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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 May 2025

**by Jonathan Bore MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5 June 2025

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**Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/W/24/3356640**

**Field west of Haughmond Quarry, Land south of B5062, Uffington, SY4 4WR**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Opdenenergy UK 10 Ltd against the decision of Shropshire Council.
  - The application Ref is 24/00724/FUL.
  - The development proposed is the installation and operation of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the scheme on the settings of Haughmond Abbey and the hillfort on Haughmond Hill, local landscape quality, the living conditions of nearby residents and wildlife, and the benefits of the scheme.

### Reasons

*The effect on the setting of Haughmond Abbey*

3. The solar farm would occupy an arable field at the foot of Haughmond Hill. The remains of Haughmond Abbey, a Grade I listed building and a scheduled monument, are situated a short distance to the north, on the other side of the B5062. The abbey is a good example of an Augustinian monastery, and enough is left of the historic site to allow an interpretation of the various functions of the building complex.
4. The abbey is located on rising ground at the foot of wooded Haughmond Hill, and in its prime it would have been prominent when seen from the west. Today, though much reduced, it still has a visual presence which can be appreciated from the minor road that leads northwards from Uffington and from the footpath that passes north westwards from the village towards and through the site. Contrary to the conclusions of the submitted Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment, these are not inconsequential or minor views; they have significance because they allow the location of the abbey to be appreciated and understood in the landscape. From these viewpoints the abbey is seen in an open, green setting against the backdrop of the wood on Haughmond Hill. The proposed solar farm would appear within this scene as an alien and incongruous feature in close proximity to the abbey.
5. In addition, a higher level panorama of the abbey complex, with open land spreading out beyond the abbey to the west, may be appreciated from the rocky

outcrop at the north eastern end of the abbey grounds, and from the adjacent public footpath. These are also important viewpoints for appreciating the layout of the abbey and its relationship to the wider landscape. From here, a slice of the solar farm would appear behind the abbey walls and would be visible through the large west-facing abbey window. It would be an intrusive and disruptive element in the attractive panorama and would be harmful to the abbey's setting.

6. The attractive setting of the abbey is an important contributor to its significance. Great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, including their settings, and in this case the scheme would have a harmful effect on the significance of the abbey because of the unfortunate intrusion into its landscape setting. There would be no direct physical impact on the abbey ruins, so the harm (using the parlance of the National Planning Policy Framework) would be in the category of less than substantial, at a medium level, but this nonetheless carries considerable weight.

*The effect on the setting of the hillfort at Haughmond Hill*

7. Owing to topography and tree cover, there is little direct intervisibility between the univallate Iron Age Hillfort on Haughmond Hill and the appeal site. Other features on and near the edge of Shrewsbury, including the Battlefield Enterprise Park and the solar farm near Sundorne, are more noticeable from the hillfort. However, the scheme would have a negative effect on an appreciation of the landscape setting of the hillfort when looking towards the hill from the lower land to the west, since it would occupy the rising field right up to the edge of the woodland hanger that crowns the hill. For this reason the scheme would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage asset, at a lower level.

*The effect on local landscape quality*

8. The impact on local landscape quality would be as discussed above in connection with heritage assets. Contrary to the conclusions of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, the solar farm would appear as an intrusive feature on rising ground below Haughmond Hill, particularly noticeable in the landscape from the viewpoints referred to above. It is appreciated that the boundary hedges around the solar farm would be supplemented, but the additional planting would not be sufficient to mitigate the harm.

*The effect on residents' living conditions*

9. The inverters and transformers would be a minimum of 200 metres from the nearest residential property and would not harm residential living conditions as a result of noise. The local planning authority no longer pursues an objection on this basis. However, certain representations have expressed concern over the close proximity of the solar panels to 8 Haughmond Fields. The panels would come close to the house on three sides and in my assessment they would have an overbearing impact on living conditions by severely encroaching into the current open outlook around the property. The unfortunate impact of this insensitive arrangement would not be sufficiently mitigated by the narrow belt of proposed planting adjacent to the house plot.

### *The effect on wildlife*

10. From the available survey evidence, skylarks are likely to use the site for breeding and this would be disrupted by the solar farm. A condition has been suggested that would prevent development being commenced until alternative provision has been made. However, the details of how this would be achieved, where it would take place, what would be required, are not adequately developed so there is insufficient certainty that such a condition would deliver a successful outcome.

### **The scheme's benefits and impacts**

11. The solar farm would have an output of 25 MW, sufficient to supply 7,500 homes per year and helping substantially to reduce CO2 emissions. There would also be an increase in biodiversity of greater than 10% and the site would be restored after 40 years. It is recognised that there is an urgent need for new energy generating capacity, and renewable energy in particular. In this regard the proposal would be in accordance with Policy CS8 of the Shropshire Core Strategy 2011 which encourages the provision of renewable energy infrastructure. In addition, Core Strategy Policy CS5 allows for development in the countryside which improves the sustainability of rural communities and brings local economic and community benefits.
12. However, it is important to ensure that proposals for renewable energy are located in suitable places in the landscape and are sensitively sited in relation to heritage assets. Core Strategy Policy CS5 states that development proposals should be on appropriate sites which maintain countryside character; Core Policy CS8 states that particular attention will be given to the potential for adverse impacts on landscape character and natural and heritage assets; whilst Core Strategy Policies CS6, CS17 and Policies MD2, MD12 and MD13 of the Shropshire Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan 2015 seek to protect the quality of the natural and historic environment.
13. For the reasons discussed above, the scheme would have a detrimental effect on the setting and significance of Haughmond Abbey. The ability to appreciate fully this ancient and unique site would be spoiled by the extensive spread of modern manufactured solar panels within its landscape setting. Although the scheme would be temporary, 40 years is a considerable length of time. The harm to the significance of the abbey over this period would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme. Added to this, the scheme would have an adverse effect on the landscape, the setting of Haughmond Hill Hillfort and the living conditions of residents adjacent to the scheme and the conditions for ground breeding birds. For all these reasons, the scheme would be contrary to the objectives of Core Strategy Policies CS5, CS6 and CS17 and SAMDev Plan Policies MD2, MD12 and MD13.

### **Conclusion**

14. I have considered all the other matters raised, but they do not alter the balance of my conclusions. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

*Jonathan Bore*

INSPECTOR