



landscape architecture ■ urban design
expert witness ■ environmental planning

REVIEW OF LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

on behalf of

CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

in connection with

Application reference: 22/03873/F – Padbury Brook

February 2024

Date of Issue: 04/03/2024
Status/ Revision Final
File ref: 933/HBA reports/933 Review of LVA
Checked: DH Approved NB.

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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 and reviews 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 Appraisal (LVA) prepared by ADAS on behalf of the applicant in relation to application **22/01682/F**, described as:

“Installation and operation of a renewable energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with a switchgear container, inverter/transformer units, Site access, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.”

- 1.5 The review considers the LVA 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 general accordance with the Landscape Institute’s Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 1/20 (published 10th January 2020).
- 1.6 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.**
- 1.7 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/LVA Review. In this instance, the scope of the LVA 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.
 - Comments on whether HBA agree with the LVA findings overall.

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- 1.8 Where comments are made by HBA on the LVA findings and judgements, these are based upon professional judgement, review of the baseline and site inspection. A separate LVA has not been carried out by HBA.
- 1.9 TGN 1/20 notes that in some instances it may be appropriate to discuss issues arising with the author of the assessment under review. This was not allowed for at this stage.
- 1.10 This LVA Review has been prepared by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute with substantive experience of undertaking and reviewing LVAs and LVAs.
- 1.11 The core material that is relevant to this review is the following document:
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal by ADAS ref 1051765-L-RP-01(01) dated November 2022 including its associated Appendices and Figures;
- 1.12 Additionally, it is acknowledged that the application includes an “*Updated Landscape and Ecological Management Plan*” (LEMP), “*Padbury Brook Site Enhancement Strategy*” (SES) and a “*Planning, Design and Access Statement*” (PDAS). These have been briefly reviewed by way of forming a more rounded understanding of the proposals but are not commented on in any detail this review.
- 1.13 In addition to the above, GLVIA3 and TGN 1/20, the following are also relevant:
- 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
 - Cherwell District Council, Countryside Design Summary SPD, June 1998
 - National Character Area (NCA) 108 ‘Upper Thames Clay Vales as defined by Natural England;
 - Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study;
 - Buckinghamshire Landscape Character Assessments;
 - 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
- 1.14 HBA are familiar with the wider area in relation to our other work for CDC. However, a specific visit including inspecting the majority of the viewpoints identified in the LVA has been undertaken to review the findings of the LVA and provide comments on the judgements of landscape and visual effects. This was carried out on 31st January 2024 in conditions of reasonable visibility. Broadleaved vegetation was not in leaf, so visibility was at its most

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unrestricted.

- 1.15 This report seeks to follow the main structure identified above at Paragraph 1.6 but inevitably there is significant overlap between the matters TGN 1/20 identifies for review. It is thus frequently the case that one particular point has implications on several parts of the review.

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:

- 1 *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 *What consultations have been carried out and have responses been acted upon?*
- 3 *Has the scope and methodology of the assessment been formally agreed with the determining authority? If not, why not?*
- 4 *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?*
- 5 *Does the assessment demonstrate a clear understanding and provide a separate consideration of landscape and visual effects?*
- 6 *Does the assessment demonstrate comprehensive identification of receptors and of all likely effects? and*
- 7 *Does the assessment display clarity and transparency in its reasoning, the basis for its findings and conclusions?*

2.2 The LVA is dated November 2022 but the Quality Assurance (LVA page1) is dated 23/08/2022 and is shown as "Draft for comment". The LVA should be updated / corrected as necessary.

2.3 There is no reference to a scoping opinion, but this is not relevant in the context of the scheme which is not subject to EIA.

2.4 The LVA notes at para 2.15 that Cherwell District Council (CDC) were consulted on the viewpoint location and the methodology for the LVA and quotes part of CDC's response:

"..a full Landscape Visual Assessment will be required to fully assess the potential impact of the scheme. The suggested viewpoints do appear to be adequate but the LVA should be conducted in accordance with GLVIA3".

2.5 There is no specific reference to the detailed scope of the LVA assessment or the LVA methodology having been agreed with CDC.

2.6 The LVA methodology is partly set out in Section 2 of the LVA and in Appendix 4 where guidance and the assessment criteria are set out.

2.7 Figures supporting the appraisal were contained in Appendix 2 although initially these were not available on the CDC portal.

2.8 A glossary of terms is contained in Appendix 3 and the methodology for the photographic work is contained in Appendix 5. Viewpoints and Photomontages are in Appendix 2.

2.9 The glossary contains no definition of Landscape Value or Susceptibility which are included in

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the GLVIA3 glossary, although the LVA text contains guidance on these components of the appraisal at Paras 6.1 and 6.7. This is rather inconsistent.

- 2.10 The glossary shows that a range of documents have been drawn from to form the definitions. References are given as appropriate but there is no specific explanation in the LVA text on how the various documents mesh together. Any departure from GLVIA3 guidance should be clearly noted and this is only partly addressed by some of the appraisal tables including footnotes referring to documents other than GLVIA3.
- 2.11 There are a broadly suitable range of tables contained in Appendix 4 to set out how the appraisal is structured. Table A4.1, Landscape Condition, contains no reference to the intactness of the landscape which GLVIA3 notes as a contributing factor to condition. It is considered that it would have been helpful to have a table setting out typical criteria for Landscape and Visual Values although these have been partly captured in the text at A4.13 and the accompanying bullet points and at A4.36.
- 2.12 It is considered that the range of ranking criteria set out are broadly acceptable and in common usage, being essentially generic, although an inconsistency is considered to apply in Table A4.6 where several of the typical criteria given for 'High Sensitivity' could equally apply to the 'Very High Sensitivity' ranking.
- 2.13 The LVA does not set out the plans that have been used for the appraisal. This should have been included in Section 3 where the proposed development is described. This is considered to be an error. Not only should this include the appropriate references to the plans showing the overall layout of the proposals but to the incidental ancillary features such as battery storage containers and so forth that are likely to contribute to landscape or visual effects. For the avoidance of doubt, best practice would refer to individual unique drawing references, clearly tying the appraisal to the documents on which it is based, including any plan showing indicative mitigation proposals.
- 2.14 The LVA and the Methodology shows a satisfactory understanding of, and suitably separates out, the consideration of landscape effects and visual effects.
- 2.15 The identification of landscape receptors is incomplete. Approximately one third of the 3KM Study Area lies within Buckinghamshire. No mention of the Buckinghamshire Landscape Character Assessment is included in the LVA and neither are any Buckinghamshire Landscape Character Types or Areas mapped on Figure 1, (although it is acknowledged that the figure is titled Oxfordshire Landscape Character). It is not clear if LVA para 5.10 is directed at this omission. This states: *"There are other LCT within the study area. The field study found there was limited intervisibility between these and the site and as such any landscape effects on them would be limited. They will not be considered within this report."* This statement could be acceptable if it applies to the landscape with Oxfordshire but is not acceptable if it is meant to cover the omission of Buckinghamshire. In this regard it is noted that other baseline features have been mapped within Buckinghamshire, eg. Listed Buildings and Ancient Woodland.
- 2.16 Also, whilst the OWLs study has been referenced in LVA Section 5 and the Landscape Character Types (LCTs) mapped on Figure 1, the figure fails to record the specific Landscape

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Character Areas (LCA's) that make up the various identified LCTs. For example, the generic LCT of rolling farmland which covers the majority of the site comprises the unique Godington Hall (BC/2) LCA, as noted in the LVA (Para 5.4). As such the proposal will affect a substantial portion of this individual LCA compared with a much smaller portion of the wider generic LCT. This is considered to potentially misrepresent the basis of the appraisal and, in the reviewer's opinion, should be rectified.

- 2.17 The landscape baseline data is thus incompletely recorded and conflicts with LVA para 2.11.
- 2.18 The appraisal approach adopted also conflicts with the LVA methodology given at LVA para 2.9. This states that the appraisal is at several levels, site level, 500m around the site, and at Landscape Character Area (LCA) level. This has not been followed. The site and the 500m buffer area considered as one, (not unacceptable in this instance the reviewer's opinion) but the LCA's have been omitted, Landscape Character Types (LCT) being substituted. There is no explanation for this divergence.
- 2.19 The visual receptors identified in the text do not include workers, but indoor and outdoor workers are included in Table A4.6. Outdoor workers would be exposed to some visual effects from the proposals, albeit this is unlikely to be a determining factor in this case.
- 2.20 The cable trench works which extend from the main body of the site to the north eastern edge of Bicester are excluded from the scope of the appraisal on the basis that these are short term and sited within the public highway (LVA 5.12, 5.13). This is probably justified in terms of the LVA, but by way of fuller context, no mention of the cable trench is included in the overall description of the proposed works which is considered to be an oversight. (It is noted that the Planning and Design and Access Statement refers to some of the cable trench being in the verge which raises the potential of damage to verge side vegetation such as hedgerows and trees. This is not addressed /referenced in the LVA).
- 2.21 The proposed highway access is not specifically mentioned in the 'description of the works', nor is it discussed in any detail in the appraisal, yet this will be an obvious change in the rural road scene. However, the access is possibly rather misleadingly described at para 3.3 which implies no change to the existing agricultural access. However, the access plans show the existing access would be widened, removing some hedgerow, kerbing would be introduced and, potentially, some hedgerow tree clearance to accommodate sight lines. In this regard there are two plans showing differing visibility splays included in the application package. The LVA does not detail which has been used in the appraisal. Reference is made to a "*turning area for the benefit of larger vehicles on entering the site*" but it is not clear where this is on the layout plan, although a turning area is noted on the indicative construction compound drawing. The LVA should have set this sort of detail out as an aid to understanding the fuller implications of the scheme.
- 2.22 The LVA notes at para 3.2 that for the "*design of the Arrays, a tracker system will be utilised to orient the panels towards the sun throughout the day*". In this brief review no other reference to this feature has been noted and, in places, the panels are referenced as fixed. It would be helpful to have some information on the degree of movement and if or how this alters the overall height of the panels which could potentially alter their prominence during the day.

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- 2.23 The LVA description of the site does not identify its extent (which is understood to be in the order of 60 Ha) and mis-describes it as comprising 4 fields (LVA5.20) whereas it comprises 7.
- 2.24 The LVA contains guidance as to what are deemed to constitute short, medium or long-distance views and long, medium and short term timescales. This is good practice.
- 2.25 The LVA includes an assessment at completion (Year 0) and Year 15. This is good practice. However, the assumptions used for making the Year 15 assessment are not clear and, given that there is only an indicative mitigation strategy in place, is open to question, particularly as the LVA states (para 2.5 2nd bullet) that “*any proposed landscape mitigation has a full effect*”. Furthermore, the assumption for annual growth of mitigation tree planting set out in the LVA (para 9.5) at 500mm p.a. is considered ambitious. It is suggested that a more conservative approach should be taken.
- 2.26 Whilst there is no named landscape masterplan, the proposed layout of the solar array, its ancillary features, fencing, etc., together with existing and proposed mitigation planting is shown on ADAS drawing 1051745-ADAS-XX-XX-DR-PL-8000. This has some information on possible planting but no information on densities, sizes etc., but includes a reference stating: “*Exact locations/specifications of planting will be agreed via planning condition / the final conditioned LEMP*”. This is acceptable. (Note. The proposed tree planting includes Lombardy Poplar and Scots pine. In the reviewer’s opinion, neither would be considered typical of the local landscape character.)
- 2.27 The assessment only displays a degree of clarity and transparency in its reasoning and the basis for its findings and conclusions can be partly followed. The treatment of visual effects is not clear in terms of the specific consideration of value and susceptibility, and, in this regard, we draw attention to LVA para A4.37 which, in the reviewer’s opinion, is confused / confusing and incorrect. Nor does it correspond with the content of the flow diagram at Figure 2.1 LVA page 5.
- 2.28 In terms of the topography, the LVA (para5.17) describes the site as being “*tucked into an area of lower ground between two undulations of higher ground to east and west*”. As can be seen by reference to Figure 3, this fails to record that the southern portion of the site rises onto a local shallow ridge at a level of over 100m AOD although this is subsequently noted at para. 5.21.
- 2.29 The LVA notes that there is a Registered Park and Garden within the Study Area (LVA 6.3) but this is not shown on Figure 2, Designations.
- 2.30 Overall, the LVA methodology is considered to be broadly compliant with the thrust of GLVIA3. Quite correctly, it allows for some professional judgement in forming conclusions as to, for example, the value, susceptibility, magnitude of change and level of effect, but sometimes there is a lack of clear justification for the judgement. It is generally reasonably well written, clear and succinct albeit there are some inconsistencies as noted elsewhere in this review.

3 CHECK THE BASELINE CONTENT, AND FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT

3.1 TGN 1/20 advises that this phase should involve the following:

- 1 *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)?*
- 2 *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 *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?*
- 4 *How well is the cross-over with other topics, such as heritage or ecology, addressed?*
- 5 *Is there evidence of an iterative assessment-design process?*
- 6 *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?*
- 7 *How appropriate are the viewpoints that have been used?*
- 8 *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?*
- 9 *What is the reviewer's opinion of the consistency and objectivity in 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?*
- 10 *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.?*
- 11 *Does the document clearly identify landscape and visual effects which need to be considered in the assessment? and*
- 12 *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?*

3.2 It is considered that the scope, most of the content and appropriateness (detail, geographic extent) of both the landscape and the visual baseline studies which form the basis for the assessment of effects are broadly acceptable in terms of that part of the Study Area within Oxfordshire / CDC. Reference has already been made to the discrepancy in connection with landscape character information in the Buckinghamshire part of the Study Area which is unreported.

3.3 The 3Km Study Area boundary and the 500m local buffer area are reasonable.

3.4 The LVA references the appropriate range of policies and some of other studies of relevance to setting out the baseline context of the site and the local area. It gives extracts from some of

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the documents within the LVA and text / tables. However, no mention is made of the Cherwell District Council, Countryside Design Summary, SPD, June 1998 and no references are made to any Buckinghamshire documentation.

- 3.5 The LVA does not include any of the original source material for the various documents referred to in the body of the report so cross checking that quoted extracts are accurate, fair and balanced requires considerable effort on behalf of the reader. Whilst this has kept the overall size of the LVA down, it is unhelpful to readers who may not be familiar with the source documents. It would have been preferable to include pertinent excerpts cross referenced to an appendix.
- 3.6 The LVA notes (para 8.3) that visual effects that are found to be 'moderate' or above are considered in detail. In principle, this is acceptable.
- 3.7 The criteria to inform levels of both landscape and visual sensitivity and magnitude of change are reasonably clear and objectively defined in the generic methodology by a combination of text and tables. However, as noted above, visual value and visual susceptibility, which both feed into the ranking of visual sensitivity, are not clearly covered and are not discussed / noted for each individual viewpoint.
- 3.8 There is very limited cross over with other topics. There are no specific references to any other reports, for example Cultural Heritage, Ecology or Arboriculture in the LVA. Neither is there any cross reference to the 'Planning Design and Access Statement', the 'Padbury Brook Site Enhancement Strategy' or the 'Glint and Glare Study' (By contrast the LEMP contains a helpful cross reference to other relevant documents at LEMP para 1.2)
- 3.9 There is no evidence of an iterative assessment-design process in the LVA which might have been expected to include some consideration of any variations in the landscape or visual sensitivity of different parts of the site. This contrasts with the Planning Design and Access Statement notes at 4.1.7 that: "The final layout for this development has been refined to ensure that there are no adverse impacts arising from the Proposal, whilst also incorporating enhancement measures into the scheme. Chapter 11 of this Statement provides a summary of all the assessed impacts of the Proposal". It would be expected that the LVA would detail any refinement that has been proposed to address landscape and / or visual issues. The LVA has identified a long term major landscape adverse change (LVA para 6.21) on the landscape character of the site and its surrounding 500m buffer area leading to a large (adverse) effect at both completion and for Year 15, contrary to the PDAS statement quoted. (Emphasis added)
- 3.10 It is not always clear how the methodology was applied in the assessment and, as already noted, some steps in the process are not recorded. This affects the transparency of the LVA.
- 3.11 Levels of effect have been defined.
- 3.12 The identification of landscape value of the site and its immediate surroundings, the Rolling Farmland LCT and the Estate Farmlands LCT overall has been ranked as 'medium' (LVA6.5). The value of the affected individual LCA's is not identified.
- 3.13 The identification of landscape susceptibility fails to note what the reviewer considers to be a

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higher susceptibility as the site encroaches onto higher ground to the south west. However, an overall site ranking of medium is probably acceptable.

- 3.14 The effects on landscape character are considered on the basis of the site and the 500m buffer area and the two LCT's in which the site lies. As, as noted above, the effect on the landscape character of the site and the buffer area this has been recorded as being large (adverse) at completion and at year 15 (LVA para 6.21). (The reviewer considers that this area probably broadly equates to the effects on the affected LCA's which the assessment does not address.)
- 3.15 For the LCTs, not the smaller LCAs, the conclusion for both affected LCTs is that the proposed development would result in a *"negligible adverse magnitude of change in the LCT, of localised geographic extent, with a level of effect assessed to be slight at completion and at Year 15"* (LVA6.22-6.25). However, the reasoning for these rankings is opaque in that both paragraphs 6.23 and 6.25 appear to ascribe a positive effect on aspects of the LCTs. Furthermore, there is no explanation of the meaning of *"localised geographic extent"* and if this is different to *"the site and the 500m buffer area"*, separately appraised at LVA 6.21, as experiencing a large adverse effect. This aspect of the appraisal is confused. (Emphasis added)
- 3.16 The above findings of the LVA therefore predict that there would be no change in effect for any landscape receptor between Year 0 and Year 15. This means that there is no beneficial reduction in effect on landscape character arising from the proposed mitigation.
- 3.17 It is considered that the viewpoints are only broadly representative. VP 9 appears to be from just outside the 500m buffer area and from a point where the road dips, screening some of the potential view. It is considered that an additional view between VPs 7 and 11, east of the site, would have been merited. VP 4 is unduly shielded compared to the open views possible from other parts of the adjacent lane south towards VP 5.
- 3.18 The ZTV on Figure 5 is helpful but contains the statement that *"This ZTV takes into account the vegetation and built features..."* but this not what the detailed methodology states. (Emphasis added). Where the ZTV is discussed at LVA para 2.12, the *"complex landform of the study area"* is noted. As produced, the ZTV identifies the area where the theoretical views range from a lower to a higher proportion of the proposals being visible. It would have been of interest to see some sensitivity testing by modelling the proposal without the higher southwestern part / field being included. This would assist in demonstrating that the proposal has been planned sensitively, as called for in the document cited by the LVA at para 4.8.
- 3.19 LVA para 5.12 states; *"All of the Listed Buildings are outside the ZTV presented on Figure 5"*. This is incorrect, see for example cluster of Listed Buildings at Newton Purcell (although it is accepted that it would be unlikely that they would experience any effect).
- 3.20 In terms of the indicative landscape and visual mitigation measures, these are shown on the layout plan and essentially comprise a strategy of hedgerow retention augmented with new hedgerow planting, all of which would be grown on and maintained at 3.0-4.0m high. This would be supplemented with individual tree planting. Reference to the visualisations suggest that the individual tree planting is too regular and, should the scheme progress further, consideration should be given to more variability and the introduction of small copses at field

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corners or where clusters of the ancillary elements are proposed as these are set in linear form and will be of a height above that of the solar panels. This would also accord with the LCT guidelines for Rolling Farmland noted in Table 9.1. (See also the point that no reduction in landscape character effects is currently predicted.) The planting is expanded upon in the LEMP.

- 3.21 The LVA is silent on the mechanism for delivering the mitigation albeit some information is found in the LEMP.
- 3.22 It is considered that the LVA broadly identifies most of the landscape and visual effects which need to be considered albeit the lack of landscape character information for the Buckinghamshire part of the Study Area means there is no appraisal of landscape effects for this area. The way the visual effects are reported is reasonable, albeit that the judgement of sensitivity is opaque. The reviewer questions the reduced sensitivity of the unnamed road east of the site and considers that the ranking of effect would be higher than the 'slight' level recorded from this location (LVA Table 8.3).
- 3.23 Similarly, the reporting of the effects on the unnamed road south of the site, represented by viewpoints 7, 9 and 11 is questioned (LVA Table 8.3). These viewpoints are separated by approximately 3Km. Viewpoints 9 and 11 are reported as having very little or no view of the site in the baseline section whilst viewpoint 7, at the site frontage, would feature the unmentioned site entrance. It is considered the appraisal is too broad brush for this road.
- 3.24 Section 9 of the LVA deals with Landscape Design and set out tables giving responses to the LCT guidance. Table 9.1 deals with the Rolling Farmland LCT. The guidance includes the recommendation to *"enhance and strengthen the character of water courses by planting willows and a where appropriate, pollarding willows"*. The response given is that *"there are no watercourses within the site"*. This is queried. The Ordnance Survey shows a watercourse crossing the site from Pool Farm, before then turning north along the northeastern boundary.
- 3.25 There is a very brief summary set out in Section 10 of the LVA. It is barely adequate. It subtly changes how the landscape character effect on the site and the 500m buffer area is reported by inserting the words *"at most"* before reporting a large residual effect. These words are not found in relation to the detailed part of the appraisal at LVA 6.21.

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:
- 1 *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.*
 - 2 *Have the findings of the assessment been clearly set out and are they readily understood?*
 - 3 *Has there been clear and comprehensive communication of the assessment, in text, tables and illustrations?*
 - 4 *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?*
 - 5 *Are the graphics and/or visualisations fit for purpose and compliant with other relevant guidance and standards? and*
 - 6 *Is there a clear and concise summation of the effects of the proposals?*
- 4.2 The LVA displays a degree of transparency and is generally reasonable and mostly objective and there is some clarity of thinking. However, as noted above, there are some gaps both in the baseline information and in following through parts of the assessment where there is little text to explain the findings. Similarly with the tables, there is a degree of information recorded but how the individual elements that feed into the assessment have been combined to produce the outcomes is not always clear.
- 4.3 The LVA is considered to be not wholly clear in its communication of the appraisal and it cannot be regarded as comprehensive because of the absence of some baseline information. Parts of the methodology do not appear to have been followed and elements of the landscape character assessment are not clear.
- 4.4 The LVA separates out landscape and visual effects effectively and in accordance with best practice.
- 4.5 No cumulative effects have been considered in this instance. This is acceptable.
- 4.6 The receiving landscape has been partly recorded in text and by reference to broadly representative viewpoints. All viewpoints are from public locations. Some on-site views could have provided more immediate context for the site, for example showing internal hedgerows and landform and might have been worthwhile additions but, in this instance, not essential. There is no mention of the watercourse that is shown to cross the site.
- 4.7 Other baseline information is shown on a set of plans accompanying the appraisal.
- 4.8 The plans and figures are of a reasonable standard and demonstrate most of the general characteristics of the receiving landscape.
- 4.9 Public Rights of Way are only key referenced on Figure 4. The referencing would have been helpful for the wider area, particularly Figure 5, the ZVT.

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- 4.10 The quality of the representative viewpoint photographs is satisfactory, but the text and the key location inserts are very small which makes reading them problematic.
- 4.11 GLVIA3 Type 3 visualisations have been prepared for certain views (VPs 2, 3, 5, 6, 9 and 17) and information is given on the visualisation type. This is good practice. Type 3 visualisations are not verified by survey data but should provide a reasonable level of locational and photographic accuracy. Type 3 visualisation is considered appropriate in this instance.
- 4.12 A review of the visualisations suggests that for offsite views, VP5 and 6 are key locations. They show that at Year 15 the visual effects would not be substantially screened. With regard to VP6, it is questioned whether the montage is accurately representative of both the extent and appearance of the panels in the mid-ground field on the lefthand side of the view. This should be checked with the author.
- 4.13 The LVA methodology (para2.5) notes that at completion, the appraisal is based at Year 0 in winter. The Year 0 visualisations show a summer view because of the season when the photographs were taken. The visualisation should contain a note clarifying this discrepancy.
- 4.14 The graphics are generally of a satisfactory standard.
- 4.15 There is a very brief summary.

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):

- 1 *Confirmation of the brief issued to the reviewer setting out the scope of the review;*
- 2 *A summary of how the review was undertaken);*
- 3 *A summary of findings of the review of the assessment methodology;*
- 4 *A summary of findings of the review of the scope of the assessment;*
- 5 *A summary of findings of the review of the actual assessment of effects;*
- 6 *A summary of findings of the presentation of the assessment;*
- 7 *A summary statement by the reviewer in respect of appropriateness, quality, comprehensiveness, compliance and conformity with relevant guidance and regulations;*
- 8 *Recommendations for further information to be sought (if necessary); and*
- 9 *Overall conclusions on the adequacy of the assessment and whether it is sufficient to support making an informed planning decision.*

5.2 The scope of this review was to undertake a high level review of the submitted landscape and visual appraisal 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 review was undertaken by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute experienced in the preparation and review of LVIA's and LVA's. 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. The PDAS, the SES and the LEMP were also briefly reviewed.

5.4 The site work involved walking some of local footpaths, some of the roads at and 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 form and character of the site were appropriate. Some of the viewpoints have been questioned and a further one would have been desirable in one location.

5.5 The LVA methodology is generic and broadly compliant with GLVIA3 guidance but there are considered to be some gaps, notably both in text terms and in the tables which mean that the assessment is not as transparent as it should be. The methodology allows scope for professional judgement to be exercised, which is reasonable, but this is sometimes inadequately explained / justified.

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- 5.6 The PDAS refers to refinements to the layout, but the LVA is silent of these or any design iteration of the extent of the arrays. In this regard the reviewer considers the inclusion of the higher south western portion of the site would have benefited from some detailed evaluation. It would have been interesting to have the ZTV plotted excluding the south western field.
- 5.7 The scope of the LVA is considered to be appropriate in terms of the range of issues identified and the geographic extent save for the major omission of any reference or mapping of the landscape character of Buckinghamshire. This is a notable oversight.
- 5.8 The two LCAs within Oxfordshire that would be physically impacted by the proposal are referenced in the LVA baseline text but not considered further in the appraisal nor mapped on Figure 1. This conflicts with the stated methodology. However, for the purposes of this review, it has been assumed that these LCAs have been included in the consideration of the site and its 500m buffer.
- 5.9 Several Type 3 visualisations have been prepared. These are helpful in appreciating extent and effects of the proposals. A query has been raised in connection with the visualisation for VP 6 and it was noted that the representations at completion should have been qualified by a note referencing winter conditions that the LVA states is the basis of the appraisal.
- 5.10 The appraisal does not clearly address either visual value or visual susceptibility.
- 5.11 The LVA would have benefited by cross referencing to the other parts of the LVA. For example, there are no references in the LVA text to the Tables in the methodology that have been used to inform the text.
- 5.12 Other than for the LEMP, there are no cross references to other documents forming part of the application. This would have been helpful for context.
- 5.13 The LVA concludes that large adverse effects to the local landscape character would remain at Year 15. Thus, the effectiveness of the landscape mitigation can be questioned.
- 5.14 Despite the above issues, it is considered that, overall, the LVA is largely compliant with thrust of GLVIA 3 guidance. The findings are reasonably clearly set out in relation to both landscape and visual issues. Whilst the findings themselves are usually broadly reasonable, the inconsistencies that have been noted undermine the appraisal as a whole.
- 5.15 The LVA is let down by easily avoidable issues that should be addressed in order to provide a robust basis to inform CDC's decision making.
- 5.16 It is the reviewer's opinion that there is a lack of justification for the inclusion of the higher south western field. CDC might want further information on this aspect of the proposal from the applicant. In the light of the LVA's landscape findings, the mitigation needs further work.