

Land Adjacent to A614 Worksop LVA Review

Prepared for: Bassetlaw District Council

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Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Landscape and Visual Appraisal.....	3
3	Conclusion.....	7

Version Control

Version	Author	Changes from previous version	Checked by	Date checked
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report includes comments prepared by Robert Browne CMLI, in response to a brief from Bassetlaw District Council. The report reviews the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) document produced by Sightline Landscape on behalf of the Applicant, One Planet Developments Ltd. The planning application, reference 24/00384/FUL, is for the installation and operation of a solar farm and battery energy storage system, with associated works, equipment, infrastructure and landscaping at land adjacent to A614, Worksop, Nottinghamshire.
- 1.2 In addition, the report considers whether the landscaping proposals shown on the submitted drawings will be sufficient to mitigate the landscape and visual effects of the development in the long term.

2 Landscape and Visual Appraisal

General Methodology

- 2.1 The LVA includes a methodology that accords with the relevant guidance document, GLVIA3. Appendix B provides descriptors which are useful to further understand the level of effects that have been outlined within the report. However, I have some concerns on the implementation of this methodology, with specific points raised below under the relevant sub-headings.
- 2.2 The LVA identifies an initial 3km study area. This is supplemented by an additional Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) provided by Wardell Armstrong. This appears to utilise an acceptable methodology to generate a digital ZTV. Following my observations in the field, I am satisfied that the report assesses the necessary study area extent, particularly with the submission of the two additional LVA Addendum documents.

Baseline Studies

- 2.3 The LVA includes references to the key baseline landscape character study, the Bassetlaw Landscape Character Assessment local-scale study (Sherwood Policy Zone 33: Bothamsall). However, there is no reference to the Natural England National Character Area Profile (Area 49: Sherwood). Although this is a national scale study and some of the key characteristics cannot be observed locally, it is still recommended to refer to this document to provide full landscape context to the site.
- 2.4 I am content that the LVA includes all relevant references from the Bassetlaw Landscape Character Assessment. This includes reference to the 'very good' condition and 'moderate' sensitivity assessed across the local character area.

Landscape Receptors

- 2.5 The LVA fails to clearly identify distinct landscape receptors within the study. However, reading the description of landscape effects in Section 7, it would appear that the intended receptors are individual elements of landscape within the site, the character of the site itself, and the character of the landscape immediately beyond the site. These are all relevant receptors, however, I would also expect to see the wider local landscape area (Sherwood Policy Zone 33: Bothamsall) to be included as a receptor.

Landscape Value

- 2.6 The assessment of landscape value included within the LVA is noticeably lacking in detail. The report fails to use the latest Landscape Institute guidance (Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations). Instead, it simply provides quotations from the local character assessment with minimal additional narrative from the Author's own observations. Providing a greater level of detail using the headings suggested within the latest Technical Guidance Note would have encouraged a greater understanding of the baseline landscape value within the study area.
- 2.7 The LVA offers a summative assessment of 'medium to low' landscape value. It is my opinion that an assessment of 'medium' would be more appropriate. I would also expect to see a separate value assessment for each landscape receptor, but this is not included within the report.

Landscape Susceptibility

- 2.8 Once again, there is an obvious lack of detail relating to landscape susceptibility within the LVA. A single summative judgement of 'medium to low' susceptibility is provided with minimal justification. Using the descriptors within the LVA methodology, it is my opinion that an assessment of 'medium' susceptibility is more fitting.
- 2.9 Separate susceptibility assessments for each landscape receptor are not provided, leading me to further question the thoroughness of the LVA study.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 2.10 Assessments of landscape sensitivity should be formed from an understanding of landscape value combined with landscape susceptibility. I have raised concerns over the thoroughness of contributing assessments and it is my opinion that this has led to an underestimation of landscape sensitivity. The LVA provides a single 'medium to low' assessment of sensitivity. My assessment for the site itself would be 'medium', based on a combination of 'medium' value and 'medium' sensitivity.
- 2.11 As with judgements of value and susceptibility, the LVA does not offer separate sensitivity ratings for each landscape receptor. It does, however, reference the 'moderate' sensitivity stated for Policy Zone 33 within the Bassetlaw LCA.

Landscape Effects

- 2.12 The LVA includes an assessment of landscape effects in Section 7. With regards to individual landscape elements, I agree that there will be no requirement for changes to topographic levels and that existing water courses will not be affected. I also agree that proposed planting will have some beneficial effects to existing tree lines and hedgerows.
- 2.13 In terms of effects on the character of the site itself, the LVA is correct to state "the proposed development will substantially alter the character of the fields in which it is situated, replacing the rural character with one of a landscape containing low level electrical infrastructure" (Page 11). I also agree with the assessment of 'high' landscape change to the character of the site. The LVA then refers to landscape sensitivity of the site being judged as 'medium', which differs from the 'medium to low' that it previously stated in paragraph 3.21. Nevertheless, I agree with the summative

assessment of 'moderate to major adverse' effect on the character of the site itself. However, the LVA asserts that this level will be reduced following establishment of proposed planting. I do not agree with this. In my opinion, the proposed planting will not counteract the comprehensive change of land use across the site. I predict the 'moderate to major adverse' landscape effects will remain throughout operation.

- 2.14 Paragraph 7.9 of the LVA asserts that the proposals will have some beneficial effects on wider character due to mitigation planting removing views to the existing arable fields. I disagree with this assessment. The perception of undeveloped arable land on the site currently contributes to the wider rural character in the area surrounding the site. Removing this perception should not be seen as beneficial. It is my opinion that the proposals would lead to a long-term minor adverse effect on the character of the surrounding landscape, which is a greater level of effect compared to the 'neutral' level assessed by the LVA. However, it is important to note that this will be restricted to a limited geographic extent. The development is likely to be perceived through existing and proposed trees, but this perception will be heavily reduced by the vegetation.

Visual Receptors

- 2.15 The LVA considers visual effects on most of the necessary receptor groups. This is informed by an accurate ZTV, with an understanding of actual visibility tested during fieldwork. The original LVA did not include people using Bridleway BW5 through the Clumber Park estate (Grade I Listed park and garden) as a visual receptor group. However, the subsequent LVA Addendum 1 document does provide additional viewpoints from within the estate to the west of the site.
- 2.16 I am confident that the LVA and addendums include all relevant visual receptors. I visited all photo viewpoints within the site and surroundings on Friday 7th March.

Visual Value, Susceptibility, and Sensitivity

- 2.17 Despite including descriptor tables for assessing visual value and susceptibility within the methodology in Appendix, the LVA does not provide these separate ratings for each of the identified visual receptor groups. This does not follow guidance outlined in GLVIA3. Instead, the LVA offers summative visual sensitivity assessments for each receptor. Again, this lacks thoroughness.
- 2.18 Nevertheless, I agree with the summative sensitivity assessments provided for each visual receptor group in Table 3 of the LVA. Although LVA Addendum 1 does not assess the sensitivity of visitors within Clumber Park, I would judge people using Bridleway BW5 to have high visual sensitivity.

Visual Effects

- 2.19 The LVA and accompanying Addendum documents collectively include all necessary viewpoints, representing the appropriate receptor groups. An assessment of effects on views is presented within paragraphs 7.11-7.54 of the LVA, with additional comments on views from Clumber Park provided in Addendum 1. A further visualisation is offered in Addendum 2, illustrating change from public right of way FP6/Robin Hood Way adjacent to the southern boundary of the site.

- 2.20 I agree with the assessment of no visual effect to people in vehicles along Blyth Road to the south of the site (view 1) and the minor road south of the Normanton Larches plantation (view 2). I also agree that people using the western part of bridleway BW2 (view 8), to the north of the site, will not experience any visual change.
- 2.21 I am also satisfied with the assessment of visual effects for residents within Forest Farm to the north of the site. This is predicted to be 'moderate adverse' in summer and 'minor adverse' in winter months.
- 2.22 However, I have some concerns over the other assessments of visual effects. It is my opinion that the level of predicted visual effect for walkers along FP6/Robin Hood Way long distance path adjacent to the southern boundary has been underestimated. I agree that visual effects along this route are likely to be 'moderate adverse' in winter, even following establishment of new planting. However, in summer, it is my opinion that visibility will remain to development on higher ground in Field 4.
- 2.23 I also question whether proposed planting under the existing overhead cable route will be possible. The National Grid has produced Design Guidelines for Development Near High Voltage Overhead Lines, available here:
<https://www.nationalgrid.com/sites/default/files/documents/Sense%20of%20Place%20-%20National%20Grid%20Guidance.pdf>
- This document provides general guidance on offsets close to overhead lines, but also suggests specific technical advice should be obtained from the National Grid before any landscape scheme is finalised. I have concerns whether this consultation has happened and if the proposed mitigation planting shown beneath power lines along the southern boundary will be achievable. If this section of planting is not possible, further visibility to the development would exist, reducing the effectiveness of proposed mitigation.
- 2.24 In addition, I question the assessment of visual effects on walkers further east along the same public right of way. LVA view 5 does not accurately reflect the visibility through existing trees that I observed on site. The photo has a strange direction of view, pointing along the off-site footpath, instead of towards Field 4. My Viewpoint A and additional single frame photos below illustrate a reasonable level of visibility through the woodland. With no mitigation planting included adjacent to this area of the footpath, a higher level of visual change will be perceived in winter months.
- 2.25 My fieldwork observations also bring into question the assessment of no visual effects for people within the Grade I Listed park and garden estate within Clumber Park. My Viewpoint B, taken from bridleway BW5 illustrates visibility through winter vegetation to Field 2. At the time the photograph was taken, plastic sheeting had been applied to the field for agricultural purposes. Whilst this does not exactly mimic the presence of photovoltaic panels, it does illustrate the visibility of a reflective surface within the field. Proposed mitigation planting along the western boundary is likely to further reduce visibility through the trees, but there is potential for some winter views.
- 2.26 In terms of a general comment relating to the proposed mitigation planting, the proposed density appears to be sparser than I would expect. The submitted planting plan specifies planting "in rows at 1.75m centres, with the plants within the rows at

1.75m staggered centres". Considering the small sizes that are also proposed, the time required for establishment, as well as an expected failure rate, the planting may not be as effective as desired.

Cumulative Effects

- 2.27 The LVA contains a consideration of potential cumulative effects in relation to an existing solar development to the north of the site. I agree that there would be no intervisibility between the developments, but may be a minor adverse perception of sequential cumulative effects for vehicle users passing both sites. I also agree that this will reduce to a negligible level following the establishment of mitigation planting.

3 Conclusion

- 3.1 The information submitted within the LVA and associated addendum documents does broadly accord with methodology outlined in GLVIA3. However, I have raised multiple concerns about the application of this methodology and the summative assessments provided.
- 3.2 In places, the LVA underestimates the predicted level of landscape and visual effects, whilst also overestimating the effectiveness of proposed mitigation planting. I am not confident that the submitted material accurately reflects the substantial change that is proposed for the site.

Viewpoint A – Taken close to LVA View 5, along FP6/Robin Hood Way



Viewpoint A – Single frame



Viewpoint B – Taken from bridleway BW5 within the Clumber Park estate, close to LVA Addendum 1 View 1



Viewpoint B – single frame



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