



landscape architecture ■ urban design
expert witness ■ environmental planning

REVIEW of LVIA

on behalf of

CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

in connection with

Application reference: 22/01682/F - Land North of Manor Farm, Noke

April 2024

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Huskisson Brown Associates (HBA) is a firm of Chartered Landscape Architects, established in 1987 and registered since then with the Landscape Institute. HBA has been a member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment since 1992.

1.2 The practice has undertaken a range of landscape and visual assessment work for many clients including public bodies, private companies and individuals.

1.3 HBA has previously been retained by Cherwell District Council (CDC) to advise on landscape and visual matters in connection with a number of individual planning applications and planning appeals.

1.4 HBA was appointed by CDC in December 2023 to carry out a review of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment prepared on behalf of the applicant in relation to application **22/01682/F**, described as:

“Development of a ground mounted solar farm incorporating the installation of solar PV panels, associated infrastructure and access, as well as landscape planting and designated ecological enhancement areas.”

1.5 The review considers the LVIA in relation to current best practice, namely the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3) (April 2013 by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) and has been carried out in accordance with the Landscape Institute’s Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 1/20 (published 10th January 2020). TGN 1/20 gives guidance for reviewing Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs, identifying the three main components of a review as to the completeness, competency, and reliability of an LVIA / LVA. These are stated as:

1. **Checking the methodology used to undertake the assessment, the criteria selected (including balance between), and the process followed;**
2. **Checking the baseline, content and findings of the assessment; and**
3. **Checking the presentation of the assessment findings.**

1.6 The above areas of review are reported and summarised in an overall conclusion, reporting the findings of the review. TGN 1/20 also notes that further information which is considered relevant to reporting on the compliance (or otherwise) of the LVIA/LVA with GLVIA3 or matters of competence or expertise may also be reported on in an LVIA Review. In this instance, the scope of the LVIA Review also includes:

- § Comments and observations on the proposed scheme that HBA consider would have a bearing on its landscape and visual appropriateness and / or “fit” within the landscape.

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- § The LVIA's consideration of the potential effects on Green Belt (as far as this pertains to openness and visual matters) is also separately addressed within this review and comments made on the completeness and reliability that can be placed upon this and whether HBA agree with its findings.
- 1.7 Where comments are made by HBA on the LVIA findings and judgements, these are based upon professional judgement, review of the baseline and site inspection. A separate LVIA has not been carried out by HBA.
- 1.8 TGN 1/20 notes that in some instance it may be appropriate to discuss any issues arising with the author of the assessment under review. This was not allowed for at this stage.
- 1.9 This LVIA Review has been prepared by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute with substantive experience of undertaking and reviewing LVIAs.
- 1.10 The core material that is relevant to this review are the following documents:
- § Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment by Pegasus Group ref SCL-ETL-ZZ-XX-RP-L-0700 Rev 01 dated July 2021 and accompanying figures and appendices
- 1.11 In addition to the above, GLVIA3 and TGN 1/20, the following are also relevant:
- Project Specific:
- § Planning, Design and Access Statement (May 2022) by Pegasus Group;
- General:
- § National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated post application on 19th December 2023;
- § Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (Part 1) (adopted 20th July 2025).
- § Cherwell Local Plan 1996 Saved Policies (adopted November 1996).
- § Cherwell Local Plan Review 2040 Consultation Draft (Regulation 18) September 2023.
- § Cherwell Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Final Report, The Environment Partnership, September 2022.
- § Cherwell Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy Final Report, LUC, November 2022.
- § National Character Area (NCA) 108 'Upper Thames Clay Vales as defined by Natural England.
- § Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study.
- § Cherwell District Council, Countryside Design Summary SPD, June 1998.
- § Historic Landscape Characterisation.

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- § MAGIC website.
 - § Historic England website.
 - § Historic Ordnance Survey and Google Map Aerial mapping.
 - § TGN 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals. The Landscape Institute.
 - § TGN 02-21 Assessing landscape value outside national designations. The Landscape Institute.
- 1.12 HBA are familiar with the area having visited the locality in relation to our other work for CDC. However, a specific visit including inspecting the majority of the viewpoints identified in the LVIA has been undertaken to review the findings of the LVIA, and provide comments on the judgements of landscape and visual effects. This was carried out on 7th February 2024 in conditions of reasonable visibility. Broadleaved vegetation was not in leaf, so visibility was at its most unrestricted.
- 1.13 This report follows the main structure identified above at Paragraph 1.5 but inevitably there is significant overlap between the specific matters TGN 1/20 identifies for review.

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2 CHECKING THE METHODOLOGY USED TO UNDERTAKE THE ASSESSMENT, THE CRITERIA SELECTED (INCLUDING BALANCE BETWEEN), AND THE PROCESS FOLLOWED

2.1 TGN 1/20 advises that this phase involves reviewing the following issues which are noted in italicised blue font, with our response set out in the proceeding paragraphs.

Does the scope of the assessment meet the requirements set out in the Scoping Opinion and/ or as defined in the LVIA or LVA and if substantively different, are the reasons clearly set out and explained?

2.2 A Scoping Opinion was not provided, and it is understood from the submitted Planning, Design and Access Statement (para 1.5) that CDC confirmed during formal pre-application discussions with the applicant that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would not be required.

2.3 The spatial scope for the LVIA is set out at LVIA para 2.7 – 2.8 and is appropriate.

2.4 Paragraph 2.9 of the LVIA notes that the LVIA considers landscape and visual effects at completion and also in the longer term after fifteen years. This reflects best practice. However, the LVIA assesses the situation at completion and at Year 10. The Year 10 assessment is not justified in the LVIA text and requires clarification.

2.5 LVIA paragraphs 2.13 to 2.14 notes that night-time impacts are not assessed as the proposal “is not considered to produce considerable light pollution” (HBA emphasis underlined). This seems to apply a qualitative judgement when it would be clearer to state whether the scheme includes lighting or not, or if for example, illumination is only likely to be temporary and/or transient if night-time emergency access by a vehicle was required.

What consultations have been carried out and have responses been acted upon?

2.6 A Consultation Statement is provided with the planning application (Pegasus Group March 2022). This records that a formal pre-application enquiry was submitted to CDC on 28th February 2020 (ref: 20/00653/PREAPP) with a site visit carried out by a CDC Officer and written response provided by CDC on 3rd June 2020. A virtual meeting was subsequently held on 10th June 2020 with further written advice provided by CDC on 16th June 2020. The Consultation Statement notes at paragraph 2.3 that “The advice highlighted the constraints of developing the Site relating to landscape & visual impact, including in relation to views from the surrounding public right of way network, as well as potential ecological impacts. The Council also raised concerns with the scale of the proposal the subject of the pre-application enquiry.”

2.7 The CDC pre-application response also stated the need for an LVIA to be prepared and submitted with the application. Important views towards Islip Conservation Area and St Nicholas’ Church and extensive views over the area from the scarp to the south were indicated as particular issues to be addressed.

2.8 Pre-application video calls and subsequent discussions were held with Noke Parish

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Council and Oddington Parish Council and community feedback was sought via a consultation leaflet and website.

- 2.9 The scheme that formed the basis of the pre-application, proposed a larger coverage of solar panels, extending across the fields to the east and west of the fields that are now proposed for solar panels. In response to pre-application comments, the applicant has amended the proposed footprint of the proposed development. The proposal was also amended to allow greater separation between the public footpath and the solar arrays. An LVIA was prepared.
- 2.10 Post-submission of the planning application, CDC's Landscape Officer provided comments on landscape and visual amenity, based on site observations and information provided in the LVIA and Soft Landscape Proposals. These are set out in an emailed consultation response dated 3rd October 2022. The Landscape Officer did not provide a formal LVIA Review (and this is not considered unusual and is not a requirement). Pegasus Group submitted a written response to the Landscape Officer's comments (in a letter dated 2nd February 2023).

[Has the scope and methodology of the assessment been formally agreed with the determining authority? If not, why not?](#)

- 2.11 There is no specific reference to the LVIA methodology having been agreed with CDC.

[As part of the methodology, has the terminology been clearly defined, have the criteria to form judgements including thresholds been clearly defined and have any deviations from good practice guidance \(such as GLVIA3\) been clearly explained?](#)

- 2.12 The LVA methodology and assessment criteria are set out in Appendix A of the LVIA.
- 2.13 Terminology is defined within the text and is based upon GLVIA3.
- 2.14 The methodology references GLVIA3 but does not make reference to Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21: 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations' (published May 2021) which is relevant to the consideration of the landscape of the site.
- 2.15 TGN 02/21 introduces 'functional' as a factor that can influence the value of a landscape, this relating to whether/how much the landscape "performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape" (TGN 02/21, Table 1, page 11). TGN 02/21 advises that "Landscape function can influence value, but the presence of a spatial designation (e.g. Green Belt or Green Gap) is not in itself an indicator of high landscape value" (TGN 02/21 p12). As the methodology does not address TGN 02/21, the functional role of the landscape as a contributor of landscape value, is not taken into consideration in the LVIA. Notwithstanding this, Table A.1 'Criteria for landscape value', identifies Green Belt as one of the criteria contributing to a Medium landscape value, and an example

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of “Designated areas at a Regional or County level”. The LVIA does not otherwise consider Green Belt to be a landscape designation or contributor to landscape value. Clarification should be sought on his.

- 2.16 The approach to landscape value in the methodology could be set out more clearly. The methodology in part acknowledges that the fact that an area of landscape is not designated either nationally or locally does not mean that it does not have any value (GLVIA3 5.26), paragraph A.3.4 of the LVIA stating that “Although factors such as formal designations are an important component when determining value, other aspects are also considered as part of the judgement process”. Whilst this does not fully reflect the thrust of GLVIA3’s meaning in this regard, it is subsequently contradicted by LVIA paragraph A.3.7 which lists a range of “factors that have been considered in making judgements on landscape value...” all of which relate to designations or landscape features defined by policy.
- 2.17 Table A.1 sets out the criteria for landscape value against ‘High’ ‘Medium’ and ‘Low’ thresholds. Applying the Table A.1 criteria, a landscape can only have high value if it is designated “at an International or National level” “and also considered an important component of the country’s character, experienced by a high number of tourists”, whilst medium value relates to landscapes designated at a Regional or County level. Undesignated landscape only has low landscape value. As read, this does not reflect GLVIA3, case law or the LVIA’s own approach. There doesn’t appear to be a mechanism within the methodology for considering that an undesignated landscape could have high value at a local, county or even regional scale. Table A.1 appears to place emphasis upon designation, in contrast to A.3.4 and GLVIA3 (and subsequent TGN 02/21) and should be clarified.
- 2.18 The methodology does not contain guidance on how assessment criteria are combined (for example, susceptibility and value to determine sensitivity, or sensitivity and magnitude of impact to determine significance), a process that is sometimes demonstrated in a matrix or diagram, this being left to the professional judgement of the assessor. This is acceptable provided the text is transparent in explaining how the judgements are reached and that judgements are consistent. The methodology refers to “balancing” such judgements (LVIA para. A.2.2, A.3.12, A.3.13 and A5.3) which is questioned. GLVIA3 requires the judgements to be combined which does not necessarily mean that each contributing factor is ‘balanced’.
- 2.19 Thresholds for the value of views and the susceptibility of visual receptors are combined in Table A.4 ‘Criteria for visual sensitivity’. Table A.4 relates mostly to susceptibility, with just one factor relating to the value of views included under the ‘Very High’ sensitivity threshold. Whilst the value of views and visual susceptibility are generally accepted to be more closely interlinked than landscape value and susceptibility, Table A.4 could helpfully include more of the factors that contribute to the value of views GLVIA3 to assist with a more transparent approach.

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2.20 The criteria relating to Magnitude of landscape impacts (Table A.3) and Magnitude of visual impacts (Table A.5) indicate that, a landscape or view that is subject to substantial or very substantial change at Year 1 can only be assessed as High or Very High magnitude of change when the duration of the impact is long term and unlikely to be reversible. Applying the criteria in Table A.3 and Table A.5 to this scheme that is reversible, albeit over a long timespan of 40 years, the visual magnitude of change upon the landscape or people experiencing views could not be assessed as any higher than a 'Medium' magnitude at Year 1 even if the change was substantial in scale and without any planting or mitigation being effective.

2.21 The criteria for Medium magnitude include that "The size and scale of change is considered fair...". Fair has a connotation of being equitable or acceptable - the other threshold criteria are more quantifiable, described as very substantial, substantial, small and very small change.

[Does the assessment demonstrate a clear understanding and provide a separate consideration of landscape and visual effects?](#)

2.22 The LVIA is generally considered to demonstrate a good understanding of the overall process of LVIA and provides a separate consideration of landscape and visual effects.

[Does the assessment demonstrate comprehensive identification of receptors and of all likely effects?](#)

2.23 The approach to selecting landscape receptors and identification of landscape and visual receptors in the LVIA could be more comprehensive.

2.24 The assessment of landscape effects (LVIA Section 6.0) considers two landscape receptors: 'LCT R1a: Elevated or low-lying, arable farmland with weak structure' from the Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment 1995 and 'the site and local landscape context'. No justification is provided for why the LCT from the older Cherwell Landscape Character Assessment is considered instead of the LCT's defined in the more recent OWLS (2004). More consideration of the OWLS LCT's and their use as landscape receptors would have been merited.

2.25 For visual receptors, representative viewpoints are considered, which is an acceptable approach however some receptor groups and viewing locations are not illustrated by a viewpoint photograph or clearly addressed in the assessment:

§ Users of public footpath 318/4/10 to the north of the site,

§ Users of Wheatley Road (B4027)

2.26 The likely effects are for the most part identified, insofar as these relate to the receptors assessed, (albeit not necessarily agreed with in terms of the professional judgements relating to their magnitude). However, the masking effect of the panels on land use and landcover is not specifically described, acknowledging that this

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would be a long-term adverse effect but temporary in nature due to the lifespan of the solar proposals. The effects of the planting proposals upon currently open views do not appear to have been identified.

[Does the assessment display clarity and transparency in its reasoning, the basis for its findings and conclusions?](#)

- 2.27 The LVIA generally displays a reasonable degree of clarity and transparency but some of the reasoning and the basis for its findings are not wholly transparent on account of the methodology issues identified above. A number of issues could be helpfully clarified, and the methodology more clearly defined, to present a more robust and transparent assessment.
- 2.28 The methodology is not clear on whether Year 10 or Year 15 provides the assessment timescale. In this instance, an assessment of any residual effects beyond Year 10/15 may also have been appropriate to have been made (in addition to the Year 10/15 assessment) in order to demonstrate the potential effects 'post commissioning' of the solar park (ie. in 40 years time).
- 2.29 The methodology does not state whether the Year 1 and Year 10/15 assessment is based on winter or summer views.
- 2.30 No guidance is offered as to what is deemed to constitute short, medium or long-distance views.
- 2.31 The LVIA does not state which levels of effect are considered significant. This is not a necessity as this is non-EIA development, however it would be helpful to include.

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3 CHECK THE BASELINE CONTENT, AND FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT

3.1 TGN 1/20 advises that this phase involves reviewing the following issues which are noted in italicised blue font, with our response set out in the proceeding paragraphs.

What is the reviewer's opinion of the scope, content and appropriateness (detail, geographic extent) of both the landscape and the visual baseline studies which form the basis for the assessment of effects (supported by appropriate graphic such as ZTVs etc as appropriate)?

3.2 The stated 2.5km study area (and allowing for wider viewpoints from the ZTV) is considered to be appropriate.

3.1 The LVIA references the appropriate range of landscape-related policies. Reference is (understandably) made to the NPPF July 2021 which coincided with when the LVA was submitted but is now superseded by the December 2023 revisions. The LVIA gives extracts from some of the reference documents within the LVIA text. Paraphrasing is often used and therefore relevant copies of the original document extracts would be helpfully appended to the LVIA to assist with document review and transparency.

3.2 The Oxford Green Belt Study (2015) and Cherwell Green Belt Study (2017) are referenced as background to understanding the likely impact on Green Belt, the LVIA acknowledging that Green Belt is not a specific landscape designation (LVIA para 3.41). The LVIA correctly places the site in 'Broad area 3' and summarises the findings of the 2015 study in relation to Green Belt purposes. It would have been appropriate to incorporate more of the narrative from the Green Belt Study 2015 that support's the findings on Green Belt purposes and provides greater insight into the baseline relating to 'openness' and geographic variations within the Broad area that are relevant to the consideration of the site and any development upon it. For example, that "The Broad Area has a strong sense of openness throughout the landscape, including the flatter lower lying topography in the northern area and the more undulating southern topography" and that "The rest of the Broad Area is made up of open agricultural land with excellent views of the surrounding countryside".

3.3 The LVIA provides an overview of the hierarchy of published landscape character assessments and also cites these in relation to relevant landscape planning policy.

3.4 With regard to the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (2004), the relevant Landscape Character Types (LCT) are set out for the site and surrounding land, however the findings of the OWLS for the Alluvial Lowlands, River Meadowlands and Farmland Hills LCTs are not separately described such that the information is merged into one paragraph (LVIA para 4.32) and the different characteristics and guidance for each LCT that covers or adjoins the site cannot be distinguished. For example, the Farmland Hills and Alluvial Lowlands have different topography and land use and not all of the LCT promote enhancement of hedgerows as suggested in 4.32 of the LVIA.

3.5 The summarising and conjoining of information about the LCTs in paragraph 4.32

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results in slightly misleading paraphrasing, for example, that “The study notes visual impacts can be limited with judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area” - this recommendation is made in OWLS in relation to the siting, scaling and materials of new barns in the Farmland Hills LCT.

- 3.6 LVIA paragraph 4.43 acknowledges the age of the Cherwell Landscape Character Assessment (1995) and considers that although the baseline situation is likely to have changed “somewhat” since then, that the general guidance remains relevant. No similar critical analysis is provided of OWLS to indicate why the LCTs it defines are not considered relevant as landscape receptors. Given the availability of newer published information in OWLS, which although published at a county level, provides a similar scale of LCT to the Cherwell Assessment (and with LCTs that are non-contiguous and with updated guidance and characteristics to those in the Cherwell Assessment) it is considered that the OWLS LCT's would have been appropriate landscape receptors for the LVIA.
- 3.7 The published character assessments (notably OWLS) provide some steer on tree and shrub species that are typical of the area within the report narrative. This has been omitted from the quotations in the LVIA but could have provided useful steer on appropriate species for in-character mitigation planting.
- 3.8 A more site-specific landscape character appraisal of ‘the site and its local landscape context’ is undertaken by the LVIA author at Section 4.0. The geographic extent of the ‘local landscape context of the site’ is not mapped but is described at LVIA paragraph 4.52. Part of the baseline analysis is also included in Section 5 ‘Development Proposals and Landscape Strategy’ with further baseline information relating to landscape value provided in Section 6 ‘Assessment of Landscape Effects’.
- 3.9 Reference is made to electricity pylons and overhead wires that run across the site, which the LVIA considers comprise “detracting features which serve to reinforce the influence of infrastructure across the local landscape context” (LVIA para 4.54) and “which further ‘separates’ the site from the wider landscape” (LVIA para). The LVIA considers that the pylons and powerlines are “an urbanising/infrastructure influence” in terms of landscape quality (condition) and “detracting features in terms of scenic quality” in terms of considering the landscape value of both LCT R1a and the ‘Site and local landscape context’. We would note that the ‘pylons’ referenced in the LVIA are timber poles. The degree of influence that these features exert is a matter of professional judgment. In our opinion the baseline places too much emphasis upon the relatively few detractors that are present.
- 3.10 The landscape and visual baseline studies are supported by appropriate graphics.
- 3.11 A ZTV has been prepared to help inform the visual assessment and is included at Figure 1 of the LVIA. It indicates both the Bare Earth ZTV and Screened ZTV. At paragraph 4.66 to 4.68, the LVIA notes that the Screened ZTV under-represents the actual level of screening vegetation available. It should also be considered that the

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Screened ZTV over-represents the screening effect of woodland as well (as in reality woodland is not 'solid' and views can be available from the edges of and within areas of woodland). The important point is that ZTV's whether Screened or Bare Earth can only be considered 'theoretical' (as is inherent in their name) and as a tool supported by site visits and 'ground-truthing'.

- 3.12 Photomontages (LI Type 3) are provided for 4 viewpoints at Year 1 and Year 10 and are helpful to illustrate the potential visual effects likely to be experienced by users as well as the 'fit' of the proposal in the landscape from the selected locations. A photomontage looking south-west across the site from bridleway 209/16/10 on the western side of Otmoor would have been helpful to indicate the potential changes to views in this location.
- 3.13 An overview of the visual baseline is provided at LVIA paragraphs 4.58 – 4.59.
- 3.14 Table 7: 'Assessment of visual effects' identifies the 16 representative viewpoints used in the assessment, with the first column titled 'Viewpoint' also identifying the receptors (people) whom would experience the views. Baseline descriptions of the representative views are set out in Table 7 and broadly summarised in relation to different receptor groups in LVIA paragraph 7.8 -7.19. From footpath 309/1/10 (on approach to and crossing through the site) and from the Oxfordshire Way (footpath 260/6/10), the LVIA baseline description notes there are direct views of the site. These are direct and generally open views. As noted in the LVIA, other more contained views are also possible from footpath 309/1/10. Conversely other open views are also available.
- 3.15 The LVIA includes a section describing the Rowles Farm solar farm near Bletchingdon including 7 views taken from 2 public footpaths that pass the edge of the solar farm. We note that the Rowles Farm scheme may share the general principle of being located near Public Rights of Way but otherwise has a different landscape context, lying in proximity to the A34 trunk road and within the Clay Vale LCT (OWLS).
- Has the value of landscape and visual resources been appropriately addressed (including but not necessarily limited to) considerations of: local, regional and national designations; rarity, tranquillity, wild-land and valued landscape?
- 3.16 Landscape value has generally been considered in relation to the 'Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes' at Box 5.1 of GLVIA3, although the LVIA findings (LVIA Table 3 and Table 4) combine considerations relating to landscape quality (condition) and scenic quality which are separate concepts. As noted previously the LVIA does not address the recent TGN 02/21 which updates the Box 5.1 criteria and helpfully provides examples of indicators and evidence for each factor.
- 3.17 With regard to the value of views/visual value, this does not appear to be specifically addressed in the LVIA other than by reference to the methodology (LVIA para. 7.1),

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however the methodology does not fully address 'value' criteria for views in its' Table A.4. It is unclear how views have been valued.

[Have the criteria to inform levels of sensitivity \(both landscape and visual\) and magnitude of change been clearly and objectively defined, avoiding scales which may distort reported results?](#)

- 3.18 The criteria that inform landscape sensitivity (ie. landscape value and landscape susceptibility) are set out, although no definitional text is provided to describe levels of sensitivity, this being informed by professional judgement.
- 3.19 With regard to visual sensitivity, definitional text is provided to describe levels of sensitivity but the criteria that inform visual sensitivity (value of views and receptor susceptibility) are not separately set out. This would be acceptable if criteria relating to visual value were addressed more fully in the Criteria for visual sensitivity table (Table A.4).
- 3.20 With regard to Magnitude of landscape impacts (Table A.3) and Magnitude of visual impacts (Table A.5), both indicate that a landscape or view that is subject to substantial or very substantial change at Year 1 can only be assessed as resulting in a High or Very High magnitude of change if the duration of the impact is long term and unlikely to be reversible. In the case of this proposal, the solar park element is long term but with a lifespan of 40 years and thus reversible. Applying the criteria in Table A.3 and Table A.5 to this scheme, the visual magnitude of change upon the landscape or people experiencing views could not be assessed as anything more than 'Medium' magnitude at Year 1 even where the change might be considered to be substantial in scale and without any planting or mitigation being effective. This would appear to distort the reported results by setting a relatively low 'bar' for Year 1 effects.
- 3.21 The definition of Medium magnitude of visual impacts and the use of the word 'fair' is also questioned, e.g. "The size and scale of change is considered fair..." (LVIA Table A.5). Fair has a connotation of being equitable or acceptable - the other threshold criteria are more quantifiable and transparent, described as very substantial, substantial, small and very small change.

[How well is the cross-over with other topics, such as heritage or ecology, addressed?](#)

- 3.22 The LVIA touches upon the presence of heritage assets, trees and ecological designations in proximity to the site, but there is limited cross-over with other topics. Reference is made to the Pre-Development Arboricultural Report in connection with describing the 'Landscape Scheme and detailed design' however, other relevant specialist reports have not been referenced. Whilst these are separate studies in their own right, it would have been helpful, and perhaps expected given the guidance in TGN 02/21, to reference their findings in particular where these may have a bearing on landscape value and the rationale for the landscape proposals.

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Is there evidence of an iterative assessment-design process?

- 3.23 LVIA paragraph 5.19 onwards describes that the “development envelope for the site has been informed by the landscape and visual analysis and pays particular attention to several landscape related constraints and opportunities” and provides further description of how the range of opportunities and constraints identified in the LVIA (para 5.15 – 5.17) are addressed in the scheme layout and landscape strategy. LVIA paragraph 5.41 describes how the landscape mitigation measures have been developed as part of an iterative process and are integral to the scheme proposal.

Is it clear how the methodology was applied in the assessment, e.g.: consistent process, use of terms, clarity in reaching judgements and transparency of decision-making?

- 3.24 It is reasonably clear how the methodology was applied in the assessment but, as already noted, some steps in the process are not recorded and criteria require clarifying/updating to ensure that the LVIA’s noted focus on professional judgement is consistent and transparent.

How appropriate are the viewpoints that have been used?

- 3.25 The viewpoints that have been used are reasonably representative. A view from footpath 318/4/10 would have been merited for assessment and illustration in the LVIA representative views, together with a view east from the B4027 Wheatley Road leaving Islip. Additional photograph viewpoints along footpath 309/1/10, for example along the line of the access and higher ground to the south, and through the more open northern section of the site would have helped to demonstrate the range of views and kinetic viewing experience along the route.

How appropriate is the proposed mitigation, both measures incorporated into the scheme design and those identified to mitigate further the effects of the scheme, and mechanisms for delivering the mitigation?

- 3.26 The proposed landscape mitigation is described at LVIA paragraph 5.18 through to 5.41 and illustrated on the Development Framework Plan (LVIA Appendix B) with a detailed landscape scheme provided on a suite of seven Detailed Soft Landscape Proposals drawings (LVIA Appendix D) and Illustrative Landscape Sections.
- 3.27 The main approach to landscape mitigation relates to the retention and gapping up of existing hedgerows, together with planting of native tree and shrub belts to the interior of the field boundary hedgerows and planting of new hedgerows to the northern and western boundaries and native shrub mix with tree groups to the eastern and southern boundaries. Hedgerows would be maintained at no less than 3m in height (LVIA para. 5.34). An ecological enhancement area is proposed in the eastern most field of the site.
- 3.28 The broad approach to landscape mitigation could assist in screening the solar panels, security fencing and other elements of new built form from the public

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footpath (309/1/10) that crosses the site and introduce layers of vegetation that could in the long-term help to filter views from the viewpoints beyond the site. However, the planting in itself would fundamentally alter the open and relatively expansive nature of many of the views, notably from locations on the footpath across the site and from the Oxfordshire Way (public footpath 260/6/1) in the more open Farmland Hills LCT (OWLS). The planting of native tree and shrub belts beyond the existing and proposed native hedgerows would change the structure of the landscape on the site and how it is read in the locality. Overall, this part of the landscape would become less open and include more extensive linear belts of trees and shrubs around field boundaries. This change to the landscape structure and the implications of the mitigation on currently open views does not appear to have been recognised in the assessment. Whilst the planting of extensive hedgerows and new trees and shrubs could assist in helping to screen views and breaking up the scale of solar panels as well as reinstating and repairing landscape features (in line with some of the local character guidance), both visual amenity and landscape character would be substantially altered by the mitigation proposals in their own right.

- 3.29 LVIA paragraph 5.33 refers to “published character guidance” recommending “native tree and shrub planting to visually contain new developments”. The relevant guidance and Character Area/LCT should be added. Whilst the OWLS Farmland Hills LCT includes a guideline that “The siting, scale and materials used for the construction of new barns should be chosen to minimise visual intrusion. Where appropriate, they should be screened with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area.”, this is not in relation to all new development and relates to the part of the site around the temporary access. Section 5 of the LVIA would benefit from including a summary or cross references to the guidance for relevant LCTs/LCAs in the published studies to demonstrate how the mitigation strategy addresses those.
- 3.30 Security fencing is described as having an “offset for maintenance purposes of 4m generally and 1m along the northern boundary adjacent to the river corridor beyond which there is significant proposed planting” (LVIA para. 5.21). The offset is assumed to be from the site boundary but this is not clear. The proposed 2m clearance between the security fencing and existing hedgerow is subsequently described as “enhancement” at LVIA paragraph 5.31 which should be corrected as the security fencing and need to create screening of it, does not enhance.
- 3.31 The Development Framework indicates a permissive path would be provided linking the existing public footpath through the site with the bridleway to the east (including a timber footbridge connection). This does not appear to be referenced in Section 5 of the LVIA as a landscape measure but would offer increased recreational use of the landscape.
- 3.32 The proposals incorporate a relatively high percentage of evergreen species

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compared to local patterns and species compositions that are typical of the landscape character of the area. Whilst this would assist in providing year round screening value, it is not in our opinion in-character with the wider and local landscape context.

- 3.33 Our comments made above on the detailed landscape design relate to the appropriateness of the approach in LVIA terms rather than specific landscape design detail.

What is the reviewer's opinion of the consistency and objectivity in the application of the criteria and thresholds set out in the methodology for assessing the sensitivity of receptors, the magnitude of changes arising from the project, the degree/nature of effects, and the approach to judging the significance of the effects identified, in the case of EIA projects?

- 3.34 In terms of the sensitivity of landscape receptors, notwithstanding the comments made above about the approach to landscape value, the LVIA considers that the wider R1a LCT has higher landscape value (assessed as medium) and higher susceptibility (again assessed as medium) to the specific development proposal, than 'the site and its' local landscape context' (low to medium value and low to medium susceptibility). The site and its local landscape context forms a part of R1a as well as small areas of R4a 'Strongly undulating complex of farmed hills and valleys' from the Cherwell Landscape Assessment, (noting also that LCT R1a is not contiguous with the more recent OWLS LCT's). No clear justification is given in the LVA as to why the receptor that is proposed to directly accommodate the proposal has a lower susceptibility and value than the same LCT when considered at a wider scale. It is possible that the LVIA landscape susceptibility and value rankings have been too strongly influenced by the presence of "the settlement edge of Noke" and "Overhead electricity pylons and powerlines" which are frequently referenced as providing context in terms of built form, detracting features and existing infrastructure influence. The criteria set out in Table A.2 for landscape susceptibility suggest that neither the site nor LCT R1a meet the threshold for 'Low' susceptibility; notably neither are "landscapes with extensive existing reference or context to the type of proposed development", LCT R1a containing an existing solar park albeit at some distance from and of a different scale to the proposal for the site, whilst the site and local context contains no existing reference to solar use. The criteria set out in Table A.2 suggest that a landscape with low susceptibility might include cleared brownfield sites or landscapes with major infrastructure that has dominant influence on the landscape. The site in its local context could not be described in this way and in our judgement should have been considered to have a higher degree of susceptibility than assessed in the LVIA.
- 3.35 The assessment of sensitivity of visual receptors is set out in Table 7: Assessment of visual effects, although no narrative is included to justify the assigned rankings so the reader needs to apply these back to Table A.4 to understand how criteria may have been

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applied (noting the absence of visual value criteria in the table). There seems to be a degree of consistency though, in that generally views available to people using rural rights of way have been assigned 'High' visual sensitivity, with some identified as being 'Very high sensitivity' (seemingly those views from named or promoted recreational routes). We would note that views from the rural rights of way network are kinetic and the routes for the most part interlink and provide 'feeder' paths to each other and across the wider Otmoor landscape such that the LVIA would benefit from providing greater clarity or justification of why the views available to viewers in similar locations have been assigned different sensitivities.

- 3.36 It is unclear why the magnitude of change to views for users of footpath 309/1/10 where it passes the site (LVIA Viewpoints 1 and 2) is assessed as higher at Year 1 for views looking west (Medium) than it is for views looking east (Low to Medium), given that the existing hedgerow is gappy on both sides of the footpath with no hedge on parts of the eastern edge of the footpath and that views are experienced kinetically. At Year 1, mitigation planting would not have taken effect and the size and scale of the change to these close distance and direct views would initially be substantial or very substantial as the proposal would replace a significant proportion of the view across open fields with solar panels. This would reflect the methodology's criteria for a High or Very High magnitude of visual impact (Table A.5), notwithstanding our earlier comments on the 'duration of impact' criteria potentially skewing the thresholds.
- 3.37 By Year 10, the views looking west from footpath 309/1/10 (Viewpoint 1) are assessed in the LVIA as resulting in a Low-Medium magnitude of visual impact whilst views east (Viewpoint 2) would be Low magnitude (both assumed to be adverse in direction). By reference to LVIA Table A.5, this is defined as representing a situation where "The size and scale of change is considered fair" (for Medium magnitude) or "small" (for Low magnitude) "due to the extent of loss, addition or alteration of features, the changes to the composition of the view including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposal, the degree of contrast and the nature of the experience" and where "The geographical extent in relation to the angle, distance and proportion of visibility is considered as small or intermediate" (for Medium magnitude) or "Limited" (for Low magnitude). Year 1 and Year 10 photomontages are provided for Viewpoint 1 where the difference between the baseline view and the Year 10 view can be considered. In our opinion, the visual change by Year 10 is not a "small change" and the distance and proportion of the view that would have changed is not "limited" such that the Year 10 visual effects on Viewpoint 1 are warranted as falling towards the 'Low' magnitude threshold. We would agree that the impact of the built elements of the proposal would have reduced by Year 10 but not to the extent they would be 'Low - Medium' magnitude. The impact of the structural planting on the currently open nature and character of the view also needs to be considered and although clearly a matter of professional judgement, in our opinion is not necessarily a positive feature (in visual terms) when its placement is considered in

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relation to the open views.

- 3.38 For users of footpath 309/1/10 at Viewpoints 1 and 2, the LVIA considers the potential effect of the new hedgerow planting and adjoining tree and shrub belt planting on screening and filtering views of the solar panels, fencing and infrastructure, resulting in an overall reduction in visual effects over time. We agree that the planting would provide a degree of screening of the solar panels in the close distance views from the public footpath. However, in many places along the route, the nature of the existing view is relatively open, looking across the site in its wider visual backdrop of Otmoor and the wider lowlands, Woodeaten Hill and the generally well wooded high ground and farmland at Noke and Beckley. Whilst this is due to the gappiness or lack of hedgerow along the footpath and field boundaries in some places, it nonetheless currently allows open views to be appreciated that will be lost when the planting establishes. The potential loss of views due to planting is not assessed in the LVIA and in our opinion results in greater adverse effects upon views from the footpath than those assessed.
- 3.39 The retention of a channelled view to St Nicholas' Church in Islip is noted in the LVIA. Clearly the open countryside setting to the foreground of the view would be altered by the proposal.
- 3.40 Users of the Oxfordshire Way west of Noke (Viewpoint 5 also including photomontages and Viewpoint 6) are assessed in the LVIA as experiencing a Low to Medium magnitude of change to views on account of the proposed development. This sits towards the lower end of the range of thresholds that could be considered in the LVIA methodology, relating to a fair or small size and scale of change, similar to the visual impact assessed for views from the footpath on the site. By reference to the baseline photography and Year 1 photomontage, it can be seen that the proposed solar panels would extend across a significant proportion of the foreground of the view, their location being emphasised by the falling rounded topography of the foreground. This is considered to be a Year 1 visual impact of greater magnitude than Low-Medium and more akin to 'High'. We agree that the visual effects would be likely to reduce over time (as is demonstrated in the Viewpoint 5 Year 10 photomontage), however in comparison to the baseline view, we consider this more likely to be of Medium magnitude (i.e. the solar panels would remain visible as a moderate component of the view but planting would have established that would help to break down the scale of the panels and embed them into the wider visual scene.
- 3.41 As the LVIA is based upon representative viewpoints, it is unclear how the assessment 'rankings' are applied to receptors (people) using the same route where different views are available. For example, the visual effects on views available to users of footpath 309/1/10 are illustrated and separately assessed in Viewpoints 1 and 2, however there are a range of views along the footpath route that differ from the representative views, for example, where there is currently no field boundary hedge

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through the northern section of the site and from the section of footpath on higher ground to the south of the site where views are frequently channelled along the hedge-lined track. The visual effects upon these parts of the viewing experience along the footpath do not seem to have been assessed, only the view from the representative viewpoint. The approach means that the viewing experience from sections of footpath is not considered in the LVIA. The LVIA could helpfully define the length of footpath from which different types of views are available for the same receptor, with associated assessment rankings for those locations or provide greater differentiation and description in the assessment narrative, (for example recording that a lower or higher magnitude of impact would be experienced for views from Xm of the footpath because of...XX...).

- 3.42 We agree with the LVIA that the greatest degree of visual impact will be from public footpath 309/1/10, the Oxfordshire Way on elevated ground to the west of the site and in long distance views from the Oxfordshire Way where it follows the high ground to the north of Beckley. Visual effects are also considered likely to be experienced for users on public footpath 318/4/10 which is not considered in the LVIA but has open views at closer range albeit broadly similar to the gateway view shown from the Oddington Road (Viewpoint 9).
- 3.43 We note that the LVIA considers that "All direct views of the proposed development will be highly localised and the consequential degree of impact arising from the proposed development would be expected with almost any development site which retains public access adjacent or close to, its location". Notwithstanding our comments on the assessment thresholds/rankings, we note that whilst 'direct views' of the proposal may be localised, the LVIA finds that the proposed development would result in a degree of adverse impact at Year 1 on all of the views experienced by receptors where the existing farmland on the site in its wider and local countryside mosaic can be seen, including long distance views over 2km from the site.
- 3.44 With regard to the magnitude of landscape impacts, the proposed development is assessed in the LVIA as resulting in a Low magnitude of impact upon the LCT R1a at Year 1 resulting in a minor adverse significance of effect, reducing to 'negligible' magnitude at Year 10 with a negligible to minor adverse significance of effect at Year 10. In the context of the wider LCT, the magnitude of change would be expected to be lesser than that considered at a more localised scale of the site and local context. The 'Low' magnitude of impact assessed in the LVIA is in part based upon the premise that LCT R1a is identified as a 'Repair' landscape rather than a 'Conservation' landscape in the now almost 30 years old, Cherwell Landscape Character Assessment.
- 3.45 It should be noted that even at the time of publishing the guidance, a 'Repair' landscape was not considered to be a landscape in poor condition, 'repair' being the 2nd highest 'ranking' in the published assessment with other landscapes

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considered to be 'restoration' or 'reconstruction' landscapes, although the LVIA's observation that this presents an "opportunity to enhance the site in line with the immediate surrounding area" (LVIA 6.27) is also appropriate. In this regard we would highlight that the newer OWLS study provides guidance on character and strategies that should also be considered. We agree with the LVIA that the retention and enhancement of the existing hedgerow and tree network adjacent to the site is relevant to the consideration of LCT R1a and that the main impacts are likely to arise from the change in land use and we would add, overall land cover and perception of open farmland. At Year 1, the changes to landscape character and the perceptual, aesthetic and functional aspects of the landscape would be most pronounced for this landscape character type (ie seemingly falling into the threshold of 'Medium' magnitude in LVIA Table A.3).

- 3.46 The reduction in landscape impact assessed in the LVIA for LCT R1a by Year 10 is considered reasonable, especially when considered at the LCT scale, albeit in our opinion, the magnitude of change could be considered to be 'Low' at Year 10, noting the size and scale of change and geographical criteria in Table A.3. It would be appropriate for the LVIA to also give consideration to the future 'post-commissioning' landscape and the magnitude of landscape change that could be anticipated between the baseline landscape of LCT R1a and to all intents and purposes the landscape of LCT RC1a with the landscape mitigation proposals implemented and established but without the built elements of the solar park.
- 3.47 The overall magnitude of impact on the landscape character of the site and its local context is assessed in the LVIA as Medium at Year 1, resulting in a moderate adverse significance of effect. At Year 10, the LVIA assesses that the magnitude of impact will have reduced to low to medium, resulting in a minor to moderate adverse significance of effect. The landscape enhancements provided by the extensive planting in the Landscape Mitigation Strategy are set out in the assessment (para 6.32) and are not entirely disagreed with more that as noted for the visual effects, the impact of the planting on the perceptual qualities of the landscape also needs to be taken into consideration and may alter the balance of the findings regarding magnitude of impact (and ultimately significance of landscape effects).
- 3.48 Whilst there appears to be a generally reasonable degree of consistency in the application of the criteria and thresholds set out in the methodology, we consider that some of the criteria and thresholds have been mis-applied such that the susceptibility of the landscape receptors and magnitude of impact to landscape receptors and some visual receptors, most notably at Year 1, has a tendency to be understated in relation to the methodology (notwithstanding our queries on the methodology itself). To a degree this represents a difference in professional opinion but the noted discrepancies between the criteria and LVIA findings should be addressed and clarified.

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3.49 The nature of landscape and visual assessment is such that seemingly marginal changes in professional judgement on sensitivity or magnitude can be amplified and produce different outcomes. However, noted errors or potential mis-application of the criteria in the methodology should be addressed.

What is the opinion on the volume, relevance and completeness of the information provided about the development or project including, where relevant, detail about various development stages such as construction, operation, decommissioning, restoration, etc.?

3.50 The volume, relevance and completeness of the information provided about the project is appropriate for the nature of the development.

3.51 'Decommissioning' would have been useful to address as an assessment point in the LVIA to understand how/if the future landscape (in 40 years' time without the solar panels and associated infrastructure) might be considered appropriate in landscape character terms, and in terms of the long-term and permanent changes to visual amenity and the composition of views from public viewpoints.

Does the document clearly identify landscape and visual effects which need to be considered in the assessment?

3.52 It is considered that the LVIA broadly identifies most of the landscape and visual effects which need to be considered in the assessment, other than with regard to the OWLS LCT's (or justification as to why these are not relevant) and certain views. The implications of the proposed new landscape structure on currently open views and the perceptual and functional aspects of landscape character have not been addressed in the assessment.

Have levels of effect have been clearly defined and, in the case of LVIA, have thresholds for significance been clearly defined and have cumulative landscape and visual effects been addressed?

3.53 Levels of effect have been defined albeit these are not necessarily accepted by the reviewer.

3.54 Thresholds for significance are defined (Table A.6 and Table A. 7) although it is not stated which levels of effect are considered significant in the specific case of the project. Whilst the assessment is presented as an LVIA and includes an assessment of significance, we note that this is not an EIA development.

3.55 Cumulative landscape and visual effects have not been addressed and are not considered to apply in this instance.

4 CRITIQUE OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT

4.1 TGN 1/20 advises that this phase involves examining the 'presentation' of the assessment including report text, figures/ illustrations, visualisations, and other graphic material forming the LVIA or LVA, and answering the following questions which are noted in italicised blue font, with our response set out in the proceeding paragraphs:

Does the LVIA/ LVA display transparency, objectivity and clarity of thinking, appropriate and proportionate communication of all aspects of the assessment of landscape and visual effects, including cumulative effects.

4.2 The LVA displays a degree of transparency and is generally reasonable and mostly objective with some clarity of thinking. Some issues have been highlighted with regard to:

- § clarifying discrepancies in the methodology (landscape value and magnitude)
- § application of the methodology criteria in relation to landscape susceptibility and magnitude of landscape and visual impacts,
- § comprehensiveness of the landscape receptors (with regard to consideration of OWLS) and justifying or updating the selection of landscape receptors
- § ensuring the LVIA clearly identifies where there is a differentiation in the nature of existing views and any variations in visual impacts for transient/kinetic views (notably for users of footpath 309/1/10 and the Oxfordshire Way)

Have the findings of the assessment been clearly set out and are they readily understood?

4.3 The findings of the assessment are reasonably clearly set out and are readily understandable.

Has there been clear and comprehensive communication of the assessment, in text, tables and illustrations?

4.4 The LVA is considered to be reasonably clear and comprehensive in its communication of the assessment. The LVA separates out landscape and visual effects effectively and in accordance with best practice. These two separate but interrelated parts of the assessment are both dealt with in text and by mean of tables and annotated photosheets for the assessment of views.

Are the graphics and/or visualisations effective in communicating the characteristics of the receiving landscape and visual effects of the proposals at agreed representative viewpoints?

4.5 The figures and representative photographs are of a good standard and demonstrate the characteristics of the receiving landscape. The visual effects of the proposals are represented in photomontages at baseline, Year 1 and Year 10 from four representative viewpoints. Detailed planting proposals plans are included alongside

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Landscape Sections demonstrating how the proposals relate to existing and proposed new features on the ground.

- 4.6 The figures generally contain appropriate information that is presented in a well-structured manner.

[Are the graphics and/or visualisations fit for purpose and compliant with other relevant guidance and standards?](#)

- 4.7 Graphics and visualisations are fit for purpose and appear compliant with other relevant guidance and standards (although no specific methodology has been checked).

[Is there a clear and concise summation of the effects of the proposals?](#)

- 4.8 The LVIA includes a Summary and Conclusions at Section 8.0.

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5 OVERALL CONCLUSION: REPORT THE REVIEW

5.1 TGN 1/20 advises that this final step of the review process is to use the reviewer's findings to produce a short report which should include (but need not be limited to) the following issues which are noted in italicised blue font, with our response set out in the proceeding paragraphs.

Confirmation of the brief issued to the reviewer setting out the scope of the review;

5.2 The scope of this review was to undertake a review of the submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) in general accordance with the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 1/20 (10 Jan 2020). This gives guidance for reviewing Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs). It identifies the three main components of a review as to the completeness, competency and reliability of an LVIA / LVA. These are stated as:

1. Checking the methodology used to undertake the assessment, the criteria selected (including balance between), and the process followed;
2. Checking the baseline, content and findings of the assessment; and
3. Checking the presentation of the assessment findings.

5.3 The brief and scope of work include desktop study and a site visit to consider the site in its context and inspect viewpoints identified in the LVA.

5.4 The components noted above would be addressed in a written report and summarised in an overall conclusion, reporting the findings of the review. The scope noted that the report summary may also include further information not covered in TGN 1/20 but which is considered relevant to reporting on the compliance (or otherwise) of the LVA with GLVIA3 or matters of competence or expertise and may include comments or observations on the proposed development that HBA consider would have a bearing on its landscape and visual appropriateness and / or "fit" within the landscape.

5.5 The scope was also to advise CDC on the LVIA's consideration of the potential effects on Green Belt (as far as this pertains to openness and visual matters). This is separately addressed within this review and general comments made on the completeness and reliability that can be placed upon this.

A summary of how the review was undertaken);

5.6 The review was undertaken by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute experienced in the preparation and review of LVIA's and LVA's.

5.7 The work involved both desk-based review and a site visit. The desk-based work centred on reading the LVA, following through the methodology by means of both the text and tables and spot checking a range of the other documents referred to.

5.8 The site work involved walking some of local public rights of way, as well as driving the

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roads in the vicinity of the site and, where time allowed, further afield, to check that the range of viewpoints was representative and that the LVA descriptions of the nature of the views and the proposed development in the views were appropriate.

- 5.9 The LVA Review then sought to address the individual questions raised by LI TGN 1/20, where possible, giving examples.

[A summary of findings of the review of the assessment methodology;](#)

- 5.10 The LVA methodology is generic (which is not unusual) and broadly compliant with GLVIA3 guidance, however a number of observations are made regarding the stated approach to landscape value, visual susceptibility and assessing magnitude of change. With regard to landscape value, TGN 02/21 has not been referenced and therefore its updated approach to assessing landscape value outside of nationally designated landscapes has not been followed. The visual susceptibility criteria do not fully address the value of views – this should be added to the methodology. GLVIA3 also requires that existing published character assessments are critically reviewed with regard to their appropriateness for LVIA – this has not been carried out for OWLS, the LVIA instead relying upon the older Cherwell Landscape Character Assessment.

- 5.11 It is not always clear how the assessment methodology has been applied, notably in relation to the susceptibility of landscape receptors and magnitude of landscape and visual impacts.

[A summary of findings of the review of the scope of the assessment;](#)

- 5.12 The scope of the LVIA is considered to be acceptable in terms of the geographic extent and the range of issues identified, save for:

- § consideration of the OWLS LCT and LCA as landscape receptors. OWLS provides a more recent published character ‘baseline’ to inform the LVIA but has not been used in the landscape effects assessment and no justification is provided for this.
- § consideration of the range of factors that are recognised to inform landscape value (refer GLVIA Box 5.1 and TGN 02-21)
- § consideration of walkers on footpath 318/4/10 and road users on the B4027 as visual receptors.

[A summary of findings of the review of the actual assessment of effects;](#)

- 5.13 It is considered that the susceptibility of landscape receptors assigned in the LVIA does not fully reflect the criteria provided in the LVIA methodology. Applying the stated methodology, the landscape receptors are considered to have higher susceptibility to the proposed development than the ‘thresholds’ assessed in the LVIA assessment. This is in part due to the application of the methodology criteria but also suggests an overstatement of the perceived urbanising and infrastructure influences on the site and local landscape within the LVIA.

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- 5.14 This is a similar situation for the assessed magnitude of landscape impacts upon the landscape character type R1a and the site in its local landscape context where discrepancies have been identified between the assessed 'thresholds' at Year 1 and the criteria provided in Table A.3 for those thresholds.
- 5.15 Overall, it is considered that the overall landscape effects assessed are slightly understated due to not considering the potential impacts of the proposed planting scheme on the perceptual qualities of the open farmland landscape and in part due to a potential misapplication of the methodology criteria.
- 5.16 The assessed visual effects of the proposed development upon views for some visual receptors (notably, users of public footpath 309/1/10 and the Oxfordshire Way), in particular at Year 1, also tend to be understated in relation to the methodology (notwithstanding our queries on the methodology itself). To a degree this (and the noted comments on landscape magnitude) may represent a difference in professional opinion but the noted discrepancies between the methodology criteria and how it is applied to the LVIA findings should be addressed and clarified.
- 5.17 Whilst we question the assessed magnitude of visual impact in the LVIA, we agree with the LVIA that overall, the greatest degree of visual impact will be experienced in views for those receptors along the public rights of way network passing through and adjoining the site itself and the elevated receptors (The Oxfordshire Way and longer distance views from the elevated ground to the south-east near Beckley). We also agree that the Year 1 visual effects of the development will be adverse for the majority of identified views with the potential to reduce over time.
- 5.18 The nature of landscape and visual assessment is such that seemingly marginal changes in professional judgement on sensitivity or magnitude can be amplified and produce different outcomes. Noted errors or potential mis-application of the criteria in the methodology should therefore be addressed both in the interests of presenting a robust assessment but also in helping CDC to determine where potential differences may arise in professional judgement (rather than methodology/approach).
- 5.19 The LVIA broadly identifies most of the landscape and visual effects which need to be considered in the assessment, other than with regard to the OWLS LCT's (or justification as to why these are not relevant) and certain views that have not been assessed and would add to the robustness of the assessment (albeit not necessarily altering the general findings). Differences in the nature of views and magnitude of effect upon kinetic or transient views experienced by the same receptors (for example as experienced when walking along the same footpath in different locations) should be indicated in the LVIA narrative for clarity and to draw out the scale of views likely to be impacted by the proposals (for example by citing the length of footpath likely to experience the assessed level of effects).
- 5.20 It is considered that the assessments of landscape and visual effects should have considered the impact of the proposed new landscape structure on currently open

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views and the perceptual and functional aspects of landscape character. Whilst at face value, the screening value of the planting and long-term enhancement that may be achieved through hedgerow retention, management and establishment of new features are broadly accepted, there is a fine balance to be made in the assessment, regarding the appropriateness and potential adverse impact of extensive planting in the context of the existing perception of open farmland, particularly in light of the site's location in Green Belt. As in any landscape and visual impact assessment, the negative and positive (and neutral) effects all need to be considered and a professional judgement drawn as to where the overall direction of the magnitude and significance of effects lies. Without consideration of the potential negative effects, the LVIA does not present a robust overall assessment from which CDC can clearly see where the balance ought to lie.

- 5.21 Given the stated 40 year lifespan of the built aspects of the solar farm and therefore the potential reversibility of some of the landscape and visual effects, it is considered that it would have been appropriate for the LVIA to consider the 'post-commissioning' phase as an assessment point in the LVIA, acknowledging that this would be based upon assumptions about landscape management and what the landscape and visual situation might be in 40 years' time.

[A summary of findings of the presentation of the assessment;](#)

- 5.22 The presentation of the assessment is acceptable.

[A summary statement by the reviewer in respect of appropriateness, quality, comprehensiveness, compliance and conformity with relevant guidance and regulations;](#)

- 5.23 The scope and overall quality of the LVIA is appropriate and broadly conforms with the thrust of GLVIA3 other than where noted in relation to landscape value and critique of published assessments. As the site lies outside of any landscape designation, TGN 02/21 should have been used to inform landscape value.

- 5.24 The LVIA could be more comprehensive in terms of the consideration of the OWLS LCT and LCT to inform the landscape baseline, as landscape receptors and in considering the appropriateness of the landscape proposal in relation to relevant guidance. Two visual receptors have identified that have not been addressed in the LVIA and the differences in visual effect could be differentiated for the same receptors (eg. in relation to transient views). The impact of proposed planting upon open views and upon the more open character and qualities of the landscape has not been assessed. The proposed permissive path should on the Development Framework would merit consideration in terms of potential landscape impacts. Greater consideration of the post-decommissioning phase of the project would also be appropriate to include in the LVIA as an additional assessment point (40 years in the future), acknowledging this would be broad-brush. This would provide a more comprehensive assessment for CDC to review and weigh up the full range of likely

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landscape and visual effects.

[Recommendations for further information to be sought \(if necessary\);](#)

5.25 To be able to make a fully informed planning decision, the following clarifications or further information is recommended to be sought from the applicant:

- § Clarification on the methodological approach to landscape value and the weighting/consideration of designations within those criteria (including the noted potential discrepancy re. Green Belt).
- § Clarification on the LVIA methodology criteria and thresholds for landscape susceptibility and its' application within the assessment.
- § Clarification on the LVIA methodology criteria and thresholds for magnitude of landscape and visual impacts and its' application within the assessment, notably with regard to Year 1 assessments.
- § Consideration of TGN 02/21 in relation to landscape value. Notably, the 'functional' factor added in TGN 02/12 would be relevant to incorporate within the LVIA assessment of landscape value.
- § Justification for the 'scoping out' of the OWLS LCT/LCA as landscape character receptors in favour of LCT R1a as defined in the older Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment or inclusion of relevant OWLS LCT/LCA as a landscape character receptor(s).
- § Consideration of the impact of the proposed new landscape structure / planting on currently open views and the perceptual and functional aspects of landscape character.
- § Assessment of views available to walkers using public footpath 318/4/10 and road users of the B4027 south of Islip.
- § Ensure that the transient/kinetic views along public rights of way (and roads) is clearly identified in the LVIA text and that the changing nature of different views and assessed effects is differentiated between. The LVIA could helpfully define the length of footpath from which different types of views are available for the same receptor, setting out the associated assessment rankings for those locations (for example recording that a lower or higher magnitude of impact would be experienced for views from Xm of the footpath because of...XX...).
- § Provide cross references between the proposed landscape mitigation proposals and the relevant strategies in the published landscape character assessments and policies.
- § Consideration of the inclusion of the 'Decommissioning' phase of the project as an

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assessment point in the LVIA (ie. the landscape and visual situation in 40 years' time without the solar panels and associated infrastructure) – albeit a broad brush consideration

[Overall conclusions on the adequacy of the assessment and whether it is sufficient to support making an informed planning decision.](#)

- 5.26 The LVIA would benefit from addressing the recommendations made above to ensure the full range of landscape and visual receptors are addressed (or justified) and to ensure a more comprehensive assessment of landscape and visual effects.
- 5.27 HBA do not agree with some aspects of the methodology and its application within the LVIA, and take the view that the susceptibility of the landscape has been understated and the assessed magnitude of landscape impact also understated (notably at Year 1), either on account of the application of the methodology or professional judgement relating to the influence of existing detractors in the landscape, the open character/qualities and where the balance of effects lie with regard to incorporating substantial new structural planting of hedgerows and tree and shrub belts in a landscape where open views are currently available and the open qualities contribute to both landscape character and the function of the landscape (partly as Green Belt).
- 5.28 The LVIA considers that the landscape character of the site and its local context would experience a **moderate adverse** magnitude of effect at Year 1, reducing to **minor to moderate adverse** by Year 10. HBA consider that a higher magnitude of effect would be expected at Year 1 when the methodology is applied as stated and the impact of planting is considered in the context of the perceptual and functional qualities of the site as open farmland. We would agree that this has the potential to reduce over time, in particular noting the 40 year lifespan of the solar park itself. However as noted, the creation and enhancement of landscape features needs to be weighed against the loss of open qualities. Similarly, the impact of the not insignificant planting belts upon currently open views and amenity from the public footpath through and adjoining the site needs to be taken into consideration. This is not currently clearly addressed in the LVIA.
- 5.29 The question also remains as to what the longer-term landscape and visual impacts of the proposal could be once the solar park infrastructure is removed and this would seem a key issue for the LVIA to also consider.
- 5.30 CDC should not wholly rely on the LVIA's findings as currently reported until the range of issues noted above have been addressed.

Other considerations

- 5.31 The scope for this LVIA Review also includes a review of the LVIA's consideration of the potential effects on Green Belt (as far as this pertains to openness and visual

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matters) and its completeness and reliability that can be placed upon it and whether HBA agree with its findings.

- 5.32 The LVIA draws upon the 2015 Oxford Green Belt Study to describe the contribution of the 'Broader Area' within which the site lies to the purposes of Green Belt. Whilst the LVIA considers the headline findings in relation to each of the purposes of Green Belt, it does not set out any of the supporting narrative included in the Green Belt Study to provide a broader baseline understanding of the site's contribution to Green Belt.
- 5.33 The LVIA correctly records (LVIA para 8.15) that the site lies in 'Broad area 3' considered in the Green Belt Study which was assessed as making the following contributions to the purposes of Green Belt:
- § Green Belt purpose 1 No Contribution
 - § Green Belt purpose 2 No Contribution
 - § Green Belt purpose 3 (to assist in safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment: High
 - § Green Belt purpose 4 (to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns): Low
- 5.34 With regard to Green Belt purpose 3, the LVIA notes that all forms of development are likely to comprise encroachment to a greater or lesser extent, but that "In this case, the site is extremely small relative to its Green Belt context, limiting this prospect. The mitigation strategy proposed will serve to assimilate it into the local and wider landscape in a manner consistent with local landscape character." And that "Insofar as landscape and visual matters are concerned, it is not considered that the proposed development is likely to unacceptably affect the purposes of the Green Belt".
- 5.35 It is agreed that the site is small relative to the overall size of the Green Belt which limits the degree or scale of encroachment into the countryside. Nonetheless the proposal would encroach new built form into the countryside albeit for a fixed period of 40 years.
- 5.36 We note that whilst the LVIA considers the scheme will be assimilated into the local and wider landscape character, this is based upon the assessment of a scheme against a landscape character type from an almost 30 year old landscape character assessment, rather than in reference to more recent character assessment and guidelines provided in OWLS. As noted in the LVIA Review above, the LVIA needs to justify why despite a newer assessment being available, this has not been taken into consideration in the LVIA and character guidance drawn from it. When the OWLS LCT and LCA are taken into account, the LVIA may find differently with regard to the scheme's ability to assimilate in the landscape (in either a positive or negative

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direction).

5.37 Whilst the LVIA touches upon the potential impacts of the proposed development upon the purposes of Green Belt, it does not specifically identify or consider the potential impact of the proposed development upon the openness of the Green Belt. This is a separate but linked assessment to the LVIA.

5.38 National Planning Practice Guidance (July 2019) sets out the factors to be taken into account when considering the impact of a proposal on openness, noting that these factors include, but are not limited to:

- § Openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – the visual impact of a proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
- § The duration of the development and its remendability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and
- § The degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.

5.39 Each is considered broadly below (noting that HBA's comments provide guidance to CDC and do not constitute an assessment of the proposals' impact upon openness or indeed upon landscape character and visual amenity).

HBA comments relating to NPPG factors in considering the impact upon openness

- § Openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – the visual impact of a proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
 - The LVIA and accompanying photographs and photomontages are useful tools to assist in making judgements on the visual impact of a proposal and it is important therefore that the assessment is robust, transparent and comprehensive. We have requested clarifications and made comments on the visual effects assessment that should be addressed and will also assist with CDC's consideration of the visual aspects of openness.
 - The openness of the existing site is important to consider. The site is perceived as open farmland and as part of a wider mosaic of open farmland, woodland and wetland. This is perceived from the public footpath that runs up to and across the site as well as public rights of way and roads in the locality and on elevated ground. The LVIA considers that those views would be subject to the greatest degree of visual impact from the proposals.
 - Although HBA do not currently agree with all of the visual assessment findings, it is noted that the LVIA considers that visual effects would range from Major Adverse to Moderate Adverse at Year 1 (Minor Adverse for the

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longer distance viewpoints 13 and 14 near Beckley) and for the views available to people using the footpath across and approaching the site and the Oxfordshire Way, would remain adverse at Year 15. Although the assessment does not consider the impact upon views in relation to their specific open qualities, the screening of the solar park is a clear consideration in the visual assessment and the photomontages demonstrate how new planting would change the open character perceived in the views (notably in Viewpoint 1). Photomontages from Viewpoint 5 and Viewpoint 13) typically illustrate how the solar panels would initially be noticeable in place of open fields in elevated views but that the proposed structure planting would in time start to break down the scale of panels that are visible. In the overlooking views, the visual impact relates more to the imposition of the panels in place of farmland in the view although for views from the Oxfordshire Way (Viewpoint 5), the planting strategy also results in a degree of negative impact upon perceived openness.

- o The proposals introduce new built form and quite extensive planting across the site. The introduction of the built elements would perhaps inevitably have an adverse impact upon the visual openness of this part of the Green Belt by introducing built development where there was previously open farmland.
 - o The provision of information relating to the volumes/coverage of proposed built forms on the site compared to the amount of existing open farmland would assist CDC with understanding impact upon openness.
- § The duration of the development and its remendability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness;
- o The solar park has a 40 year lifespan and therefore the proposed built elements would eventually be removed from the land. The proposed landscape mitigation is not based upon retaining or enhancing the state of openness but introduces quite substantial new planting of hedgerows as well as tree and shrub belts. These could deliver enhancement to landscape features and reflect the local wooded patterns in the landscape but would clearly also impact upon the sense of openness and available open views at a local scale.
 - o The impact of the planting strategy upon currently open views and

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character has not been assessed in the LVIA but is recommended in the LVIA Review above.

- The 'decommissioned' phase of the project has not been assessed in the LVIA and is also recommended to be considered by the applicant in the LVIA Review above.
 - Consideration could be given to whether some parts of the proposed landscape strategy should allow for 'reinstatement' to the original state of openness (for example by allowing for the retention of views across the site). This presents an awkward challenge between achieving a degree of visual filtering of the solar park during operation, creating a strong landscape structure but also balancing green belt openness.
 - These aspects would help to identify to CDC whether there is a prospect of the openness of this part of the Green Belt covered by the site being 'returned' in the longer term or to what degree it would be lost/adversely affected by the proposal including in the long terms through planting.
- § The degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.
- The proposed solar park is considered to generate a relatively low level of activity on the land, this would reduce further once decommissioned.