as ‘oppressive’ within the reasons for refusal, would experience permanent effects of at most Minor adverse.

8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1.1 National Policy states that, “*Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:..b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services...*”
- 8.1.2 These requirements are recognised in the Shropshire Council Local Plan in Policy CS 17 which states that development should protect and enhance local character and not adversely affect the visual or recreational values of the landscape. Further to this draft policy DP12 states that the Council will, “*Encourage new development to plant trees, woodlands and hedgerows...*”, and that proposals ensure “*...that native species hedgerows are retained on development sites.*”
- 8.1.3 This Landscape Proof of Evidence has specifically addressed the single reason for refusal in so much as it concerns the changes to the baseline landscape character of the appeal site and how these changes will affect the visual amenity of the public using local roads and footpaths, taking into account the effectiveness of the enhanced mitigation proposals.
- 8.1.4 The ADAS LVA concluded that there would be no permanent adverse landscape effects greater than Slight within the Estate Farmlands LCT and no permanent visual effects greater

than Moderate adverse. The planning officer has noted agreement to these effects as described in the submitted planning report. It is my assessment that, permanent adverse landscape effects would be at most Moderate/Minor to within the local landscape area, reducing to Negligible within the wider LCT. In addition, I have assessed permanent visual effects as at most Moderate from the footpath at Cantlop, and Minor from the local road network in the immediate vicinity of the site.

- 8.1.5 Whilst some adverse landscape impacts would remain, the mature vegetated character of the proposed landscape enhancements would help to incorporate the appeal proposals into their local setting and the levels of effect would reduce from their initially moderate levels in the medium to long term.
- 8.1.6 Only the users of the public footpath in the vicinity of Cantlop to the south of the site would experience any visual effects greater than Moderate/Minor adverse on the completion of the appeal proposals. These effects are judged to be Moderate adverse on completion and would remain Moderate adverse for the duration of the solar farm lifetime.
- 8.1.7 I have judged that views, described as '*oppressive*' in the reasons for refusal for the users of the road to Cantlop Mill, would be at most Moderate/Minor adverse on completion of the development; these effects would reduce to Minor adverse as the mitigation measures mature. In my professional opinion, neither level could be described as oppressive for the users of the road.

In relation to effects on landscape character and visual amenity, in my professional opinion, I conclude that there is insufficient landscape justification for refusal.